

# **Empowerment and academically exceptional students**

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*What if becoming who and what we truly are happens not through striving and trying but by recognizing and receiving the people, places and practices that offer us the opportunities we need to unfold?*

Unknown author

Supervisor: Dr Nicholas Munro

## Declaration

I, Terry Shuttleworth, declare that

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Date: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Hestelle Scheppning, whose dedication and service to high school students for thirty-three years was the inspiration for my dissertation. Her recent passing in December 2015 has inspired me in my journey to a PhD. I will always remember her as an exceptional educator, grandmother, and everything we need to aspire to as a role model for humanity

## Acknowledgements

A Master's degree is produced through the candidate's active engagement in socially meaningful activity. I acknowledge the following who participated in this activity with me:

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- Professor Frederick Veldman, and Robert Hall, for their guidance and advice on the statistical analysis of my dissertation
- My research participants, who were the inspiration for my work, you are the role models for empowered students, who despite your background and circumstances have achieved exceptional academic achievement.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation reports on a study, which explored psychological empowerment and exceptional academic achievement in a South African higher education institution. The significance of exploring the relationship between psychological empowerment and exceptional academic achievement of students rests on the current discourse of underachievement in South African higher education. The study offered a contrasting perspective within the South African higher education sphere. Firstly, the study was situated within a historical-contextual perspective, and secondly, was positioned in the transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm was explicated from a social justice agenda, and with a critical lens of South Africa's neoliberal transformative paradigm in higher education. In the quantitative phase of the study in response to the historical-contextual perspective of higher education in South Africa, the study sought to explore whether a relationship existed between psychological empowerment of undergraduate students and academic achievement. The qualitative phase of the study specifically incorporated a methodological Photo voice activity that offered a meaningful exploration of psychological empowerment and the phenomenon of exceptional academic achievement. Within the context of their exceptional academic achievement, the study explored the people, places, structures, and processes that had influenced their exceptional academic achievement.

In line with the historical-contextual and conceptual perspectives, and the research questions, a social justice stance was assumed and a transformative mixed methodology was employed. The methodology involved two concurrent phases that were situated in a higher education institution that was both racially transformed and internationally ranked. In the quantitative phase of the study, the Psychological Empowerment Instrument (PEI) which had been validated in over fifty studies was used to investigate the level of psychological empowerment Psychology 101 students felt they had in relation to their learning environment. From the PEI, a correlational model was developed. The model was developed from a sample of 84 Psychology 101 undergraduate students who were currently registered for a variety of degrees at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Other analyses included Cronbach's Alpha to establish the internal consistency and reliability of the scale, while a secondary exploratory factor analysis using principal components was run to establish the number of factors on the scale after the wording had be adjusted. The correlational model identified that there was no relationship between empowerment scores and students' final results for their Psychology 101

module. However, the type of degree a student registered for revealed a practically significant result when compared to their final results for Psychology 101.

In the qualitative phase of the study, two South African and four international female and male students who had attained exceptional academic achievement were purposively invited to participate in the study. Using the transformative paradigm and an interpretive analytic perspective, the important meaning participants gave to their Photo voice activity was used as a data collection method. Furthermore, all six of the participants engaged in photo-elicitation interviews with the researcher. The themes generated from the data revealed that multiple factors/holistic perspective (emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual factors) influenced each participant's exceptional academic achievement. Some of these influences were inspirational role models, strong family support systems, academic and peer support, psychological and physical boundaries being challenged, cultural practices and religious beliefs. Moreover, the findings highlighted conscientised students situated in an educational context of previous injustice and oppression. The findings further highlight that despite the participants' socio-economic and educational background, their exceptional academic achievement within a persistently unjust higher education system, was attainable. The current and historical dynamics involved in the academic paths of undergraduate students who excel academically, reveals that, when set in a transformative educational context with the goal of social justice, exceptional academic achievement and the socio-political transformation of lives is possible.

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**Part One: Empowerment and Academically Exceptional Students: Literature,  
Historical-Contextual and Conceptual Perspectives**

**Chapter One: Historical and Contextual Perspectives of Higher Education in  
South Africa**

**Chapter Two: Transformation, Empowerment, and Exceptional Academic  
Achievement**

# Chapter One: Historical and Contextual Perspective of Higher Education in South Africa

## 1.1. Introduction

Twenty years of democracy and transformation have changed much of the political, cultural, and social landscape of South Africa. From societal to cultural to individual levels, South Africa has advanced from repressive systems of beliefs and values to (in principle) offering a society for citizens with equal rights (Higher Education South Africa [HESA], 2014). One of the new democratic governments and policy makers' aims of transformation has been to increase the accessibility of and the participation rate<sup>1</sup> in education of all race groups, especially those that have previously been excluded under the apartheid regime. Educational empowerment is vital in achieving greater equity, and in capacitating previously marginalised people to free themselves from the restrictions of previous inequalities. Being able to free oneself from previous inequalities is purported to enable social mobility as well as play a role in the political and economic sphere of the societies that (previously) disadvantaged people live in (Tucker & Ludi, 2012). However, the processes involved in transforming a society are wrought with obstacles. Although much progress has been made to increase accessibility of and participation in the education sector (black students now comprise 81% of the total student population, and 58% of students are female (Council on Higher Education, 2011), major changes are still needed to achieve the overall aim of equity<sup>2</sup> in education (HESA<sup>3</sup>, 2014). According to Scott, Yeld, and Hendry (2007), the necessary conditions for improvement include “core curriculum reform, building the capacity for teaching expertise, enhancing the status of teaching and reforming teaching approaches that cater for diverse students” (p.73). The core curriculum changes that need to be addressed are related to the issue of previous experiences and dominant ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge (Scott et al., 2007). In other words, the authors are suggesting that the curriculum needs to consider non-traditional ways of learning and acquiring knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Participation rate in the higher education context refers to the enrolment of all race groups of students aged 18-24 at tertiary institutions (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Equity is viewed as the extent to which individuals can take advantage of education and training, in terms of opportunities, access, treatment, and outcomes. Equitable systems ensure outcomes of education and training are independent of socio-economic and other factors that lead to educational disadvantage, and the treatment reflects individuals' specific learning interests and needs. 'Treatment' can further be explicated by the equal educational opportunities available to students despite differences in their backgrounds (Woessmann & Schuetz, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> In 2015, HESA underwent a name change and is now called Universities South Africa.

Boughey explicates that “[b]y virtue of their previous experiences, black students have not been inducted into the dominant ways of constructing knowledge” (cited in HESA, 2014, p. 3).

According to Walters (1999), in many countries across the world, lifelong learning<sup>4</sup> is of such importance that it has been implemented in policy perspectives across the globe, including South Africa. In 1996, South Africa’s National Commission on Higher Education urged higher education institutions<sup>5</sup> (HEIs) to take lifelong learning seriously if they were to achieve the goal of not only a transformed, equity driven education system but the emancipatory ideal of empowerment<sup>6</sup> (National Commission of Higher Education, 1996). The equitable access to education in tertiary institutions by previously marginalised groups is linked to the concept of lifelong learning and how it leads to social mobility and transformation. In a recent HESA Portfolio Committee report on the current state of higher education in South Africa, one of the key highlights of the report focused on the participation of students in higher education classified by racial groups. HESA found very marginal increases in the rates of participation with increases<sup>7</sup> of only 5% and 2.3% for African and Coloured students respectively, while participation of White and Indian students remained the majority (2014).

In contemporary society, where such importance and value are placed on education and academic achievement, they have become sought after commodities that have a fundamental influence on empowerment at multiple levels. If participation in education and exceptional academic achievement can empower people on an individual level, the capacity to effect change through empowerment at community levels would be even greater, further influencing the capacity to empower people at societal, political, economic, and cultural levels, driving the process of transformation at an even greater speed and depth than already achieved.

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<sup>4</sup> Lifelong learning in the context of this study and the author’s intended meaning, refers to education and learning beyond high school to include learning that takes place not only in higher education institutions but adult education throughout life (Walters, 1999)

<sup>5</sup> Higher education institutions from this point forward will be written as an acronym HEI/HEIs

<sup>6</sup> The author’s reference to empowerment in this paragraph is understood as the intrinsic motivation and conscientisation needed to succeed academically to influence upward social mobility, which in turn affects a society economically, structurally and politically (Espinoza, 2007; Spreitzer, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> The marginal increases in participation are taken from 1994 until 2014 when the report was published.

## **1.2. Historical context of higher education in South Africa**

In the latest report on the current state of higher education in South Africa (HESA, 2014), the slow progress in equity is identified as a primary concern for the political, economic, and social future of the sector. This primarily involves the lack of capacity to successfully accommodate a greater portion of historically disadvantaged groups of people in higher education. In addition to only marginal increases of participation of African and Coloured students in higher education post 1994, enrolments of African students in historically white institutions (HWI'S) have remained low while historically black institutions (HBI'S) remain exclusively black (HESA, 2014).

Furthermore, the relatively lower rates of throughput and graduation, and, higher dropout rates of African students are an indication of the substantial improvement that is needed to achieve equitable exceptional academic achievement. Of students that enrolled in a three-year degree in 2005, 16% of the African students that enrolled graduated within the three years, 41% graduated after six years and 59% dropped out. Comparatively, white students fared much better with a graduation rate of 44% after three years, 65% after six years and a significantly lower dropout rate of 35% (CHE, 2012). According to the National Planning Commission (2012) other issues facing higher education today are that while rates of enrolment have increased, the capacity for funding has not. Adequate accommodation is a consistent problem and needs urgent attention with universities' infrastructure under severe strain. Plans need to be implemented to allow for the expansion of this infrastructure. The development of teaching staff is a further concern with a mere 34% of academia in higher institutions with doctorate degrees in South Africa (HESA, 2014). According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013) South African higher education "is a system that is unable to effectively support and provide reasonable opportunities for success to its students...They also have a central significance for development as well as social inclusion" (p. 2).

Boughey (cited in HESA, 2014) further emphasises:

If universities are to contribute to a more equitable South African society, then 'access' and 'success' must be improved for black (and particularly black working class) students who by virtue of their previous experiences, have not been inducted into dominant ways of constructing knowledge (p. 3).

Du Toit (2000) called for the engagement of the historical discourses of intellectual colonisation, racialisation and patriarchy to better understand transformation and its implications. Du Toit (2000) further argued that “cultures characterised by colonial and racial discourses endanger empowering intellectual communities and that ongoing transformation in institutions is necessary to academic freedom and empowerment” (p.103).

Factors such as equitable access, participation, and throughput of previously marginalised groups affect the upward social mobility of students negatively influencing their potential for empowerment and the experience of it. In light of the challenges facing higher education, the overarching goals of the *White Paper on Higher Education Transformation* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013) of “access and equity” and “high level excellence” (p. 7) are important in the context of transformation.

Key findings from the Soudien Report (2008) discuss how a number of universities in South Africa viewed transformation in higher education. In particular, three critical elements of transformation were identified: “policy and regulatory change, epistemological change specifically related to the curriculum, institutional culture with an emphasis on social inclusion” (p. 36). The report further discussed guidelines developed by the University of the Free State on how to assess the progress of institutional transformation. Some of these guidelines included:

[a]n academic culture of diversity in scholarship by guaranteeing the necessary intellectual space for freedom of scholarly approaches and encouraging diversity and innovation in academic disciplines; a sense of belonging for all members of the university – black and white, male and female, of whatever language, cultural or economic background, as well as people with disabilities, non-marginalisation, respect for minorities and appreciation of human diversity in personalities, individual preferences, human skills and workplace skills; sufficient diversity in the composition of staff and student of different population groups in governance (including residences) to constitute the necessary institutional space for nurturing non-racialism, non-sexism, multiculturalism, multilingualism and non-dominance and a positive and supportive environment; a platform for dynamic student life which is based on an educational approach towards student activities which includes (but is not limited to) languages of

instruction, choice of university residences, sports, arts and cultural activities, inclusive student governance, and genuinely creating employment and developmental opportunities within the prescripts of law whilst avoiding unfair discrimination and/or employment practices, within the context of the Bill of Rights and relevant legislation. (UFS, 2004, pp. 4-6).

In terms of legal and regulatory compliance, higher education institutions are doing well in attending to transformative. However, substantive transformation is yet to be achieved as “there continue to be significant inequalities with regard to the participation rate and the throughput and success rates, as well as with regard to access to postgraduate programmes...” (2008, pp. 40-41).

The report (2008) further notes the problem of transformation is universities’ close association with Westernisation and being a “white project” (p.41). The report (2008) further argues “universities need to confront the challenge of opening up itself to different bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge making in new and exploratory ways” (p. 41). Without these changes, the South African government and higher education institutions are complicit in promoting a neoliberalist agenda which is often seen as a goal of higher education.

### ***1.2.1. Criticisms of South Africa’s transformation goals for HEIs and its neoliberalist agenda***

It would be remiss of the researcher to ignore the ideological contradictions and dialectical tensions between what Spreitzer (1995a), Senge et al. (1994), Frymier et al (1996), and South Africa’s transformation goals (Baatjes, 2005) were justifying for the development of empowerment in the higher educational context, without critically questioning the neoliberal, capitalist agenda imposed by these ideals. The researcher further questioned how the neoliberal agenda claims to offer groundbreaking explanations to social problems set in the context of a country that is still profoundly tarnished by legacies entrenched in apartheid. Criticisms of Neoliberalism include the idea that these non-commodified institutions are being transformed according to the global market perspective. In effect, principles that are contradictory to what HEIs stand for. These include inclusive education, and a group of people [academics] “engaged in pedagogical activities in pursuit of social justice, freedom, democracy and citizenship”

(Baatjes, 2005, p. 25). A number of criticisms of neoliberalism that are noteworthy are, that as an integral part of the government's transformation project,

[n]eoliberalism glorifies a corporate-led economic doctrine that evangelically embraces economic democracy, pro-free trade, anti-trade unions, anti-human rights, competition, rapacious capitalism, consumerism, privatisation, the rejection of governments and so forth. Neoliberalism, as the most dangerous ideology and most brutal form of market capitalism of our times, reorganises society according to the politics of markets and corporations and rejects equity, redress, social justice and civic responsibility which underpin the values of an inclusive democracy (Baatjes, 2005, p. 27).

According to Baaitjes (2005) "Many of South Africa's public educational institutions are increasingly regarded as complete failures and are largely being abandoned to their own demise" (p. 26). Teachers are not trained properly and work under poor conditions, standards have been lowered and discipline is absent, teaching skills are lacking and poor levels of academic achievement are responsibilities directed at educational institutions (Baatjes, 2005).

Supporters of neoliberalist educational policy function from the idea that education is principally a sub-sector of the economy (McLaren, 2003). One of Baatjes (2005) biggest criticisms of what he refers to as 'neoliberalist dystopia' is that HEIs are being forced to transform by adopting a neoliberalist agenda in order to compete in the global economy, which essentially rejects the ideas of economic and social justice, freedom and equality. Furthermore, the use of Spreitzer's PEI in an attempt to transform higher education is problematic as her focus on individual levels of achievement and empowerment reinforces the neoliberalist agenda in not allowing structural and contextual mediators of empowerment, and therefore cannot properly address issues of equity. Therefore, although the researcher justified the use of Spreitzer's PEI based on the development of empowerment within the organisational context, the researcher was aware of the neoliberalist agenda being enforced as part of the government's transformation agenda on HEIs and consistently questioned her complicit role and the role of her fellow academics in promoting neoliberalism. The researcher kept her epistemological beliefs of social justice foremost in her mind throughout the study.

### ***1.2.2. Internationalisation in HEI's in South Africa***

In light of the issues of equity, access, and participation of previously marginalised groups in higher education institutions, a more detailed description of South Africa's historical exclusion from the international education realm as a consequence of the imposed apartheid regime is provided below. South Africa's participation in the international education arena and the accessibility of education to international students into South Africa influences the process of transformation of education in the country.

The exclusion of South Africa from international education, to a large degree was a planned strategy to end the unjust treatment of majority groups<sup>8</sup> from equal educational opportunities (Jooste, 2014). The injustice of it led to South African higher education institutions being systematically isolated from the world. The resounding effects of this exclusion were a great price to South Africa, as a country, and to academia. For example, a great number of overseas scholars refused to enter South African shores and South African scholars were refused invitations to international conferences (Jooste, 2014).

However, the reconstruction of higher education in South Africa post-apartheid, enlightened its leaders and country to take the necessary steps to be viewed in a more positive light, and became a sought after destination for international academics and students alike. While the academic community were preoccupied with the required changes in education, internationalisation and its potential contribution to transformation in South Africa was ignored. The development of South Africa as an internationally attractive country to come visit and study in, was being ignored while educational experts were focusing on the necessary changes needed to provide equal access to all racial groups in South Africa (Jooste, 2014).

A necessary way forward for leading South African education back into the international realm required the visionary insights of Dr Roshen Kushun and Dr Derek Swemmer. They designed and developed a self-help internationalisation strategy. According to Jooste (2014) the successful implementation of this strategy can be seen in the acceptance of a great number of international students into higher education institutions across South Africa since 1994. It became evident that South Africa was a popular study destination which a great number originating from other Southern African regions. Furthermore, the growth rate of international students since 2002, has been growing at a rate of 4% per year (Jooste, 2014). Since 1994, key

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<sup>8</sup> Majority groups refer to Indian, Coloured and Black race groups during the apartheid regime in South Africa.

education role players have understood the importance of internationalisation as playing a critical part in transformation in the country. This can be illustrated by the establishment and formalisation of International Education Association of South Africa which according to Jooste “became one of the pillars of internalisation in South Africa” (2014, para.8).

Since its establishment in 1997, IEASA has led higher education institutions to develop into professional internationalised institutions, relevant to the international student’s career aspirations and offer quality education that can compete on a global level. This is ensured through two annual activities; an IEASA conference and the Study South Africa publication. In recent years, there have been further developments in the role that internationalisation has played in higher education in South Africa with IEASA leading the way and one cannot ignore its relevance over the past twenty years, and continuing efforts to impact on transformation in education in South Africa (IEASA, 2014). It became clear to the researcher the impact international students would have on the current study.

According to Lee and Sehoole (2015), who conducted a study on international students in seven South African HEIs in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng provinces in 2014, of the sample of 1682, 52% of the international students were females while 79% of them were from Africa, 8% each from Europe and North America, 4% from Asia, and 1% from other countries. 40% of the students were registered for a bachelor’s degree, 10% for an honours degree, 23% for a master’s degree, 19% for a PhD degree, and 1% for postdoctoral studies. Moreover, according to a recent publication of Study South Africa by IEASA (2014), the number of international students has “grown dramatically” since democracy which was achieved in 1994 from 74 000 to 165 000 in 2012 (IEASA, 2014). It was further established, that in 2012, of 1878 doctoral graduates from across South African higher education institutions, 35% of them were international students which is indicative of the throughput rate and level of academic achievement of international students (IEASA, 2014).

Furthermore, Lee and Sehoole's (2015) survey reported that a number of ‘pull factors’ were responsible for the increasing numbers of international students in South African higher education institutions, which included the South African government’s commitment to supporting international students from SADC regions and achieving a 5% participation rate. This commitment is characterised by the SADC protocol, which stipulates regional students pay the same fees as local students and are subsidised by the South African government. Some

other factors reported were affordable fees, the ‘currency’ South African qualifications hold, the lack of available courses in their home countries, political instability in their home countries, quality of education, and availability of supervision (Lee & Schoole, 2015). The contribution of ‘internationalisation’ related to international students in higher education and to transformation in South Africa will be discussed in chapter Two.

Many of the factors highlighted in the discussion above, extend beyond ‘access’ and ‘opportunity’ and require investigation into both the cultural context of higher education institutions and the epistemological and ontological issues associated with traditional ways of teaching and learning. Issues pertaining to discourses in diversity, social cohesion and social justice need to be investigated, and incorporated into investigations that explore components of higher education (HESA, 2014).

With the South African higher education focus on underachievement, high dropout levels, and low throughput levels, the education sector needs to question whether this focus is problematic and the discourses of underachievement have reiterated the prevailing racially skewed statistics. For example, African students are disproportionately represented in low academic achievement levels (CHE, 2013). Therefore, the focus of exceptional academic achievement and the psychological empowerment of these high achieving students<sup>9</sup> need to be considered within the socio-historical context of transformation and equity in a higher education institution of South Africa.

Academic achievement in the context of this study will refer to higher achieving academic students at UKZN from the undergraduate population where much research has focused on the problem of underachievement and the socio-political implications in South Africa today (Munro, 2014).

With a great emphasis on transformation in higher education in South Africa currently, and the need to change the focus on underachievement, it necessitates further investigation into understanding the implications of students’ psychological empowerment on their exceptional academic achievement in higher education institutions. By gaining greater insights into the students level of psychological empowerment it may help direct the policy changes within the

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<sup>9</sup> High achieving students from a scholarship list were invited to participate in the qualitative phase of the study.

higher education context to improve the structural support systems necessary to positively influence students psychological empowerment and increase levels of exceptional academic achievement amongst previously marginalised students.

### **1.3. Academic achievement and international students**

Currently, there is evidence of a global phenomenon of an ever-increasing number of international students studying at HEIs in foreign countries over the past twenty years as seen from the discussion above. This has mainly been evidenced in developed countries such as the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010). According to recent research conducted by the British Council, IDP Australia and Universities UK (Böhm et al., 2004) the flow of students will increase from 2.1 million in 2003 to an estimated 5.8 million by 2020, 2.6 million representing international students. Individuals from countries such as China, India and Malaysia form the majority who demand higher education in the above five countries. The greatest demand however, has come from Chinese students (Li et al., 2010).

The important role international students' play in their contribution to receiving universities has been recognised to move beyond the financial benefits to include a demand for subjects such as mathematics and engineering which guides receiving universities to offer a more diverse array of subjects (Li et al., 2010).

For the past three decades, a large body of research has been focused on the academic performance of students in higher education where a number of factors have been used to measure and predict performance to help institutions develop quality assurance criteria. These measures include academic, cognitive and psycho-social factors (Li et al., 2010). Academic performance is largely based on prior academic achievement<sup>10</sup> while social integration into the university and psychological and emotional support are key factors that affect student's success (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Lecompte, Kaufman, & Rouseeuw, 1983; Pokay & Blumenfeld, 1990; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978).

With an ever-increasing number of international students in foreign countries, cross-cultural studies have become fairly common. The cultural milieu of student learning has allowed

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<sup>10</sup> Prior academic achievement is a key academic predictor of the students' further achievements at higher levels of study. A number of studies have shown that it plays a dominant role in predicting students' learning outcomes (McKenzie, K., & Gow, 2004; Mckenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

researchers to study the differences and similarities between home and international students in academic performance. According to Webb and Read (2000) language is a key determinant in academic performance and in recognising cultural differences in achievement. According to Li et al. (2010) "...proficiency in English plays a crucial role in international students successfully completing their studies in an English-speaking learning environment" (p. 393). Another factor is academic behaviour. Asian students have been found to perform well when effort rather than ability is focused on as effort, hard work and endurance are highlighted in their culture (Hau & Salili, 1990). Furthermore, studies of difference between Chinese students and Western students have identified different learning styles where Chinese students perform well in a more guided instructor based classroom setting and are better at rote learning, while Western students perform better in a more independent learning environment with less guidance (Smith & Smith, 1999).

Apart from a few differences in learning between Asian and Western students, is the recognition that foreign students have to deal with factors that local students do not have to cope with. These factors include students who face culture shocks and need to adjust to the new culture (Li et al., 2010). Furthermore, according to Robertson, Line, Jones and Thomas (2000) international students experienced "feelings of isolation from local (Australian) classmates, homesickness, and the need for social activities" (p. 94).

Li et al.'s (2010) study of academic achievement of international students at the School of Management at the University of Surrey found that "perceived significance of learning success to family, proficiency in English, and social communication with compatriots were the most significant predictors of academic performance of all international students in this study" (p. 402). Moreover, Chinese students who had not studied in a foreign country before were likely to achieve higher when compared to other international students who had studied in a foreign country before. However, Chinese students performed lower in English language studies when compared to other international students (Li et al., 2010).

In Rienties et al.'s (2012) study of 958 international students at five business schools across the Netherlands, they found that stress was a major factor experienced by international students when adapting to their new culture and learning (host) institution. Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas (2000) furthermore identified stress as a factor that is experienced by international students and in a number of other studies (Burns, 1991; Li et al, 2010, Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003).

Rienties et al. (2012) investigated the differences in academic and social integration between international and local students using standardised questionnaires measuring the two constructs. Their findings suggested that exceptional academic achievement of international students was multi-dimensional. Students from a mixed Western background performed well on both academic and social integration and performed at higher academic levels than domestic students perform. Other international students from non-Western countries performed similarly to Western international students but had lower scores of social integration. However, academic adjustment was the main predictor of academic performance for Western, Mixed Western and Dutch students. There was no fit for non-Western students that measured long term academic and social integration which the researchers suggest can be explained by the complexity of these processes (Rienties et al., 2012). The great number of international students flooding into foreign universities is interesting to note and worth exploring, as there was the possibility they would be potential participants in the study.

#### **1.4. Rationale for the study**

Transformative research paradigms seek to address inequalities<sup>11</sup> within societies, especially of marginalised and underrepresented groups (Mertens, 2007; Sweetman, Badiee, & Creswell, 2010). Mertens (2007) explicates the core assumptions of the transformative paradigm as an “overarching paradigm for addressing issues of social justice and consequent methodological decisions” (p. 212). She goes on to highlight that the role of the researcher is to recognise past inequalities and challenge current hegemonies (Mertens, 2007). There is a need to distinguish between ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ at an educational level:

Equality has to do with making sure that some learners are assigned to smaller classes, or receive more or better textbooks, or are preferentially promoted because of their race . . . Achieving equality requires insuring that children [students] are not excluded or discouraged from the tracks that lead to better jobs because they are girls. . . Equity, however, has to do with fairness and justice. And there is the problem . . . [Indeed] where there has been a history of discrimination, justice may require providing special

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<sup>11</sup> There has been much debate and controversy surrounding the use and definitions of ‘equity and ‘equality’. Here, the researcher is referring to ‘inequalities’ as critical theorists view them. According to Espinoza (2007) “critical theorists see inequality as a social ill that requires treatment . . . and are unnecessary” (p. 346), and therefore, warrants the use of transformative frameworks.

encouragement and support for those who were disadvantaged in the past...to achieve equity—justice—may require structured inequalities, at least temporarily. Achieving equal access, itself a very difficult challenge is a first step toward achieving equity. (Samoff, 1996, pp. 266-267)

Therefore, within the landscape of education both globally and locally, historical traditions of higher education have been designed to exclude marginalised groups (Sweetman, Badiee, & Creswell, 2010). In a study by Munro et al. (2015) he found that white female students were more likely to achieve academic excellence than any other gender or race group. In his thesis, Munro (2014) highlighted a discourse of underachievement that was generally found in higher education statistics currently in South Africa. Munro et al. (2015) emphasised this discourse being problematic due to the “resultant conflation of academic underachievement with race, educational and socio-economic disadvantage, and language” (p.14). He further argues (Munro et al., 2015) this conflation reinforces negative ways of thinking in South African higher education, which underlines students’ deficits related to their educational history, language disadvantage, and their unpreparedness for the challenges of higher education. This study, therefore, seeks to move away from a ‘deficit discourse’ of ‘underachievement’ and will also focus on exceptional academic achievement and psychological empowerment.

Understanding exceptional academic achievement in more depth is a further motivation to look at why previously marginalised groups have not achieved the same levels of exceptional academic achievement within the context of transformation and equity. Empowerment and the notion of empowerment will be embedded within the transformative paradigm. Based on the assumptions of a transformative paradigm, the strength in using both qualitative and quantitative methods is emphasised. Quantitative methods can be used to measure outcomes that may give credibility to the participants and the community overall, while a qualitative method may gather meaningful insight from individual participants, community members and the processes and structures that inform the study (Mertens, 2007).

With these goals in mind and with the information available, there is value in exploring the notion of psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment is defined according to Spreitzer (2008) “as a set of psychological states that are necessary for individuals to feel a sense of control in relation to their work” (p. 56). For the purpose of this study however, psychological empowerment would be an individual’s sense of control in relation to

exceptional academic achievement and the academic environment. Spreitzer's (2008) definition of psychological empowerment was grounded in Conger and Kanungo's (1988) conceptualisation who argued that the socio-structural definition of empowerment was limited as the managerial practices that led to empowerment did not consider the effect it would have on employees if they lacked self-efficacy. For Spreitzer (2008) to fully capture the essence and definition of psychological empowerment, she incorporated a multi-disciplinary approach to literature on empowerment from the fields of psychology, education, sociology and social work and refined the definition to include the four cognitions of meaning, competence (which relates to self-efficacy), self-determination, and impact. These four cognitions will be discussed in further detail in the chapter Two (i.e. 2.3). Furthermore, the study hoped to explore empowerment on a social and collective level through the participatory activity of the Photo voice.

## **1.5. Conclusion**

In Chapter One, a background of the current state of higher education in South Africa was introduced. Equitable distribution and access to higher education, and equal educational opportunities independent of students' socio-economic background, the controversy surrounding the concepts 'equity' and 'equality', and how they were intended for the purposes of this study was discussed. The focus on underachievement in higher education literature was introduced and the problems related to focusing on it were briefly discussed. The historical context of higher education (pre 1994) was discussed. Two contrasting perspectives surrounding dominant education hegemonies and the dangers with it were briefly highlighted. South Africa's transformation goals for higher education institutions were criticised for their Neoliberalist agenda. Included in the historical context were a discussion of South Africa's exclusion from international education during the apartheid era and the implications of it. The researcher further described how government officials and educational policy makers had to transform the education system post 1994 due to the important influence South African HEIs play on the development of the country and their contribution to the international education arena. The participation and contribution of international students to South African HEIs was discussed with a number of factors such as skills development in skills shortage sectors, multicultural awareness and financial benefits were highlighted. The academic performance of international students in a number of institutions worldwide was discussed. The researcher

found that after an extensive search for literature pertaining to international students' academic performance in South African HEIs there was very little available information. This illuminated the need for further research of international students' academic performance in South African HEIs.

## **Chapter Two: Transformation, empowerment, and exceptional academic achievement**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Chapter Two will introduce and briefly discuss the transformative paradigm with a social justice context. Within the transformative paradigm, a number of perspectives related to it will be discussed, and the theoretical basis for it. Freire's (2005) Banking Concept of Education, the problems with it will be discussed. Moreover, Freire's proposition of viewing the world by the way people pose problems in relation to their world as an education system for the future. Empowerment as a concept will be discussed in more detail than when it was introduced in Chapter One. The definition of empowerment is discussed and the psychological empowerment concept (Spreitzer, 2008). Moreover, the assumptions of the psychological empowerment concept will be explained and the justification for the use of the concept will be described. The relationship between psychological empowerment and academic achievement will be discussed in relation to the study. The researcher will also discuss some of the criticisms of South Africa's transformational goals for higher education institutions related to a Neoliberalist agenda, and criticisms of empowerment theory. Lastly, the research objectives and questions will be identified and briefly discussed.

### **2.2. A transformative paradigm**

One of the core tenets of the transformative paradigm is the issue of power (Mertens, 2007), and how this power is related to social justice and oppression. Researchers of the transformative paradigm position themselves with marginalised groups to bring about social transformation (Mertens, 2010). Within the literature on transformative paradigms, four main characteristics have been identified that are common to the paradigm and distinguish it from constructivist and positivist paradigms:

- It places importance and value on the lives of these individuals. Traditionally, groups that have been marginalised include persons with disabilities, women and minority groups. An aim of transformative research is to study these groups not only from their experiences of oppression but holistically and contextually too. This would include the systems and structures from whence the oppression originates; the actions of the oppressors and the strategies and mechanisms oppressed groups use to challenge these structures.

- It analyses how differences between demographic variables such as race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and disability are reflected in relationships of power.
- It examines how inequalities are influenced by political and social action.
- It uses the transformative theory to direct the research approach and the implementation of intervention programs (Mertens, 2010).

### ***2.2.1. The emergence of the transformative paradigm***

According to Mertens (2010), the transformative paradigm initially arose from discontent with the dominant paradigms and the limitations of research related to those paradigms. The dissatisfaction was articulated the most by feminists, members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual communities as well as non-Europeans and disabled people who all had experienced a form of discrimination and oppression. From these articulated objections, professionals in the fields of education and psychology revised their perspectives to include these groups and become more conscious of and responsive to issues of transformation (Mertens, 2010). The subsections below discuss the different fields of research where the transformative paradigm emerged and was developed to address previous marginalization and underrepresentation of specific groups such as women and various race groups.

#### ***2.2.1.1. Feminist perspectives***

Historically, sociological and psychological theory have been criticised because they have been developed entirely from a male perspective and only men were used as the subjects of inquiry. Dominant theories which have traditionally maintained that they are neutral, have been found to reflect an observational and evaluation bias (Mertens, 2010). Gilligan (1982) found many instances where theorists of dominant paradigms developed their theories solely using men. When these theories were reviewed from a feminist perspective, they developed a new awareness of the importance of women's experiences. Feminist theories focus on gender inequalities that result in social injustices such as exclusion from education, religion, media and government (Mertens, 2010).

#### ***2.2.1.2. Cultural competency perspectives***

The aim of cultural competency is to promote the use of multicultural education in the counselling and psychotherapy context, as well as in the field of research. Principles for

multicultural education have been developed to address issues such as an awareness of approaches that have historically viewed cultural differences negatively and to better understand the underrepresentation of minority groups in various areas of society (Mertens, 2010).

### ***2.2.1.3. Differential achievement pattern perspectives***

As stated previously, due to the historical context of education in South Africa, differences in achievement by race, gender and culture are still prevalent as South Africa is still in the early stages of democracy and transformation. Globally, over the last few decades, there has been research focused on the area of underachievement in education by minority groups. Many countries have tried to address these differences and focused on transforming their education systems to include multi-cultural aspects (Mertens, 2010). According to Anyon (2005), equity in educational achievement will only become a reality when it [equity] is set in the larger context of the community and social sector. For example, researchers need to investigate why government policies consistently result in oppressive practices where poor communities lack access to resources. The power dynamics of people in power [studying up] need to be researched to understand how they make decisions. She further contends that interventions need to go beyond curriculum and pedagogical change to a meta-level such as job creation, affordable housing and transportation and equitable access to resources (Anyon, 2005).

Numerous research studies have documented that low achievement is closely related to poverty and lack of resources (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). In South Africa, key findings have revealed race is still a powerful predictor of poverty and deprivation, and, a future consequence for today's children. (South African Human Rights Commission & United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, 2014). Despite significant progress in reducing the effect of poverty for many poverty-stricken South Africans, the country is still beleaguered by poor quality education, elevated levels of unemployment, particularly among its youth, with poor delivery of basic services. Twenty years after the abolishment of apartheid, inequality is still pervasive in South Africa. The country's poverty is even more apparent because it coexists with striking prosperity and retains strong racial dimensions. While some children in South Africa live in relative luxury and have access to first-rate education and health services, others face threats to their development in the form of poor living conditions, poor nutrition and poor access to basic services (South African Human Rights Commission & United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, 2014).

### **2.2.2. Theoretical basis of the transformative paradigm**

As discussed previously, one of the main reasons for the use of the transformative design is its applicability in explicitly addressing issues of power and social justice. At the same time it is suitable for the use of mixed methods research, qualitative research, feminist research, participatory action research and various others forms of research that are socially transformative. Some of the theories relating to the transformative paradigm that have dominated literature are standpoint theory, post-colonial feminist thought and postmodern feminist thought. Further theories are queer theorists who focus on LGBTQ communities around gender and sexual identity and a new paradigm that focuses research efforts on physically and mentally challenged communities (Mertens, 2010).

### **2.3. Freire's banking concept of education**

To understand the concept of 'conscientisation'<sup>12</sup> and how it leads to the potential emancipation from oppressive systems of learning, and feeling empowered by transformative learning experiences, the researcher sought to explicate the 'banking concept' which was termed, explained and criticised by Freire as "suffering from narration sickness" (Freire, 2005a, p. 71). The banking concept of education follows the transmission model where knowledge is transmitted from teacher to students and is generally used in HEIs by lecturing staff (Nola & Irzik, 2005). The banking concept of education lacks the critical thinking skills necessary for students to learn in order to conscientise themselves to being psychologically empowered, and emancipated by oppressive systems that hinder their exceptional academic achievement. In the banking concept of education, Freire (2005) asserts that information is deposited in students from the teacher, where students passively receive, memorise and repeat. Knowledge is perceived as a gift that is given [narrated] by those [the teacher] who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those they consider ignorant [the student]. The banking concept of education has been a dominant way of teaching worldwide for quite some time, and is characteristic of an oppressive ideology and repudiates knowledge as a process of inquiry (Freire, 2005b).

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<sup>12</sup> Freire conceptualised *conscientisation* as learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. In education *conscientisation* refers to the requirement that both teacher and students critically engage in learning for dialogue to be successful (Freire, 2005).

It further, does not encourage students to critically question reality. An implicit assumption of the banking concept of education is the dichotomy between people and the world: a person is merely a passive spectator in the world and not seen as interacting with it. Our minds are passive receptors and an educator's role is to control what enters into students' minds (Freire, 2005b). According to Freire (2005) "[t]he more students work at storing deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (p. 73). Freire (2005) further argues "dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants" (p. 89). He found this problematic and emphasised that dialogue in education requires both teacher and students to be conscientised (Freire, 2005b).

The process of conscientisation and dialogue is dynamic and dialectical.<sup>13</sup> Freire's emphasis on conscientisation implies that once students become aware of their learning and actively participate in it, they become empowered in the choices they make relevant to their lives. Moreover, conscientisation requires students to recognise the structures and institutions that have oppressed their education and learning and how they (the students) have played a role in maintaining and reinforcing the systems that have oppressed and discriminated against their growth (Tiwaah & Kwapong, 1995). Freire's emphasis on students' conscientisation leads to an awareness of their learning, which in turn leads to becoming empowered to make decisions relevant to their lives, and is therefore, linked to the focus in this study on high achieving students and their level of psychological empowerment. The findings could illustrate whether these students have been conscientised, and how this conscientisation may have led them to feeling empowered.

The need for authentic education has been reiterated by the likes of Freire who believed education is only authentic when we consider people in relation to their world, in the "process of becoming" (Freire, 2005b, p. 84). Furthermore, authentic education is where educators engage in dialogue *with* students that is dialectical in nature (Freire, 2005b). Freire (2005b) emphasised "[m]any political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed

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<sup>13</sup> Dialectical refers to a method or process engaged in dialogue between two or more people (teacher and students) holding different opinions about a topic to establish the truth through dialogue with the space for reasoned arguments. It is a two way, dynamic process, a sympathetic identification and relationship of exchange and communication (Schrijvers, 1991, p. 169)

them according to their own personal views of reality...” (p.94). It was proposed that to truly liberate people from oppression, we need to reject the banking concept of education entirely, and consider the problems posed by people in relation to their world as the way forward.

Problem-posing education embodies communication between student and teacher and can result in freedom [empowerment] when the contradiction between them can be resolved. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-students and the students-of-teacher cease to exist where both parties actively learn by being responsible for the dialogue, which becomes a process of growth for all. While the banking concept of education seeks to obstruct creativity, the problem-posing education model strives for the emergence of creativity and critical awareness. In problem-posing education, students feel empowered to critically observe the way they exist in the world and how their reality is a process of transformation. Problem-posing education develops students who are critical thinkers and becoming more authentic beings [empowered by conscientisation] (Freire, 2005b).

#### **2.4. Empowerment as a concept**

According to Fourie (2009), empowerment is one of the most widely researched concepts in the field of management and organisational psychology and has been applied in multiple contexts. Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment from a motivational perspective and related it to the concept of self-efficacy. Originally defined by Wood and Bandura (1989), self-efficacy is the belief “in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to exercise control over events in their lives” (p. 364). Bandura (1977) emphasised that “self-efficacy is derived from four key sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states” (p. 191). The more a person can rely on the experience of accomplishments and achieve their goals, the greater the effect on their personal efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, Conger and Kanungo (1988) believed that empowerment should be viewed as a ‘motivational construct’ that enables and mobilises self-efficacy.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) believed empowerment to be multifaceted and not to be understood as a single concept. Other early proponents of empowerment such as Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, and Checkoway (1993), defined empowerment at an individual level and stated it to be a “process by which individuals gain mastery and control over their lives, and a critical understanding of their environment” (p. 3). Ashcroft (1987) defined an empowered individual

“as someone who believed in his/her capacity to act, and this belief would be accompanied by able/capable action” (p. 143). These definitions of empowerment are inextricably linked to what was discussed earlier in Freire’s (2005) conceptualisation of conscientisation and the processes and psychological constructs necessary for its success and his goal of empowering individuals<sup>14</sup>. The link between the above definitions of empowerment and emancipation is when individuals [students] develop a conscious awareness of their environment and their learning; they feel intrinsically motivated to achieve goals they believe they have control of, and believing in their capacity to achieve these goals increases their experience of feeling empowered.

While Freire (2005) focused on empowering students by critically questioning the traditional systems that are oppressing them and to direct their own learning, it seems contradictory that the very systems and traditions that are oppressing them are the individualistic psychological schools of thought espousing self-efficacy and empowerment through individual achievement of goals. Although seemingly in opposition to each other in the way people are to become empowered, both Freire’s empowerment through conscientisation and the traditional psychological models through vicarious experience they have the same end goal of empowerment.

#### ***2.4.1. Psychological empowerment***

Zimmerman et al. (1993) defined individual empowerment (psychological/experienced intrinsically) to be dependent on the context and the population of the study. In the most general of contexts, it includes *intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural components*. The *intrapersonal component* refers to how individuals perceive their ability to influence social and political systems that they give value to. The *interactional component* refers to interactions between people and the environment that enables them to master these systems. The *behavioural component* refers to the actions individuals take to successfully influence their environments through participation at a community level.

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note there is a difference between ‘empowering’ individuals and ‘emancipating’ individuals from oppressive systems. Empowerment implies giving people the necessary skills to empower themselves within an existing hegemony while Freire’s emancipatory ideal was to conscientise individuals enough to free themselves from oppressive systems of an existing hegemony with the power to choose a different life (Freire, 2005). This will be discussed in more detail below in a section on the criticisms of empowerment. However, it is not necessary to understanding the context of this study.

Both Spreitzer (1995a) and Zimmerman et al. (1993) noted that although there is a great deal of literature on empowerment, few have specified its relationship to context or empirically tested the theory. Spreitzer's definition of psychological empowerment was essentially developed from the work of Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990). Furthermore, Spreitzer (1995a) based much of her work on developing and validating a measure of psychological empowerment for the workplace context. The PEI Scale has been validated and used in over fifty different studies including a few in the higher education context. The PEI Scale was also validated in a national South African study in the organisational work context (Fourie, 2009). However, there is a need to explore psychological empowerment within the unique context of higher education and transformation in South Africa where previously marginalised groups are currently underrepresented in exceptional academic achievement. The study of psychological empowerment in the field of education is in its early stages and little research has been done in this area. Therefore, there is a need to have a greater understanding of how students in higher education settings can experience psychological empowerment, and how understanding it is related to exceptional academic achievement. This is especially relevant to transformation of higher education in South Africa with the goal of addressing equity.

#### ***2.4.2. Spreitzer's psychological empowerment concept***

Similar to the conceptualisation of psychological empowerment by Zimmerman et al. (1993) where three components of psychological empowerment were identified, Spreitzer identified four cognitions that were manifested by the intrinsic experience of psychological empowerment (motivation) of people's relationship to their work role; *meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact* (Spreitzer, 1995a).

In the psychological empowerment model, meaning refers to the value individuals perceive of their work role in relation to their own value and belief system, while competence is the individual's belief in their own capabilities to perform a task with skill. Moreover, self-determination is an individual's sense of choice in regulating actions in their environment, whereas impact is the influence an individual can have on the processes and structures in their work environment (Spreitzer, 1995a).

These four cognitions together assume the active role people could take in their work environment and are able to take control of their tasks at work. Although distinctive on their

own, combined they measure the overall construct of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995a). Spreitzer (1995a) notes that “the lack of one of the four cognitions will deflate from the overall degree of empowerment experienced” (p. 1444).

#### ***2.4.2.1. Assumptions of Spreitzer’s psychological empowerment***

Spreitzer (1995a) further clarifies some assumptions in the definition of empowerment:

- It is not a personality trait that is generalisable across contexts, but a set of cognitions influenced by the workplace
- It is a construct that can be measured on a continuum of more or less empowered
- Empowerment is not generalisable in different life roles but specific to the work context

Although Spreitzer originally argued the PEI’s non-generalisability across contexts, it has since been validated in over fifty different contexts, including academic contexts (Spreitzer, 1995b). In a descriptive-correlational study of nursing student’s academic achievement, the use of psychological empowerment as a measure was validated and reported a positive correlation between psychological empowerment, resilience, spiritual well-being and academic achievement (Beauvais, Stewart, DeNisco, & Beauvais, 2014).

#### ***2.4.3. Spreitzer’s psychological empowerment instrument***

Contemporary empowerment, organisational and management research has been grounded in different theoretical and cultural perspectives. Although mostly located in the organisational psychology domains, three perspectives seem to have dominated. Of the current literature, three perspectives of empowerment have emerged: (1) *the social-structural perspective*, (2) *the critical perspective* (3) *and the psychological perspective* (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005).

The *social-structural perspective* generally has its roots in democratic polity and its relevance to empowerment is in the belief that power resides equally within people at all levels of a system and facilitates the inclusion, participation and contribution of all equally. Key components of this perspective are participation and social exchange of power between superior and subordinate individuals (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005).

In contrast, *critical theorists* have propounded that without a formal structural representation of employee work ownership, empowerment will fail because in reality, power exists at the top of an organisation. Critical theorists further note the lack of ‘power discourse’ in empowerment

theory and question the extent to which empowerment programs actually empower (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005).

However, Spreitzer and Doneson (2005) defined psychological empowerment as “a set of psychological conditions necessary for individuals to feel in control of their own destiny” (p.7). They extended Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse’s (1990) definition of empowerment to involve an intrinsic experience of task motivation and included four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact which have already been discussed in detail above.

In 1997, after an intensive review of literature on empowerment across a spectrum of disciplines including sociology, psychology, education, and social work, Spreitzer found support for the development of the four dimensions to describe and measure psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995a). Kraimer, Siebert and Liden (1997) further validated the four dimensions of Spreitzer’s psychological empowerment measure.

From the psychological perspective, the psychological empowerment measure has dominated empirical research and has resulted in extensive research on empowerment. It has further been developed to include a nomological network of empowerment in the workplace. The use of the measure across diverse contexts is a validation of its generalisability of the psychological perspective and its relevance to empowerment (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005).

#### ***2.4.4. Empowerment and academic achievement***

The term ‘empowerment’ originated from within the perspectives of *continuous quality improvement* and *learning organisation* in organisational contexts to improve overall performance of employees and relationships among staff members (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994). From these perspectives, the concept of empowerment was developed. According to Senge et al. (1994) “Learning organizations require an energized and committed workforce with ‘empowered employees’ who must learn to act in the interest of the organization” (p.11).

Currently, a much debated topic related to the ideals of *quality improvement* and *learning organisation* in the higher education context, is the ‘corporatisation’ and ‘commodification’ of

public institutions which includes HEIs such as universities. In 2005, the minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel argued that “public institutions that were non-commodified<sup>15</sup> and non-commercialised space, needed proper management systems in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness” (Baatjes, 2005, p.25). It was argued that the solutions to these poorly run institutions was to convert them into better service-oriented places that fulfill the needs of its clients, and most importantly needed to be cost-effective. These goals have emerged from the South African government’s ‘agenda of transformation’ of restructuring public institutions that include mergers and acquisitions (Baatjes, 2005).

For similar reasons to South Africa’s agenda of transforming HEIs by restructuring them to be more cost-effective and efficiently run ‘commodities’, and where researchers such as Senge et al. (1994) felt that learning organisations needed a “[c]ommitted and energised workforce,” (p.11) it was one reason for the researcher to use the Psychological Empowerment Scale to gain insights into the experiences and levels of psychological empowerment of its students [clients] to improve ‘service delivery’ (Baatjes, 2005).

Furthermore, if businesses are to be viewed as learning organisations where learning is a valued commodity and gives a competitive edge against competitors, then empowered learners are vital to creating learning organisations because people, not organisations are responsible for learning (Senge et al., 1994). This perspective is a motivation in itself to investigate the effect psychological empowerment may have on student’s exceptional academic achievement. Moreover, if South Africa’s political agenda on transforming HEIs included a goal of producing a workforce that was more skilled, effective and could contribute to the country’s economy, surely the exploration of psychologically empowered individuals, would give educational policymakers insights into how they can accomplish transformation of higher education systems?

Frymeier et al. (1996) proposed that the concept of empowerment could be applied to the classroom or instructional context since it was successfully applied in the organisational context and argued the contextual relevance of whether its a governmental, organisational or educational environment because they share many of the same structures and processes.

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<sup>15</sup> Commodification is the act of treating something inappropriately as if it can be acquired or marketed like other commodities e.g. the commodification of knowledge (Collins English Dictionary, 2016).

Houser and Frymier, (2009) expanded the conceptualisation of empowerment for the learning environment and defined it as “a student’s feeling of competence to perform a task that is meaningful to them and has an impact on the situation” (p. 35) . Frymeier et al (1996) emphasised the importance of a communicative relationship between student and teacher that allows for the space, institutional processes and structures that foster feelings of responsibility, personal meaningfulness, ownership, self-efficacy, and an intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve exceptional academic achievement within the student. Academic achievement in the context of this study will refer to higher achieving academic students at UKZN from the undergraduate population where much research has focused on the problem of underachievement. Exceptional academic achievement in this study, will also be related to the socio-political implications it has on higher educations institutions and South Africa’s development goals (Munro, 2014).

Frymier et al. (1996) developed an instrument to measure a student’s empowerment and included three of the four dimensions that Spreitzer (1995a) developed and validated for the workplace (i.e. meaningfulness, competence and impact). Meaningfulness refers to how students in a class context perceive the meaningfulness of a work assignment according to their values and beliefs. Competence refers to the student’s belief in their own abilities to perform a work assignment to achieve their goals, while impact refers to whether or not students believe they have an impact on what happens in the classroom.

#### ***2.4.5. Criticisms of empowerment theory***

Since Freire’s publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the term ‘empowerment’ has been widely used to investigate the intersecting variables of power, dominant hegemonies, and education. However, it has become problematic not only because its frequent use has influenced its ubiquity, but its ‘silence’ is evident in empowerment discourse (Archibald & Wilson, 1997).

The concept of empowerment has received criticisms from researchers and educators for a variety of reasons, one of them being the overuse of empowerment as a meaningless buzzword by liberal educators. There is further concern that as a theory, empowerment is underdeveloped and there is risk of it being reified to the extent that the depth of its intellectual meaning and its

emancipatory potential will be forever lost (Archibald & Wilson, 1997). Inglis (1997) critically analyses the use of empowerment and emancipation in education and distinguishes the two, “empowerment being an individual’s capacity to succeed within existing hegemonies while emancipation requires individuals to critically analyse and fight against existing hegemonies with the end goal of freedom from oppression” (p. 4). Ellsworth (1989) states “proponents of critical pedagogy treat the symptoms of empowerment but leave the disease unnamed and untouched” (p. 306).

In the focus of this study [exceptional academic achievement], the differences between empowerment and Freire’s (2005) emphasis on emancipation from oppression by way of conscientisation was necessary to explicate as it revealed the dialectical complexity of the researcher’s epistemological beliefs and the use of empowerment as a way to understand students exceptional academic achievement. Can students who are conscientised and excel academically who exist within a dominant hegemony ever be truly emancipated from oppressive systems?

Weissberg’s (2000) initial criticism of the use of empowerment has been its appeal for all political and social spheres, ranging from radical feminists on the left to ‘empowerment America’ on the right. He goes back in history to describe the slogan ‘All Power to the People’ during the 1960s which was celebrated, funded, and even mainstreamed into society. Jumping on the ‘trendy bandwagon’ opportunists are abundant and an internet search reveals that 221 empowerment organisations exist from self-assertion seminars to transgender support groups.

Academia is further criticised and described as “those academics who sing albeit in convoluted harmonies the ostensible praises of heightened self-mastery” (Weissberg, 2000, p. 15). There is concern that standards set at academic levels of policy and implementation need to meet the realistic capabilities of everyday people. Moreover, academics have the power to shape an entire generation on amelioration but the goals of it need to be attainable. Lastly, it has been argued that if empowerment is to conquer society’s ills, the success of it largely rests on the shoulders of academia. In all the scholarly literature post-1960’s, much of what has been written and researched on the subject has revealed a dismal picture of empowerment’s success with very few benefits. In summary, the ideological pursuits of academia, their use of empowerment, the realities of its implementation and its limited capacity to conquer all of society’s woes have been criticised (Weissberg, 2000).

## **2.5. Research Objectives**

1. To identify whether there is a relationship between psychological empowerment and high academic achievement in university students.
2. To further, explore the notion of psychological empowerment in a select group of high achieving undergraduate students.

## **2.6. Research Questions**

1. What is the nature of the relationship between (high) academic achievement and psychological empowerment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
2. What historical spaces, structures, and processes have enabled (or constrained) the exceptional academic achievement of high achieving undergraduate students prior to and during their studies at UKZN.

## **2.7. Concluding summation**

In Chapter Two, with the study's primary goal of discovering whether high achieving students are psychologically empowered and with a social justice agenda, the researcher introduced a transformative paradigm, which essentially focused on oppressive systems, the call to address these oppressive systems, how to bring about social change and the processes involved in transformation. Secondly, the problem of Freire's Banking Concept of Education was discussed which followed on from the development of the Transmission Model. Freire's concept of 'conscientisation' was introduced and its relevance to the emancipation and empowerment of students was discussed. The researcher then put forward Freire's Problem-posing Theory of education as a way forward for empowering students. Thirdly, the concept of empowerment was introduced and more specifically the various theories surrounding psychological empowerment. Spreitzer's theory on Psychological Empowerment was specified and the use of her Psychological Empowerment Instrument was discussed and justified. The relationship between psychological empowerment and academic achievement was also introduced and discussed. The researcher further discussed its applicability to higher education contexts. Furthermore, a number of criticisms of empowerment theory were discussed. Lastly, the research objectives and questions were identified and discussed.



**Part Two: A Method for Measuring and Exploring Psychological Empowerment  
of Academically Exceptional Students**

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction and overview**

In the previous chapters, the current state of higher education in South Africa was explored. Integrated into this exploration were the epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions of empowerment theories that are relevant to the processes of transformation in higher education in South Africa today. Furthermore, the rationale and purpose of the study was described as being social justice and change within the philosophical assumptions of empowerment theory. The historical context of education in South Africa was explained using quantitative representations of higher education currently, which highlighted the socio-demographic variables and educational factors affecting higher education students in South Africa. In the second chapter, the concept of psychological empowerment was discussed in greater detail and was related to the context of academic achievement. Academic achievement of international students was discussed in relation to the challenges they face as foreign students in foreign countries. Criticisms of empowerment theories were described as was the transformative paradigm and their relevance to academic achievement.

Chapter Three will discuss relevant methodological considerations in relation to the conceptual, contextual, and theoretical perspectives of this study. Furthermore, the rationale of the study will be reiterated as well as the relevance of the research questions to the rationale. The rationale for the use of a mixed methodology will be presented as well as the research processes and a description of analyses that were employed for interpretation of data. A section on the ethical considerations that were necessary for the study will also be described. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with a description of the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility necessary to the success of mixed methods research and to the current study.

### **3.2. Contextual, conceptual, and theoretical frameworks: methodological considerations**

The historical perspective was presented in Chapter One with quantitative data on the current state of underachievement in higher education of previously marginalised groups. As the current study identified a gap in the literature on empowerment of high achieving students, there was an opportunity to explore it in the field of education. Due to this gap in literature and

the relevance of a transformative paradigm, the study was informed by the research goals of social justice, transformation, and empowerment. As the transformative paradigm provides a paradigm that addresses issues of power and justice, it adds to a database of mixed methodologies research that have been both widely used in recent transformative research and suggested as a method by such research experts as Creswell (2013), Sweetman, Badiee and Creswell (2010) and Mertens (2007). However, these experts suggest an awareness of both quantitative and qualitative methodological principles are necessary to relate to the ideals of a social justice and the transformative paradigm. From a historical perspective, the transformative paradigm is related to and acknowledges the perspectives and teachings of Paulo Freire in his 'dialogical conscientisation' (Mertens, 2010) which are directly related to empowerment in this study. The paradigm creates an opportunity for researchers to engage with communities whose voices were previously silenced and excluded. In the context of this study, these voices have the potential to highlight the representations of cultural and racial injustices in higher education. It may further illuminate future policy implementations necessary to address such injustices (Mertens, 2010).

In an effort to discuss the development of the transformative paradigm and explicate its relevance to mixed methodologies, four basic characteristics common to the transformative paradigm as identified by Mertens (2010b) are discussed below.

### ***3.2.1. Axiology***

For the reasons related to the emergence of the paradigm and its core tenets, concerns for the rights and welfare of participants involved in research are highlighted. Transformative researchers are critiqued on the extent to which they apply the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice. Respect is examined from the researcher's cultural interactions in diverse cultural groups, and beneficence is defined in terms of the promotion of human rights and an increase in social justice outcomes (Mertens, 2010).

A review of various ethical guidelines for researchers and psychologists are an axiological assumption of the paradigm. Transparency and reciprocity are important to the assumptions of the paradigm and emphasis has been placed on the importance of giving back to the community. Transformative researchers are further required to apply multicultural ethical principles. These principles require the collaboration of the researcher with the host community where

community members and stakeholders actively participate in the research and directly benefit (Mertens, 2010).

### ***3.2.2. Ontology***

The transformative paradigm recognises the acceptance of what is perceived to be real and differences are treated as equally important. Proponents of the paradigm further state that what is 'real' may be reified structures that are perceived as real because of past historical events or situations of cultural significance. A critical analysis of these perceptions of what is 'real' is required to investigate the role they play in perpetuating oppressive systems. For example the 'silences' of power in empowerment discourse has directly influenced the continued justification and use of oppressive systems in many societies and communities (Mertens, 2010).

### ***3.2.3. Epistemology***

The significance of the transformative paradigm's epistemological assumptions is based on the meaning of knowledge defined from the cultural view of the participants and involves an interactive relationship between researcher and participants. The researcher is required to conscientise what is valued as knowledge from the perspective of the participants. The aim of the relationship is to empower those with no power (Mertens, 2010).

### ***3.2.4. Methodology***

Mertens (2010) has identified three characteristics that need to be considered in the ethical implications for the choice of methods related to the transformative paradigm:

- Silenced voices need to be heard to ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups in the research process, the findings, and the recommendations.
- Equitable distribution of resources in all phases of the research process needs to be ensured.
- Results of the research need to be directed towards the implementation of a social action and a plan that leads to the empowerment of the community involved in the research. Personal and systematic transformation is the overall aim.

Transformative researchers are pluralistic in the methodological choices they make. While empiricist researchers who work within the transformative paradigm use quantitative methods, they acknowledge and highlight the need for a critical perspective regarding the post positivist paradigm and greater meticulousness surrounding issues such as sexism, racism, feminism and

biased results. Other transformative researchers employ qualitative methodologies such as observations and interviews with a social justice ideology (Mertens, 2010).

The current study used a mixed methodologies for the purpose of creating opportunities that would possibly bring about personal and systemic transformation (Schneider et al., 2004). In other words, the mixed methodologies were purposefully chosen to give those with less power the power to bring about positive change in their lives on a personal level. This included potentially feeling empowered by high levels of academic achievement that may be related to the long-term effects of academic empowerment on their career goals. Furthermore, the potential to empower their families and communities both economically and socially would be an example of transformation at a societal level.

### ***3.2.5. The potential benefits of mixed methods research***

According to Ponterotto et al. (2013) using mixed methods as a research tool can add value to a variety of psychological phenomena across multiple cultural contexts. Moreover, due to the holistic nature of using a variety of methods, it increases the validity and reliability of the phenomena being investigated as well as the accuracy of understanding the phenomena. With most researchers acknowledging the limitations inherent in all research studies, the incorporation of multiple perspectives and a combination of both methodological approaches allows researchers to not only increase the complexity and scope of the topic under investigation but reduce the limitations of the study (Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008; Lonner, 2009).

### ***3.2.6. The value of mixed methods designs for transformative and social justice research***

While quantitative methods add value to mixed methods research, it is necessary to mention how. According to Ponterotto et al (2013) firstly:

[t]hey promote representative sampling techniques within marginalised groups in dominant hegemonies; they allow the study of correlational and cause and effect relationships among social justice constructs; a section of the findings are anchored in statistical methods aimed at positivistic journal and grants reviewers; present statistical findings with clarity and supports small, qualitative findings by detailing the representativeness of social justice findings to larger samples. (p. 48)

Supporting the value of quantitative methods, it is necessary to balance them out with the use of qualitative paradigms and methods that address the historically oppressed and silenced voices of marginalised communities. Often oppressive systems and practices of marginalised groups are maintained when researchers rely solely on positivist quantitative methods and do not balance the study with qualitative methods rooted in a critical stance, even when they have a well-meaning social justice intent (Mohatt & Thomas, 2006).

### ***3.2.7. The reflexive journey of the researcher's methodological decisions***

In explicating the conceptual, contextual, and theoretical perspectives specific to this study and the methodological decisions of this study, it is necessary to understand the epistemological beliefs of the researcher and their alignment to social justice, the transformative paradigm, and empowerment. The researcher's interest in empowerment is based on the value she places on education and the insurmountable challenges she faced having to overcome not only a physical disability but a neurological and cognitive disorder of epilepsy. In overcoming these challenges recently in life (as compared to the population norm), the researcher has an inherent interest in researching groups who have previously been marginalised by politically, culturally and socially oppressive systems while simultaneously promoting human development for both the individual and collective good (Ponterotto et al., 2013).

Moreover, the researcher's epistemological orientation to social justice research is not only embedded in and linked to empowerment of the individual but the active acknowledgement and confrontation of past injustices in society as they affect the research participants and the context of those systems (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008). Crethar et al. (2008) situate social justice research in the principles of *equity, access, participation* and *harmony* which is not only relevant to the current study but to the process of transformation in South African higher education today. According to Ponterotto et al. (2013) two of the necessary steps in adopting a social justice mixed methods research is to increase one's multicultural awareness and developing the capacity and skills in both methods as well as the philosophical assumptions that guide and inform each method.

The researcher further acknowledges the epistemological assumptions of social construction where reality is in the minds of the participants as well as phenomena that is equally measurable and valid (Ponterotto et al., 2013). Just as Freire (2005) emphasised the need for participants' conscientisation as a necessary process to empowerment, Ponterotto et al. (2013) argued social constructionism proposes "awareness and knowledge is embedded within the participant and

only accessed by and co-constructed with the researcher through dialogic encounters characterized by close proximity and prolonged engagement (dualism is abandoned)". (p. 44)

Lastly, the researcher acknowledges the critical-ideological perspective that proposes that people's realities are "shaped by social and political forces and embedded in a historic power imbalance and subjugation politically, socially, and economically of less-empowered societal groups" (p. 44). Ponterotto et al. (2013) further emphasise that critical researchers' use of both quantitative and qualitative methods is rooted in establishing a dialectical stance between the researcher and participants that has the desired outcome of empowerment and transforms oppressive structures and processes to more socially justifiable practices.

The researcher attempted to link her own epistemological beliefs to the transformative paradigm, the social justice approach, empowerment theory, social constructionism, and critical theory and give them relevance to and throughout this study.

Therefore, relying solely on quantitative or qualitative methods will not give the reader or the community being researched a better understanding of the complexities associated with understanding the cultural, social and political injustices embedded in history.

### **3.3. Mixed methods rationale, research questions, instruments and data collection methods**

The rationale for this study has been founded in the historical-contextual perspective in Chapter One and the conceptual perspective in Chapter Two. The study attempted to add value to the dominant themes of education by focusing on exceptional academic achievement in a transformative education context. It further attempted to offer new insights into empowerment and its relationship to exceptional academic achievement in higher education that has not previously been researched. Therefore, the focus on empowerment was unique to the South African higher education setting.

Although empowerment is not new to social science research, very little research has focused on empowerment in the education sector and more specifically, higher education within a transformative setting. Moreover, much of the research on higher education in South Africa has been dominated by a quantitative focus on access, participation, throughput and underachievement (CHE, 2011). A focus on empowerment and its relationship to exceptional academic achievement could inform education officials and policy makers of ways to empower those who are not achieving high academic levels and do not experience psychological

empowerment. These factors therefore, provided a rationale for the study, the transformative approach and methodology, and its focus on exceptional academic achievement.

The research process was informed by the contextual, conceptual, and theoretical perspectives of the study and therefore, focused on the nature of the relationship between psychological empowerment and exceptional academic achievement. It also focused on which processes, structures and places have empowered students to achieve high academic outcomes. The first research question therefore, related to the quantitative phase of the study as it explored whether there was a correlation between the two variables of psychological empowerment and high academic achievement (student marks). Although the quantitative measure was limited to being generalised to the UKZN psychology undergraduate student population due to convenience sampling, the sample was representative of an educational context in the process of transformation. The second research question focused on the qualitative phase of the study, investigating issues of empowerment articulated by students who participated in the Photo voice activity; a purposively sampled group of high achieving students. Therefore, the above questions are relevant to the historical-contextual, conceptual, and theoretical perspectives that inform this study.

In line with the transformative paradigm and social justice perspective underpinning this study, the tools for analysis were a psychological empowerment instrument and final academic results, and an activity that was oriented towards the possible experience of empowerment found in the meanings students gave to their exceptional academic achievement.

### **3.4. Research design and process**

The historical, conceptual, and theoretical perspectives informed the design of mixed methods of empowerment and exceptional academic achievement at a South African higher education institution. Although the design of this study was a concurrent design with both the quantitative and qualitative phases occurred simultaneously, the phases were labelled as Phase 1 and Phase 2 for the quantitative and qualitative sections of the study. The University of KwaZulu-Natal was selected as the location of the study. The sub-sections below will give an account of the research processes (methods, sampling and analysis) that were part of this study. A description of the integration of both quantitative and qualitative analysis will further be described.

### ***3.4.1. The University of KwaZulu-Natal as a location of the study***

The rationale for the use of UKZN as a location of the study was based on practical reasons as well as factors related to the relevance of the study's context. As a master's student of Research Psychology at UKZN, and as the study fell under the student's supervisor's study of exceptional academic achievement, it was a natural choice to locate the study in the same context of learning and education. Although not always recommended and often frowned upon in a variety of research fields, according to Foot and Sanford (2004) the field of research psychology remains reliant on students as samples in research studies. One of their main concerns that Foot and Sanford (2004) and Peterson (2001) raise is that not all student populations are representative of adult populations and this questions the validity and reliability of the sample. However, the use of students as a sample was deemed appropriate and relevant to the research context; they were readily accessible to the researcher and the research is exploratory in nature, as empowerment has not been widely researched in transformative higher education settings. Furthermore, as the research pertains to students, the student population was an obvious choice.

Secondly, the merger in 2004 between what was formerly known as the University of Natal (previously advantaged) and the University of Durban-Westville (previously disadvantaged) was most importantly based on the need to:

[I]ncrease equitable and meaningful access to education, knowledge, skills and learning to ensure an education system that is more accessible by the marginalized and the poor; ensure progressive values of democracy, non-racialism, redress and broad participation and an education system to narrow and the elimination of socio-economic disparities through education. (Higher Education Transformation Network, 2015)

This merger is an example of a transformative process and relevant to the research study's underlying goal of transformation in higher education and the location of the study. Furthermore, the university (UKZN) has been shown to rapidly engage in other transformative processes through their increase in Black and female instructional and research staff which is higher than the national average being 53% and 48% respectively (DHET, 2012).

### ***3.4.2. Mixed methods design***

The study adopted a concurrent transformative mixed methods design (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013) the suitability of this design is specifically related to the researcher's worldview (advocacy, social change) and the strength of integrating data from both qualitative and quantitative methods which was discussed in greater detail above.

The intent to use concurrent transformative mixed methods design was to explore the notion of empowerment among psychology undergraduate students at UKZN within the context of academic achievement and equity within the university. The data production (sampling and collection procedures), and data analysis and interpretation are detailed below.

In the study, the Psychological Empowerment Instrument (Appendix 1) was used to measure the relationship between psychological empowerment (independent variable) and academic achievement (dependent variable). Permission from the instrument developer, Gretchen Spreitzer, was granted to use an adapted version of PEI (see Appendix 4). Demographic information was included in the instrument to enable an analysis of variations in gender and race groups representations of levels of academic achievement among psychology undergraduate students at UKZN. For convenience, first year psychology students were targeted for sampling purposes. Due to the aim of this study not necessarily being able to generalise the findings to the larger university student population, purposive and convenience sampling strategies mentioned above were sufficient. Ideally, the researcher should have engaged in some validation process after changing the wording of the PEI. The wording of the original PEI was designed for organisational work settings and therefore needed adaption for the higher education setting which may have affected the reliability and validity of the instrument.

For the qualitative phase of the research, the notion of empowerment was explored with the second research question in mind. The method of exploring this research question was through a Photo voice activity and photo elicitation interviews.

Creswell (2013) emphasises four important aspects of mixed methods that need to be considered: timing, weighting, mixing and theorising.

The first aspect, timing, is the consideration of when the quantitative and qualitative data collection phases are to be gathered. For the purpose of this study, data was collected

concurrently (at the same time). Furthermore, it was more practical as data was being collected in the same setting (UKZN Pmb campus) for both phases (Creswell, 2013).

The second aspect to consider was weighting, or the priority that was given to the quantitative and qualitative methods. For the current study, equal priority was given to the two methods. Equal weighting was assigned to both methods as both methods were exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2013).

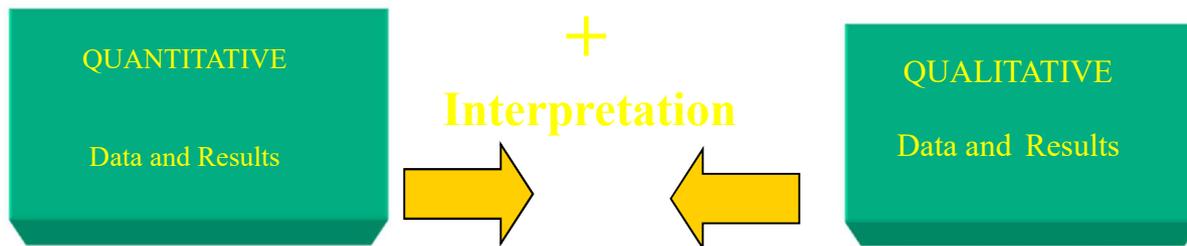
The third aspect that Creswell (2013) suggests needs to be considered is mixing. Mixed of the data may occur at various stages of the study. For the current study, mixing was categorised as partial and data were integrated at the interpretation stage where both the quantitative and qualitative results were compared and explicated.

The design was categorised as partially mixed for three reasons:

1. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used when designing the research objectives and questions (i.e., correlation through the use of quantitative methods, and exploratory research through qualitative methods)
2. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed.
3. Both qualitative and quantitative inferences were made (Munro, 2014).

The fourth aspect according to (Creswell, 2013) that needs to be considered is theorising. This entails integrating the theoretical paradigm that informs the design throughout the study. For the purpose of this study, the broad theoretical lens that has informed the study is one of advocacy and social justice related to exploring the notion of exceptional academic achievement within a transformative setting and with an equity agenda. The theoretical paradigm of transformation and the empowerment perspective are explicitly stated and interwoven throughout the study (Creswell, 2013).

As suggested by Creswell & Plano Clark (2007), Mertens (2010) and other mixed methodology experts, it is appropriate to construct a graphic representation of the research design (see Figure. 3-1)



*Figure 3-1. Graphic representation of concurrent transformative design with triangulation*

### ***3.4.3. Phase One: Quantitative data production and initial analyses***

Although the two methods of the study were concurrent, they will be discussed as phases. Phase 1 of the study was designed to answer question one of the study, which sought to explore the nature of the relationship between academic achievement and psychological empowerment of undergraduate students at a South African higher education institution (UKZN). The purpose of this phase of the study was to explore whether there was a relationship between psychology students' experience of psychological empowerment and their Psychology 101 results. It was anticipated that the findings would predict that the higher students scored on psychological empowerment, the higher their Psychology 101 results would be. Moreover, their empowerment scores alone would give the researcher and university lecturers a clearer idea of what domains these students feel empowered in and where they felt disempowered. The four cognitions of the Psychological Empowerment Scale measured meaningfulness, impact, self-determination, and competence, which can be interpreted as meaningful on their own or as part of an overall empowerment score. The four subscales could further identify which of the cognitions are significantly associated with predicting high academic achievement (academic results). Lastly, it was anticipated that the biographical data of race, gender, age, psychology results, home language, and degree would show differences in educational and socio-demographic variables representative of psychology undergraduate students.

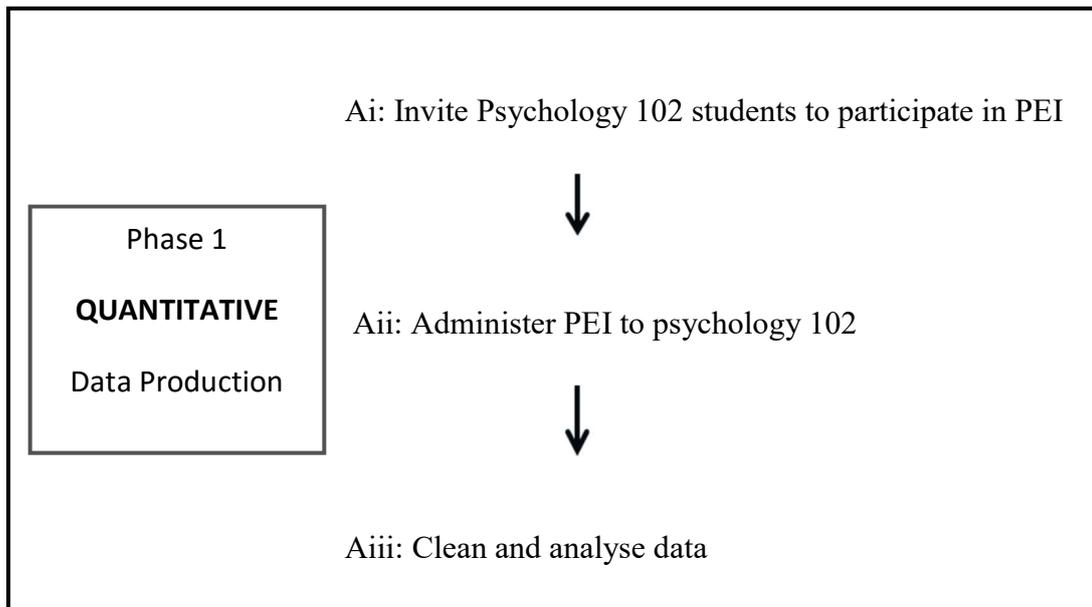
### *3.4.3.1. Quantitative sample and database*

Before commencement of this study, ethical approval from the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee was attained (see Appendix 7) Moreover, gatekeeper's approval was attained for the current study to proceed (see Appendix 6). Furthermore, permission from the instrument developer, Gretchen Spreitzer, was granted to use an adapted version of PEI (see Appendix 4). As part of consenting to participate in the study participants agreed to the researcher having access to their academic results for the purpose of analyses and she was granted permission to do this by the Registrar of UKZN. There were no ethical concerns related to the nature of the study insofar as the researcher treated the data with confidentiality. Although the participants were identifiable to the researcher, their data was anonymised where their names and student numbers were removed from the dissertation.

The researcher's supervisor provided the academic results that were necessary to correlate to their empowerment scores, as the supervisor was the Psychology 101 module coordinator. All students were informed of the purpose of the study (see Appendix 2) and the use of their results prior to consenting to access their results (see Appendix 3) and filling in the PEI questionnaire. These results were in the form of a spreadsheet, which included their student number and Psychology 101<sup>16</sup> final results. The PEI was handed out to the participants at the end of a lecture to answer. The answer sheets and signed informed consent forms were then collected. Participants were given an information sheet explaining how to interpret their empowerment scores (see appendix 1, section 4).

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<sup>16</sup> Psychology 102 students were invited to participate, but it was only if they had completed Psychology 101 that it made it possible for their PEI results to be included.



*Table 3-1 Phase 1 - Quantitative Data Production*

Data cleaning involved the following steps: Firstly, the data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet where demographic data and question responses from the PEI were coded and the exam results were included. Of the population of 500 psychology students, 165 students participated in the study. The majority of the sample was first year students who were studying various degrees ranging from Bachelor of Arts degrees to Bachelor of Commerce degrees. However, the majority were studying a Bachelor of Social Science degree.

Secondly, once data had been cleaned and participants with missing variables had been excluded, the data was imported into JMP Statistical Package version 10.2 and SPSS Statistical Package version 23 to run various analyses. Of the initial sample of 165 participants, 81 were excluded with a remaining 84 usable questionnaires. Participants were excluded based on missing Psychology 101 results, and mismatched questionnaires and informed consent forms. The exclusion of data has been suggested by Katz, (2011) prior to commencing regression analyses. These participants were contacted via email to fill in the questionnaire again on Google forms. Unfortunately, none of them responded. A limitation of this is related to the design of the biographical data section. Participants filled in a separate informed consent sheets that were not attached to the questionnaire. Therefore, questionnaires might have been separated from the informed consent sheets or not handed in together with the informed consent sheets.

### ***3.4.3.2. Quantitative data analyses***

Data analyses in the quantitative phase of the study included descriptive statistics, correlational analysis Cronbach's Alpha (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) for internal consistency and reliability. Initial descriptive statistics were performed to describe the sample while correlational analysis were performed to determine if any relationship existed between academic achievement and a number of the demographic variables (Howell, 2010). Furthermore, a correlational analysis was run between the constructs of the empowerment scale as well as between empowerment and academic achievement.

Descriptive statistics was used to describe the sample of respondents who filled in the PEI to understand their level of empowerment, their various demographics, and their psychology 101 results. Frequency counts and percentages were used.

In a secondary analysis, the researcher ran an Exploratory Factor Analysis using Principal Components Analysis to explore the number of factors that emerged from the adapted PEI Scale (Spreitzer, 1995a).

Finally, Cronbach's Alpha was performed to test the internal consistency and reliability of the PEI Scale on each of the four subscales (constructs) as proposed by Spreitzer (1995a). A Cronbach's Alpha test was run on all 12 items of the scale to determine the overall reliability of the scale as well as the internal consistency of the scale.

The final sample included 84 Psychology 101 students comprising an empowerment score and Psychology 101 results with a number of socio-demographic variables. Lastly, the researcher spent time checking the data for errors. In a secondary analysis, the researcher performed an Exploratory Factor Analysis of the adapted PEI Scale to determine how many factors emerged from the adapted PEI scale.

A potential limitation of the study was the use of only Psychology 101 results in relation to their empowerment scores and not an average of their overall academic results, which may have been a better indicator of overall academic achievement. A further limitation of the study is the generalisability of the results to the entire student population.

### ***3.4.3.3. Reliability and validity of the Psychological Empowerment Instrument***

According to Spreitzer (1995b) the Psychological Empowerment Instrument has been validated in over fifty studies worldwide. The fields in which the instrument was validated ranged from nursing to manufacturing. In Spreitzer's initial analyses of the PEI, she reported Cronbach's

alpha reliability coefficients of .72 for her one sample and .62 for the other sample (Spreitzer, 1995a). Spreitzer's initial factor analysis of the four cognitions of the instrument reported findings that strongly indicated that each construct was distinct and contributed to the overall construct of empowerment.

Although the researcher investigated the use of Frymeier et al (1996) Learner Empowerment Scale (LES), Spreitzer's PEI (1995b) included the domain of self-determination and gives a more accurate overall measurement of people's psychological empowerment score within the learning environment. The LES is very specific to measuring empowerment within the classroom context (student and teacher) and does not consider student's psychological empowerment holistically (socially, economically, and structurally). The use of mixed methods and a qualitative phase of the study allows for the more in-depth exploration of empowerment that may not be addressed in the quantitative phase.

Two studies specifically related to academic achievement were a study of nursing students at a private university in New England, USA. They found a statistically significant correlation between academic achievement and psychological empowerment and reported an overall Cronbach's Alpha ranging between .85 and .91 (Beauvais et al., 2014). In a further study of 312 female lecturers in 25 private higher education institutions, the researchers examined whether there was a correlation between antecedents of empowerment and psychological empowerment. They reported an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.86. The alpha values for antecedents ranged between 0.82 and 0.92 (Ghani & Raja Hussin, 2009).

Furthermore, a doctoral thesis by Fourie (2009) who used the Psychological Empowerment Instrument to study the extent to which South Africans are psychologically empowered in the workplace reported a validity co-efficient that exceeded .80 and high levels of reliability. The use of the PEI in her study is a validation in itself of the applicability for use in the South African context. Due to the fact that the wording of the PEI scale for the current study was changed slightly, it was necessary to test the internal consistency and reliability. Therefore, a Cronbach's Alpha tested all 12 items of the instrument and was found to be reliable with a score of .811. The quantitative findings section will discuss the reliability in greater detail.

#### ***3.4.4. Phase Two: Qualitative data production***

In the qualitative phase of the study, participants were purposefully sampled to represent students who were achieving exceptional academic results and who were scholarship recipients. Phase two of the study was designed to answer the second question of the study: Which spaces, structures, and processes at university have empowered high achieving undergraduate students to attain high academic achievement outcomes? This allowed the researcher to access the meanings that can be found in participatory activities such as Photo voice and the subsequent interviews about the meanings each participant found in their photos and the activity. Phase two of the study further allowed the researcher to explore the historical spaces, structures and processes that have enabled (or constrained) student's exceptional academic achievement. Another reason for purposive sampling was that it can be used to compare against the findings in the quantitative phase and integrate into the interpretation stage which Creswell (2013) suggests in a concurrent mixed methods study with triangulation. This method of sampling may highlight the systems, processes, and structures that may be maintaining the oppressive practices that have silenced the voices of previous minority groups.

As stated above, an important aspect of mixed methods is the consideration of theorising, which is closely related to researcher's reasons for purposive sampling. Theorising is related to the lens of the study, which is social justice and advocacy. Purposive sampling with a strong association to the social justice lens further allows for the researcher and university policy makers to understand the context of academically exceptional and empowered students and how they can implement policies that can help students who are not achieving high levels of exceptional academic achievement to reach these levels. Purposive sampling further advanced the theoretical perspective of empowerment and the methodological congruence of mixed methods (Munro, 2014). Furthermore, according to Silverman and Marvasti (2008) purposive sampling "demands that you think critically about the parameters of the population you and choose your sample case carefully on this basis or...illustrate some feature or process in which you are interested" (p. 166).

A limitation of this sampling technique is the exclusion of students who may be achieving moderate levels of academic achievement but who may still feel empowered. However, it was justified that the use of exceptional academic students could inform future research in helping those students who are achieving moderate levels of exceptional academic achievement to

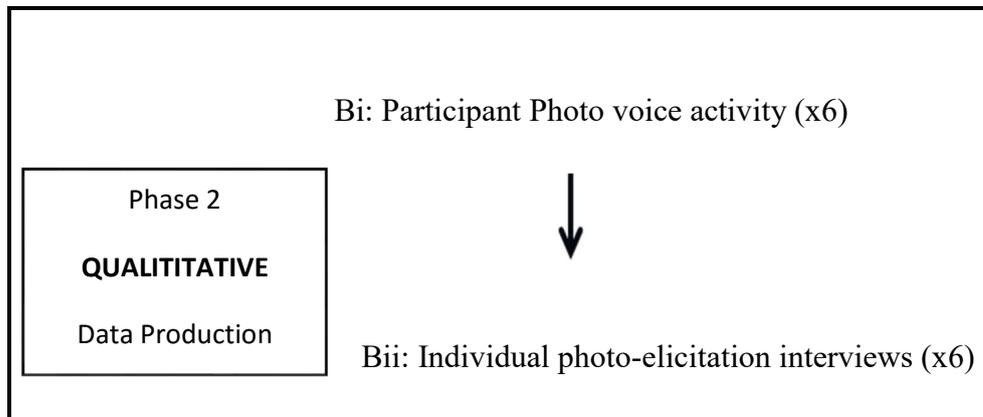
reach higher levels of achievement by understanding the processes, structures, and people influencing the current sample.

#### ***3.4.5.1. Qualitative sample and data production***

In light of the chosen method of purposive sampling for the qualitative phase of the study, it was necessary to access the participants. As this phase of the study was part of the overarching study on exceptional academic achievement, ethical approval from the UKZN ethics committee and the relevant gatekeeper's approval had been granted prior to the commencement of this study (See Appendix 6 & 7). Permission was granted by the chair of the scholarship committee to the researcher (Dr Munro) of the overarching study, to obtain a list of undergraduate students who had excelled academically at first and second year of their degrees, and who were offered scholarships at the beginning of 2015 (Munro, 2014). Students who excel academically are students who attain very high marks in the year or level and generally achieve a number of distinctions. They are then offered scholarships by UKZN. Scholarships are in the form of money awarded to students to pay for their tuition fees. Scholarships were awarded from both UKZN and external funds either partially or fully. Permission was then granted to the current researcher to access the list and use it for this purpose. Students who were situated on the Pietermaritzburg, Westville and Howard campuses of UKZN, were then invited via their student email addresses (See Appendix 9) to participate in a Photo voice activity and then subsequent individual photo-elicitation interviews with the researcher to explore the notion of empowerment and academic achievement. Of the seventy students the researcher initially invited to participate, six students responded and participated in the Photo voice activity. All participants were from the PMB campus. Of the six participants, two were South African, two were Zimbabwean, one was Malawian, and one student was from Botswana. Initially, the researcher planned to recruit only African students. However, due to the poor response to participate in the study, the researcher made a subsequent decision to sample more widely to include all race groups. Of the six participants, one of the South African student's was a white female. Although a white female student would not necessarily be considered to belong to a historically marginalised group in the context of this study, the researcher felt she was marginalised by socio-economic status and the fact that she was the first person in her family to be awarded a degree from university.

As identified in Table 3-2 below, Phase 2 of the study involved two interrelated data production activities. Due to time constraints and resources, only students from the Pietermaritzburg,

Westville, and Howard campuses were invited. However, all six participants who responded to the invitation were from the Pietermaritzburg campus.



*Table 3-2 Phase 2- Qualitative Data Production Strategies*

#### 3.4.5.1.1. Photo voice activity and photo-elicitation interviews

Considering the explosion of Photo voice as a method of data collection over the past twenty years by qualitative researchers, it is necessary to consider its suitability and applicability to the empowerment perspective and from a social justice lens (Sanon, Evans-Agnew, & Boutain, 2014). According to Sanon et al. (2014) Photo voice has its theoretical underpinnings grounded in the work of Paulo Freire who focused on critical consciousness. It was originally developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris to give marginalised groups a visual means of voicing their experiences. One of their key purposes for its use was to empower individuals by providing a platform to bring attention to the issues of the community (Sanon et al., 2014). Furthermore, Wang (1999) emphasised Photo voice as an important tool for dialogue to take place which was necessary to community development that could influence change on at meta levels (systemic). In light of the current study’s empowerment and social justice perspectives, Photo voice as a qualitative data collection method was chosen. It was further chosen for its suitability to higher education contexts and students are the participants (Steyn & Kamper, 2011). Mertens’ (2007) transformative paradigm, social justice perspective and Spreitzer’s (1995a) empowerment theory were applied when analysing the data.

Modern Photo voice methods involve providing participants with a camera and taking a number of photographs relevant to the research topic (Noland, 2006) and related to the meaning participants in from their lives. In this study once participants had finished collecting photos, photo-elicitation interviews were completed to explore the meanings each photo had to each participant related to their exceptional academic achievement and the notion of empowerment. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews and photographs. This

perspective was employed by the researcher to avoid imposing her own views and epistemological beliefs on the participants. During the writing of this dissertation and the data collection and analysis phase, the researcher tried to engage in reflexive praxis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by being aware of her own perceptions and writing about them in a journal. According to Huberman and Miles (1994) a reflexive stance “involves regular, ongoing self-conscious documentation” (p. 302). In addition to the researcher’s interest in exploring empowerment and its relationship to exceptional academic achievement, there are other theoretical reasons for the use of Photo voice, which the researcher will explicate below.

Firstly, the adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” refers to the complex notion that a photo can contain multiple, complex layers of meaning and can convey its meaning more effectively than a written description is deeply rooted in the researcher’s epistemological belief in social justice, transformation and empowerment. It is further rooted in her interest in photography. Huberman and Miles (1994) note that choosing a topic one is interested in can form the basis of a research topic, and that is an additional reason why Photo voice was chosen as qualitative data collection method.

Secondly, the prolific use of cameras in modern society lends itself to the way people understand their world visually. Furthermore, the availability of cameras (on cell phones) is relevant to how important visual imagery is to our modern existence (Munro, 2014).

Thirdly, the use of Photo voice as a transformative tool addresses collective and systematic problems at their roots (Sanon et al., 2014). The assortment of a ‘collective visual imagery’ (campus photo exhibitions<sup>17</sup>) can be used as a powerful tool for dialogue and transformation. There are resultant benefits in the subsequent photo-elicitation interviews between the researcher and participants. The interviews not only build rapport but according to Meo (2010), by using the participants’ photographs, it gives them the power to direct the interview and allow the researcher to understand their world. According to Noland, (2006) this is important in facilitating participants feeling empowered, especially people from previous minority groups.

Lastly, during the Photo voice activity and the photo-elicitation interviews the researcher created the opportunity for a deeper level of understanding, reflection and conscientisation to

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<sup>17</sup> Participants will then be encouraged and supported to facilitate college specific photo exhibitions. Participants will be encouraged to select samples of their photos to exhibit at each college. These exhibitions do not form part of the data collection process but rather the Photo voice project will enable students to have their ‘voices’ seen/heard. The wider UKZN community including teaching staff will be invited to the exhibitions to engage in dialogue

take place which was key to Freire's philosophical and epistemological assumptions (Freire, 2005b). In most of the interviews, participants became aware of the process Photo voice had on them and how it conscientised them to their exceptional academic achievement, a feeling of being empowered and the people, places and structures that facilitated that empowerment. The above reasons have given a justification for the use of Photo voice as a qualitative data collection method interwoven into the theoretical perspectives of social justice, empowerment, and transformation that inform this study.

Of the six students that participated in the study, all six signed informed consent forms, which included consenting to the use of their photographs in the findings of the research. Furthermore, participants were required to obtain acknowledgement and release forms for all the people they photographed. Once they agreed to participate, they were invited to a Photo voice induction session that explained to them what Photo voice was, what it involved, including the ethical issues around taking photos of other people, and the type of photos that needed to be taken. Next, they were given a digital camera if they did not have a camera on their phone or tablet, with a data card and shown how to use it. Lastly, they were asked to take 10 photographs that were reflective of the spaces, structures and processes that they felt empowered them to excel academically at UKZN and 10 photographs that reflect the historical spaces, structures, and processes that empowered (and restricted) their (exceptional) academic achievement prior to starting their studies at UKZN. The participants were given the following hand-outs as prompts for the Photo voice activity:

### **Taking Photographs:**

#### Photo collection 1:

- Take approximately 10 photographs that reflect the current spaces, structures, and processes that have empowered you to achieve exceptional academic achievement.

#### Photo collection 2:

- Take approximately 10 photographs that reflect the historical spaces, structures, and processes that empowered (and restricted) your (exceptional) academic achievement prior to starting your studies at UKZN (You could also choose some existing photographs for the second collection). (See Appendix 12)

After the mid-year vacation in July, the participants were invited back to photo-elicitation interviews with the researcher. All six participants took photographs and attended one photo-

elicitation interview that generally lasted around 30 – 40 minutes. Appendix 14 reflects the semi-structured interview guide that was used in the interviews. Due to various delays and time constraints the photo exhibitions did not take place. In summary, the data produced from the qualitative phase of the study included the transcriptions from all six photo-elicitation interviews, and one hundred and twenty photographs from the Photo voice activity taken by the six participants. Of the six participants, four were females and two males. The four female students were all from the College of Humanities and taking psychology as an undergraduate subject. The one male student was studying media and visual arts, and the other was studying international relations. One of the female students had been awarded Golden Key status. Only one female student was receiving a partial scholarship while the two male students were on different scholarships. However, they were all high achieving academic students as indicative of their inclusion on the scholarship list.

#### ***3.4.5.2. Initial steps in qualitative data analysis***

The analysis of the qualitative data was an iterative and reflexive process that according to Srivastava and Hopewood (2009)

Is not a repetitive mechanical task but a deeply reflexive process...and is key to sparking insight and developing meaning. Reflexive iteration is at the heart of visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understandings. (p. 77)

The qualitative data for phase two of the study was produced over a three month period, and the researcher undertook two different forms of analysis throughout the data production stage and afterwards the data production stage. This included becoming aware of and noting potential codes and themes (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly, 2006) while transcribing the audio files to text, inferring and noting codes and identifying themes. The reflexive process of revisiting the data and reconnecting with the data was undertaken after data production. Initial themes were identified in the analysis and interpretation stages and final themes during the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

The researcher followed the analytic steps of interpretive (thematic) analysis suggested by (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The authors suggest it as a way of ‘unpacking’ some of the processes involved in immersion in the data and a reflection of the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Prior to the actual data analysis stage, the researcher engaged in a reflexive process in

the data collection and production stages and arrived at a preliminary understanding of the meaning in the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This was done by transcribing verbatim the audio to text and sorting through the photos and noting the important photos the participants had acknowledged gave them the most meaning. It was necessary to read and reread transcribed interviews, therefore becoming aware of emerging themes and narratives prior to immersion in the analysis stage. These were in the form of notes and comments added to sections of highlighted text. The participants' photographs were downloaded onto the researcher's laptop during the photo-elicitation interviews as they formed the core of the interviews. By this time, the researcher had already engaged in the first step of familiarisation and immersion, which led to the second step.

The second step in interpretive analysis is that of inducing themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This process involves a grounded approach where themes should naturally emerge from data and be related to the research question. This involved the researcher coding data that used the language of the participants to label categories. Secondly, the researcher organised the data according to a thematic scheme around their exceptional academic achievement that included support structures and inspirational role models. The participants' photographs, the context of the photographs and the meanings given to them both as individual photographs belonging to each participant and a collection of all the photos required the researcher to constantly be aware of the photograph in conjunction with the text. This further required looking at the photographs for not only what is visible but what is not visible (symbolic) as suggested by Mitchell (2011). As part of the interpretation phase, it was necessary for the researcher to then interpret at a deeper level than what was immediately available in the photographs. The process of inducing themes was undertaken throughout all the transcribed interviews and text that the researcher considered relevant to the research question was extracted from each participant's interview. This then led to the third step of interpretive analysis, which involved coding the data by highlighting text that was relevant to themes that had initially been induced. Some of the codes that were given to sections of text were applicable to more than one theme by highlighting text in different colours relevant to its theme.

The fourth step of elaboration was to systematically link themes through all the participants' interviews and photographs that consistently emerged and that appeared to belong together. This step allowed the researcher to refine the initial theme names and recode data if necessary. The final step, which involved interpreting what had emerged from the data and writing on the themes that had emerged. It further required the researcher to reflect on their role in collecting

the data and interpreting it. At the same time, it required the researcher to acknowledge partiality related to philosophical and epistemological beliefs. In other words, although the researcher attempted to engage in bottom up analysis driven by the data, the theoretical perspectives that were the focus of the study (transformative and empowerment) informed the analysis and identification of themes.

#### ***1.4.6. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data***

The researcher attempted to draw on Creswell's (2013) concurrent transformative strategy and Mertens' (2010) transformative paradigm to integrate both the quantitative and qualitative data. The integration of the findings was based on how the researcher viewed the meaning (their cultural perspectives of academic achievement) the participants gave to their photographs, and comparing it to the findings in the quantitative phase which is suggested by Creswell (2013) when employing the concurrent transformative mixed methods design (with triangulation). Creswell (2013) further suggests that integration of the data occurs by merging and connecting the data which the researcher did by discussing both sets of findings separately first, and then comparing and merging them.

### **1.5. Ethical considerations**

As previously stated, ethical approval for the study was granted by the UKZN Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The researcher considered other ethical principles that were relevant to the study such as the anonymity of the academic results in the dissemination of the data that may identify any of the participants in anyway. Further principles that were considered were informed consent, the voluntary nature of participation in the study, the autonomy and rights of the participants to withdraw from the study at any time, and treating participants with respect and dignity. Lastly, the researcher considered the specific ethical principles that are related to the collection and use of photographs as suggested by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001).

#### ***3.5.1. Ethical principles specific to the research***

The researcher ensured the autonomy of the participants in the study by informing them of what the study was about and the objectives of the study (informed consent). As part of the informed consent, the researcher also explained that participation in any phase or stage of the study was voluntary and they had to right to withdraw at any time and there would not be any

negative consequences (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). Informed consent was obtained during a class lecture session for the quantitative phase and during the induction of the Photo voice activity in the qualitative phase.

The researcher treated the participants with respect and dignity when engaging with them during the data production stages by giving them the opportunity to share their experiences of academic achievement, life views and creating the space for a critical awareness of the empowering effects of the Photo voice activity. They were encouraged to share stories and photos that were personally meaningful to them while the researcher showed empathy and sensitivity when necessary.

According to Creswell (2013) anonymity of the research participants needs to be ensured. The researcher ensured participants' identities were anonymised and kept confidential by removing their student numbers and corresponding Psychology 101 marks in the dissemination of the research. However, due to the nature of the Photo voice activity in the qualitative data collection phase, participants were requested to obtain written consent from anyone they wanted to photograph in the form of an acknowledgement and release form which included consenting in writing to having their photos used for research purposes, and to appear in the dissertation and any subsequent research publications (Appendix 13).

The principle of non-malevolence (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012) was followed by the researcher as the probability of harm occurring to the participants was almost non-existent. The principle of beneficence was followed by the researcher by providing the participants with digital cameras for taking their photographs, which they kept after the study. Furthermore, by the participants sharing stories of their exceptional academic achievement and talking about the people and places that inspired their achievement, it was anticipated they would feel empowered and motivated to achieve even higher goals after the interviews. This did occur as a few of the participants remarked during or after the photo-elicitation interviews they had become more aware of their achievement while participating in the study and thanked the researcher for the opportunity to feel empowered by the experience. One participant even suggested that from the experience, he would like to help those students who were not achieving such exceptional academic achievement to feel empowered.

### ***3.5.2. Ethics related to visual methods***

According to Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) Photo voice as a visual data collection method is grounded in the ethical principles that underpin the health education field. These principles are the advancement of social justice, respect for autonomy, the avoidance of harm and the promotion of beneficence. As part of the Photo voice activity participants were requested to take photographs of people, place, processes and structures that had influenced their academic achievement and potential empowerment. To respect people's right to privacy, the participants were made aware of the ethical issues pertaining to taking photographs of people (Appendix 11). Furthermore, participants were requested to obtain written consent from anyone they wanted to photograph in the form of an acknowledgement and release form (Appendix 13).

Following the guidelines of Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) the purpose of the photographs and how they would be used (to answer the research question, for analysis and publication of the dissertation) were incorporated into the forms. Moreover, it was stipulated that the photographs would not be used for profit and their names or any other identifying features would not be appear alongside the photographs. Lastly, it was explained that if the participants consented, the photographs might appear in any publication related to the study. The same information was provided in the acknowledgement and release forms for taking a photograph of a child. Several copies of the acknowledgement and release form for adults and minors were provided to each participant in the induction session.

In light of the fact that the participants owned the photographs, an acknowledgement, and release clause was incorporated into the informed consent form whereby participants consented to their names and photographs being used in the publication of the dissertation (Appendix 10). The researcher noted that although two of the participants (PI 2 & PI 6) consented to the use of their photographs and had signed an acknowledgement and release form for use of their photographs in the publication of the dissertation, a few of the photographs required pixilation as their family members had not given consent for their identities to be revealed in the dissertation.

## **1.6. Quality in mixed methods**

Many researchers in the field of mixed methodologies have designed evaluation techniques for the use of mixed methods to analyse and assess the quality of the method. For the purposes of this research study and within the theoretical assumptions of empowerment and the

transformative paradigm, this research projects aimed to investigate the quality of the methods employed from a holistic contextual perspective (Munro, 2014).

In a chapter on *Assessing the Quality of Mixed Methods Studies* by Curry (2015), he details the work of many experts who have contributed extensively to an in-depth conceptual paradigm for analysing the quality of research methods. Some of them include Bradley, Lincoln and Guba, Miles and Huberman, and Sale and Brazil to name a few. He identified four common quality criteria from their work, for appraisal of both qualitative and quantitative studies. They are veracity, consistency, applicability and neutrality (Curry, 2015). However, Curry emphasises how appraising the rigour of both qualitative and quantitative methods is not sufficient to ensure a high quality paradigm in a mixed methods study. The definition of mixed methods itself assumes “it is more than the sum of its parts where data integration and generation of overarching (meta) insights are essential characteristics” (Curry, 2015, p. 179).

In recognition of O’Cathain’s (2010) work, Curry adapted her Critical Appraisal Framework for the Quality of Mixed Methods Studies to the health sciences and included the following criteria: conceptualisation and justification of the study as mixed methods design, design quality, adherence to respective standards for qualitative and quantitative methods throughout the study, adherence to standards of mixed methods data analysis, quality of analytic integration and quality of interpretation (Curry, 2015).

O’Cathain’s quality evaluation framework is based on six quality domains and each domain incorporating research quality principles and practices. The domains are planning quality, design quality, data planning, interpretive rigour, inference transferability and reporting quality (Bryman, 2007).

The first domain refers the factors pertaining to the quality of the research strategy; the structural elements necessary for the study. They would include a thorough literature review in the development of a conceptual and paradigmatic framework and a sound rationale for using mixed methods with an emphasis on the strength of each method to minimise limitations of the other method (Munro, 2014; Curry, 2015).

The second domain refers to design quality and the transparency of its design. Transparency is related to the depth of its explanation and its relevance to the rationale for using mixed methods. Quality and transparency would be given further relevance with a variety of mixed method typologies (concurrent transformative mixed methods) and reference to specific elements

(Munro, 2014b). The chosen design needs to be well suited to generating quantitative data, qualitative data and integrating data relevant to answering the research question (Curry, 2015, p. 183).

The third domain refers to data quality and its adherence to the standards for qualitative and quantitative methods throughout the study. Data quality would need to explicate the standards adhered to in sampling, data collection and data analysis (Curry, 2015). In the qualitative method, sampling would need to be purposive while quantitative sampling would require random sampling. Data collection in qualitative studies requires flexibility, implying the dialectical nature of both the process and outcomes while data collection periods are not preset. Data collection in quantitative studies is preset and defined. The instrument remains the same once administered and the validity and reliability of the instrument are essential. In terms of analysis, data from qualitative studies is usually analysed from an interpretive perspective where themes are generated. Quantitative analysis involves using various statistical methods such as descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, Exploratory Factor Analysis, One-way Anova, Chi-square and Cronbach's Alpha for reliability. Analysis should further state whether it is exploratory or confirmatory at the outset (Curry, 2015).

The fourth domain relates to adherence to data analysis of mixed methods. Mixed methods often produce divergent or convergent data between methods and divergent data cannot be simply ignored (Curry, 2015). Unanswered questions need to be reported in the findings and given plausible explanations. In Munro's (2014) doctoral study, he refers to 'interpretive rigour' incorporating the principles of inference, inference quality, credibility, and trustworthiness. Tashakkori and Teddlie, (2003) definition of inference is "a researcher's construction of the relationships among people, events and variables as well as his or her construction of respondents' perceptions, behaviours, feelings and how these relate to each other in a coherent and systematic manner" (p.692). He further emphasises the importance in the quality of inference is directly related to the researcher's ability to link stated inferences to relevant data sources with consistent theoretical support for the inferences. Overall, the strength of interpretive rigour is related to the quality of integration across both quantitative and qualitative methods and the researcher's capacity to articulate these findings that show plausibility, credibility and trustworthiness to others (Munro, 2014).

The fifth domain refers to 'inference transferability'. It involves the assessment of the external validity of the quantitative instrument and analysis, and transferability of the qualitative

research findings and its applicability to other contexts. Rich descriptions and a thorough account of the research context are necessary for inference transferability (Munro, 2014)

The sixth domain refers to the qualities that are specific to the study. In light of the study's focus of exploring the notion of empowerment and Spreitzer's empowerment theory, the researcher deemed it necessary to weave empowerment throughout the study and communicate the participants' experiences of empowerment related to their academic achievement. The researcher further tried to communicate this in the qualitative phase of the study with the meanings that were shared by participants in the photo-elicitation interviews and the photographs.

### **1.7. Concluding summation**

Chapter Three has provided a detailed description of the research methodology for the study, which included the historical, contextual, and theoretical methodological considerations. The benefits of mixed methods and the value of mixed methods with a transformative paradigm were also argued. The rationale for the study was reiterated and the research design and process were explicated which included a discussion of the analysis and interpretation stages and at what stages integration occurred. Each phase of data production and analyses was then discussed, as was each sample. The initial steps of the analysis for each phase were discussed and a description of how the data would be integrated across both quantitative and qualitative methods was discussed. Chapter Three concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations that were necessary to the study. Lastly, the researcher discussed the quality controls or decisions that were necessary for both quantitative and qualitative methods. The next section (chapter four, five, and six) will present the findings of the phenomenon under study and discussion of the findings, which will include limitations of the study and the implications for future research.

**Chapter Four: A Quantitative Representation and Explanation of Empowerment and Academic Achievement**

**Chapter Five: A Qualitative Representation and Explanation of the Exploration of Empowerment and Exceptional Academic Achievement**

**Chapter Six: An Integration, Representation, and Discussion of the Data**

## **Chapter Four: A quantitative representation and explanation of empowerment**

### **4.1. Introduction and overview**

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the phenomenon of the exploration of psychological empowerment in higher education institutions is lacking and has predominantly been researched in organisational work settings. Moreover, due to the historical context of education in South Africa with a quantitative focus on academic underachievement, the researcher chose to explore the area of empowerment and its relationship to academic achievement. Chapter Three described the methodology used in this study while Chapter Four will present the quantitative findings of empowerment and academic achievement.

Chapter Four will be discussed in two sections. The first section of the chapter will discuss the descriptive results related to socio-demographic variables of the study that were significant and their significant relation to certain items of the scale. The second section of the chapter will describe the multivariate analyses, which included correlational analysis, exploratory factor analysis (principal components analysis), overall Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency and reliability of the instrument and the proposed constructed of the PEI after adaption. It also includes the analyses of both a linear and nonlinear regression model. This model allowed for a detailed description of the profile of empowerment of Psychology 101 students and its relationship to academic results. The researcher predicted the higher the students' empowerment scores, the higher their academic results for psychology 101.

### **4.2. Phase one findings**

After data cleaning by the researcher, the final sample for phase one of the study comprised of 84 Psychology 101 students. The students were registered for five different degrees, which included BA, BSS, BCom, LLB, and BSc. The majority of the students were first year psychology students with some being registered for second year.

#### 4.2.1. The socio-demographic variables

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	82	17,0	22,9	19,225	1,1175
Psych 101 final result	84	38,0	79,0	57,583	9,1048
Valid N	82				

Table 4-1 Descriptive statistics for whole group

Of the sample of 84 respondents, 2 respondents were excluded from the descriptive analysis as age was missing. Of the remaining 82 respondents, the minimum was 17 years of age while the maximum was 23 years of age. The mean age of the group was  $M=19.0$ ,  $\pm SD=1.1$  years. For the psychology 101 results, all 84 respondents were included with a minimum percentage score of 38.0% and a maximum percentage score of 79.0%. The mean percentage score for psychology 101 final results was  $M=57.6$ ,  $SD=9.1\%$ . Below is the age distribution of respondents (Figure 4-1).

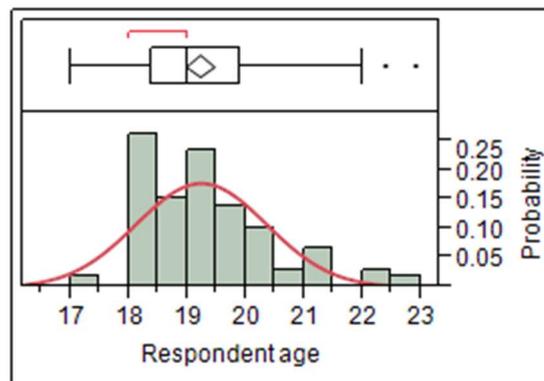


Table 4-2 Respondents' age

All students participating in this sample were from the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The majority (94%) of the students were in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study while only 6% of the students were in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study.

Home language: Most participants spoke isiZulu (64%) followed by English (26%) and isiXhosa (5%) as their home language.

Home language	N	%
isiZulu	54	64.3%
English	22	26.2%
isiXhosa	4	4.8%
SeSotho	2	2.4%
SiSwati	1	1.2%
Other (please specify)	1	1.2%
Total	84	100.0%

*Table 4-3 Home Language*

Gender: The majority of participants were female (74%). The males in the sample numbered 26%.

Gender	N	%
Female	61	74.4%
Male	21	25.6%
Total	82	100.0%

*Table 4-4 Gender distribution*

Race: Africans were the dominant group in this sample, accounting for 76% of participants. Coloureds, Indians and Whites account for 24% of the sample.

Race group	N	%
African	64	76.2%
Coloured	4	4.8%
Indian	7	8.3%
White	9	10.7%
Total	84	100.0%

*Table 4-5 Race distribution*

Qualification: The majority of students were studying for the BSS qualification (63%). Approximately 18% are studying for an LLB qualification and 15% for the BA qualification.

Degree	N	%
BA	12	14.6%
BSS	52	63.4%
BSc	1	1.2%
LLB	15	18.3%
Other (Please specify)	2	2.4%
Total	82	100.0%

Table 4-6. Qualification distribution

#### 4.2.2. Respondents' self-evaluation of PEI constructs

Respondents' self-evaluation for each of the statements on Psychological Empowerment was measured on the following 7-point Likert scale: 1=Very strongly disagree, 2= Strongly disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree and 7= Very strongly agree.

Statement	% Very Strongly Disagree	% Very Disagree	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree	% Strongly Agree	% Very Strongly Agree
<b>COMPETENCE</b>							
1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically	1.2%	0.0%	2.4%	4.8%	35.7%	38.1%	17.9%
9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	33.3%	42.9%	14.3%	1.2%

12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	4.8%	45.2%	27.4%	21.4%
<b>MEANING</b>							
2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%	32.1%	57.1%
5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	34.5%	28.6%	20.2%
10. The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.	0.0%	1.2%	3.6%	20.2%	19.1%	25.0%	31.0%
<b>SELF-DETERMINATION</b>							
3. I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study.	1.2%	0.0%	4.8%	20.2%	34.5%	27.4%	11.9%
7. I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.	1.2%	0.0%	1.2%	6.0%	32.1%	32.1%	27.4%
8. I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	6.0%	34.5%	34.5%	22.6%
<b>IMPACT</b>							
4. I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.	1.2%	0.0%	17.9%	32.1%	35.7%	9.5%	3.6%
6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures	4.8%	6.0%	9.5%	38.1%	28.6%	9.5%	3.6%
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.	3.6%	3.6%	11.9%	40.5%	34.5%	4.8%	1.2%

*Table 4-7. Distribution of respondents' perceptions of psychological empowerment constructs*

From the summary of responses above, the high scores appear in the positive range of the Likert scale. Most respondents have a view that varies from Neutral and Agree to Very Strongly Agree.

Average scores for the constructs of Psychological Empowerment were determined by calculating the mean score for the items that constitute each construct. The following tables and distributions describe the natures of the construct scores.

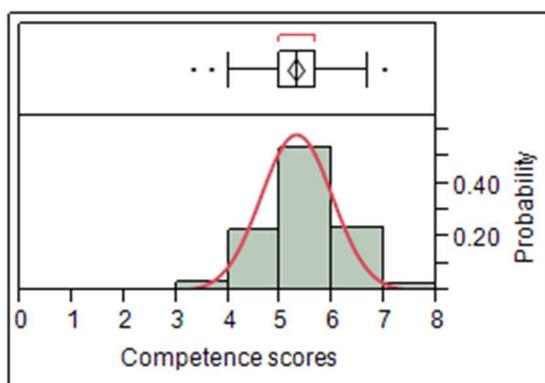
#### 4.2.3. Competence

Measures of centrality (mean and median) are 5.3. This indicates an average view of between Agree and Strongly Agree for respondent’s self-evaluation of Competence. Measures of dispersion (standard deviation and interquartile-range) are .68 and 0.7 respectively.

Approximately 25% of respondents have views that vary between disagree and agree (i.e. between 3.3 and 5.0), 50% have views that vary between agree and strongly agree (5.0 to 5.7) and 25% have views on their competence that vary from strongly agree to very strongly agree (5.7 to 7).

The data is uniformly and symmetrically distributed about the mean.

Figure 4-2 Distribution of competence



Descriptive statistics	
Mean	5.3
Std Dev	0.68
N	84

Table 4-9. Descriptive statistics for competence

Table 4-8 Competence percentile

Percentile	Statistic	Value
100.00%	maximum	7.0
99.50%		7.0
97.50%		6.6
90.00%		6.2
75.00%	quartile	5.7
50.00%	median	5.3
25.00%	quartile	5.0
10.00%		4.3
2.50%		3.7
0.50%		3.3
0.00%	minimum	3.3

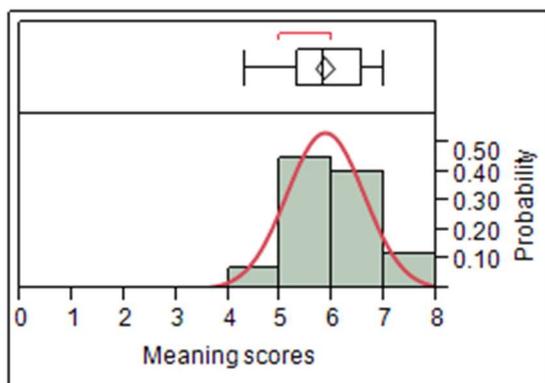
#### 4.2.4. Meaning

Measures of centrality (mean and median) are 5.8. This indicates an average view of almost Strongly Agree for respondent's self-evaluation of Meaning. Measures of dispersion (standard deviation and interquartile-range) are .74 and 1.3 respectively.

Approximately 25% of respondents have views (the level of agreement pertaining to their Meaning) that vary between neutral and agree (i.e. between 4.3 and 5.3), 50% have views that vary between agree and almost very strongly agree (5.0 to 5.7) and 25% have views on Meaning that are approximately Very strongly agree (6.6 to 7).

The data is fairly uniformly and symmetrically distributed about the mean.

Figure 4-3 Distribution of Meaning



Descriptive statistics	
Mean	5.8
Std Dev	0.74
N	84

Table 4-11. Descriptive statistics for meaning

Table 4-10 Meaning percentile

Percentile	Statistic	Value
100.00%	maximum	7.0
99.50%		7.0
97.50%		7.0
90.00%		7.0
75.00%	quartile	6.6
50.00%	Median	5.8
25.00%	quartile	5.3
10.00%		5.0
2.50%		4.4
0.50%		4.3
0.00%	minimum	4.3

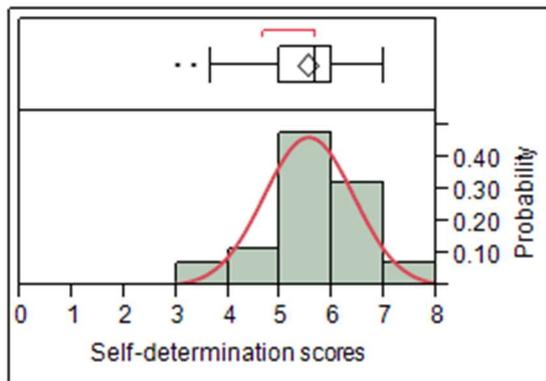
#### 4.2.5. Self-determination

Measures of centrality (mean and median) are 5.5 and 5.7. This indicates an average view of between Agree and Strongly Agree for respondent's self-evaluation of Self-determination. Measures of dispersion (standard deviation and interquartile-range) are .86 and 1.0 respectively.

Approximately 25% of respondents have views (the level of agreement pertaining to Self-determination) that vary between Disagree and Agree (i.e. between 3.0 and 5.0), 50% have views that vary between Agree and Strongly Agree (5.0 to 6.0) and 25% have views on Self-determination that vary between Strongly Agree and Very Strongly Agree (6 to 7).

The data is fairly uniformly and symmetrically distributed about the mean.

Figure 4-4 Distribution of Self-determination



Descriptive statistics	
Mean	5.5
Std Dev	.86
N	84

Table 4-13. Descriptive statistics for self-determination

Table 4-12 Self-determination Percentile

Percentile	Statistic	Value
100.00%	maximum	7.0
99.50%		7.0
97.50%		7.0
90.00%		6.7
75.00%	quartile	6.0
50.00%	median	5.7
25.00%	quartile	5.0
10.00%		4.3
2.50%		3.4
0.50%		3.0
0.00%	minimum	3.0

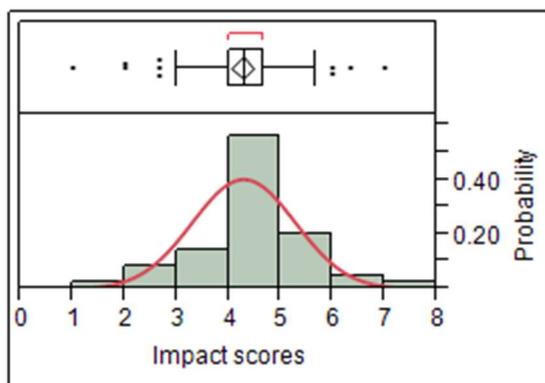
#### 4.2.6. Impact

Measures of centrality (mean and median) are 4.3. This indicates an average view of approximately neutral for respondent's self-evaluation of Impact. Measures of dispersion (standard deviation and interquartile-range) are .99 and 0.7 respectively.

Approximately 25% of respondents have views that vary between Very Strongly Disagree and Neutral (i.e. between 1.0 and 4.0), 50% have views that vary between Neutral and Agree (4.0 to 4.7) and 25% have views on Impact that vary between Agree and Very Strongly Agree (4.7 to 7).

The data is fairly uniformly and symmetrically distributed about the mean.

Figure 4-5. Impact distribution



Descriptive statistics	
Mean	4.3
Std Dev	0.99
N	84

Table 4-15. Descriptive statistics for Impact

Table 4-14 Impact Percentile

Percentile	Statistic	Value
100.00%	maximum	7.0
99.50%		7.0
97.50%		6.3
90.00%		5.3
75.00%	Quartile	4.7
50.00%	Median	4.3
25.00%	Quartile	4.0
10.00%		3.0
2.50%		2.0
0.50%		1.0
0.00%	minimum	1.0

#### 4.2.7. Correlation between the constructs of Psychological Empowerment

The Pearson’s correlation coefficient is a measure of the strength of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. The coefficient (rho or r) varies from -1 to +1 where -1 is perfect negative correlation, and +1 perfect positive correlation. A correlation coefficient of 0 indicates a total lack of any linear relationship between two variables (Howell, 2010).

The following is a rough guide in the interpretation of correlation coefficients:

$r = \pm 1.0$ : Perfect correlation

$r = \pm 0.8$ : Strong correlation

$r = \pm 0.5$ : Medium strength correlation

$r = \pm 0.2$ : Weak correlation and

$r = \pm 0.0$ : No correlation (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)

The following matrix table presents the pairwise correlation between the constructs of Psychological Empowerment:

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Competence</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Self-determination</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Competence	1	** .288	** .611	** .470
Meaning	** .288	1	* .278	* .246
Self determination	** .611	* .278	1	** .395
Impact	** .470	* .246	** .395	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

*Table 4-16 Pairwise correlation between construct of Psychological Empowerment*

The correlation between the constructs of Self-determination and Competence is medium to strong. The strength of the linear relationship between Impact and Competence and Impact and Self-determination is weak to medium. This relationship between Self-determination and Meaning and between Meaning and Competence is rather weak. Although the relationship between Self-determination and Meaning is weak, the correlation is significant with a p-value

<0.05. Furthermore, while the relationship between Meaning and Competence is weak, the correlation is significant with a p-value <.01.

Note that all pairwise linear relationships between the constructs are positive. This implies that an increase in one construct is associated with an increase in a corresponding construct. Furthermore, it tells us that there is a measure of co-variation between the two variables. 3 conditions can exist – a negative relationship, a random relationship (no correlation), or a positive relationship.

#### 4.2.8. The overall Psychological Empowerment view

The overall Psychological Empowerment view is the mean scores of all items on the PEI Likert scale.

Table 4-17. Psychological Empowerment Percentile

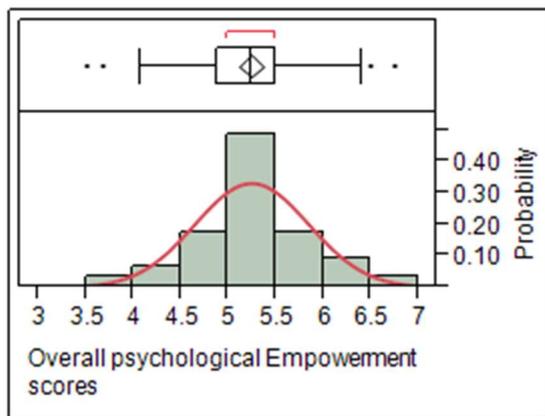


Figure 4-6. Distribution of overall Psychological Empowerment

Percentile	Statistic	Value
100.00%	maximum	6.8
99.50%		6.8
97.50%		6.5
90.00%		6.1
75.00%	quartile	5.5
50.00%	median	5.3
25.00%	quartile	4.9
10.00%		4.5
2.50%		3.7
0.50%		3.5
0.00%	minimum	3.5

Descriptive statistics	
Mean	5.2
Std Dev	0.6
N	84

Table 4-18. Descriptive statistics of psychological Empowerment

Measures of centrality (mean and median) are 5.2 and 5.3. This indicates an average view of Agree and Strongly Agree for respondent’s self-evaluation of Overall Psychological Empowerment. Measures of dispersion (standard deviation and interquartile-range) are 0.6. Approximately 25% of respondents have views that vary between Very Strongly Disagree and

Neutral (i.e. between 4.5 to 4.9), 50% have views that vary between Agree and Strongly Agree (4.9 and 5.5) and 25% have views on Impact that vary between Strongly Agree and Very Strongly Agree (5.5 and 6.8).

The data is uniformly, and symmetrically distributed about the mean.

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Self-determination</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Competence</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Overall Psychological Empowerment</b>
Overall Psychological Empowerment	0.780	0.763	0.786	0.591	1

*Table 4-19. Correlation between the overall Psychological Empowerment construct and the constituting constructs*

It is to be expected that the correlation between Psychological Empowerment and each of the constructs would be high since Psychological Empowerment is calculated from the mean of the constructs. It is noted that Self-determination, Impact and Competence each have a strong correlation with Psychological Empowerment, but that the correlation between Meaning and Psychological Empowerment is only of average strength.

The following table and spider-chart (or quadrant-plot) presents the overall mean scores of the respondents' self-evaluation of Psychological Empowerment. Note that the minimum and maximum scores are also presented.

*Table 4-20. Overall mean scores of respondent's self-evaluation of Psychological Empowerment*

	<b>Self-determination</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Competence</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Mean	5.53	4.28	5.30	5.85
Min	3.00	1.00	3.33	4.33
Max	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00

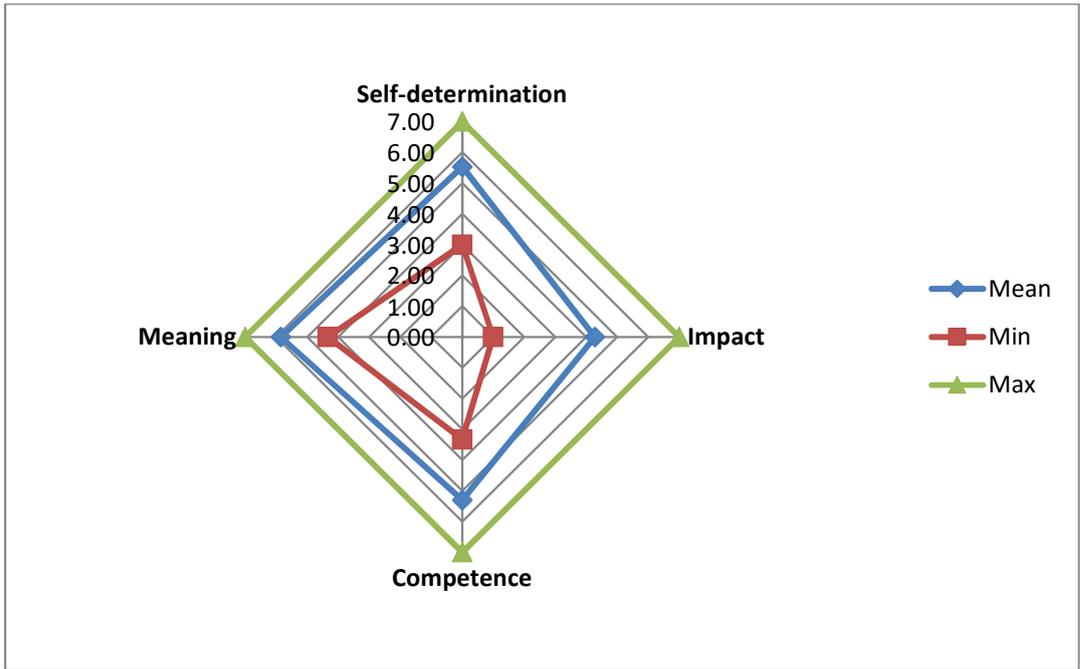
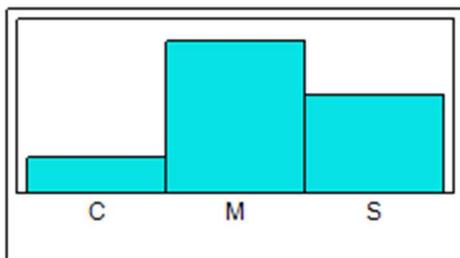


Figure 4-7 Spider-chart displaying dominant Psychological Empowerment constructs

The intention of the plot above is to emphasise the dominant Psychological Empowerment construct(s). Only the construct Impact has a less dominant contribution.

The spider-chart (or quadrant-plot) based upon the mean construct scores does not reveal much about the overall Psychological Empowerment of the participants in this survey. However, inspection of the dominant construct of Psychological Empowerment for each student reveals the following information:

Table 4-21 Percentage of respondent's dominant constructs



Construct	N	%
Competence	10	11.9%
Meaning	45	53.6%
Self-determination	29	34.5%
Total	84	100.0%

Figure 4-7 Bar-chart of dominant constructs

The table shows the number of students that identified each construct as dominant.

The most dominant construct of Psychological Empowerment of participants is Meaning (54%) followed by Self-determination (34%) and then Competence (12%). The construct Impact does not seem to feature favourably in the self-evaluation of respondents.

Meaning or the value students perceive in the role they play in their learning environment in relation to their own value and belief system is the most dominant Psychological Empowerment characteristic.

Self-determination or student’s sense of choice in regulating their actions in their environment is the second most dominant Psychological Empowerment construct.

Competence or student’s belief in their own abilities to perform an assignment well to achieve their goals is third most dominant construct.

Impact or whether or not students believe they can have an influence on the processes and structures in their learning environment is the least dominant.

It is concluded that students do not believe that they can influence (i.e., have an impact on) the processes and structures in their learning environment.

#### 4.2.8.1 Academic achievement

Academic achievement was measured using student results for the module Psychology 101

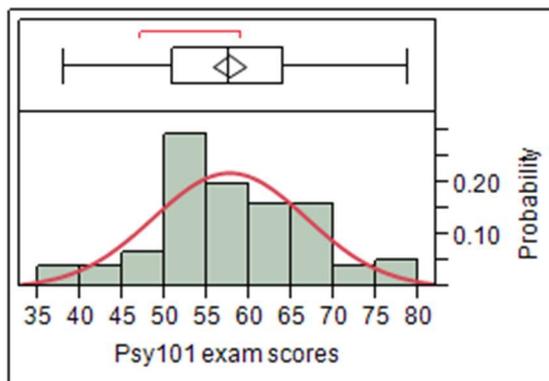


Figure 4-9 Distribution of Psychology 101 Final Results

Table 4-22 Academic achievement Percentile

Percentile	Statistic	Value
100.00%	maximum	79.0
99.50%		79.0
97.50%		76.9
90.00%		68.5
75.00%	quartile	64.0
50.00%	median	57.5
25.00%	quartile	51.0
10.00%		46.5
2.50%		38.1
0.50%		38.0
0.00%	minimum	38.0

Descriptive statistics	
Mean	57.6
Std Dev	9.1
N	84

*Table 4-23 Descriptive statistics for academic achievement*

Psychology 101 scores range from 38% to 79% with a mean score of 57.6% and a median score of 57.5%. Dispersion of scores as measured by the standard deviation is 9.1% and 13% as indicated with the inter-quartile range.

Fifty percent of students scored between 51% and 64%, 25% scored between 38% and 51% and 25% scored between 64% and 79% for the Psychology 101 final results.

The scores are fairly uniformly and symmetrically distributed.

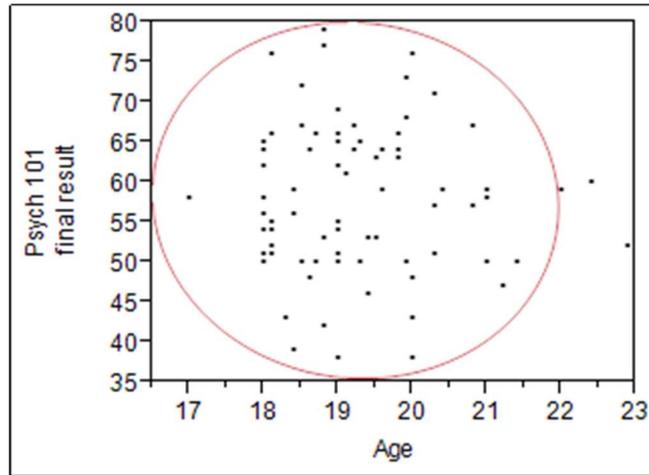
#### ***4.2.8.2. The relationship of socio-demographic characteristics upon academic achievement***

The following socio-demographic characteristics were considered when investigating its influence on academic achievement. (Lack of data in all categories prohibited consideration of all categories of demographic detail)

- Age
- Gender
- Home language (only isiZulu and English speakers)
- Ethnicity (only Africans and non-Africans)
- Qualification (only BSS, LLB and BA considered)

**4.2.8.3. Age vs. Academic achievement (Psychology 101 final results)**

Figure 4-10 below is a scatterplot of age and academic achievement.



*Figure 4-10 Scatterplot of age and academic achievement*

Table 4-24 below presents a correlation table of age and academic achievement.

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Correlation	Sig. Prob	Number
Age	19.2	1.12	-0.03788	0.7354	82
Psych 101 final result	57.8	9.1			

*Table 4-24 Age and academic achievement correlation table*

From the 95% bivariate density ellipse surrounding the data points and the correlation table, it is obvious that there is no correlation between age and academic achievement (Psychology101 final exam results).

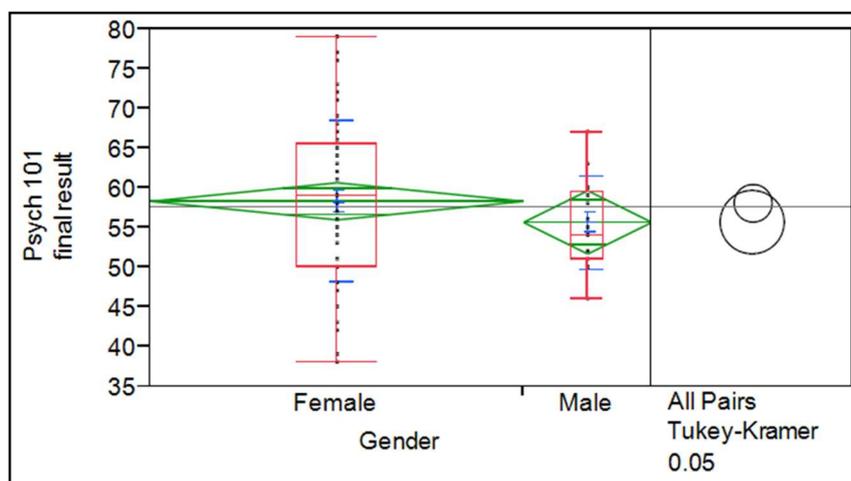
**4.2.8.4. Gender vs. academic achievement**

Table 4-25 below presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each gender group:

Gender	Number	Mean	Std Dev
Female	61	58.4	10.04
Male	21	55.7	5.87

*Table 4-25 Descriptive statistics of each gender*

A One-way Analysis of Variance conducted upon academic achievement for the two gender groups yielded the following results:



*Figure 4-11 One-way Analysis of Psychology 101 final results by Gender*

One-way Anova results (assuming normally distributed data and homogenous variances)<sup>18</sup>, the result of the robust Welch test (which relaxes homogenous variances) and the non-parametric Wilcox test (Mann-Whitney U test) provided no evidence that there is a difference in the academic achievement of females and males.

<sup>18</sup> Instead of testing the criteria for performing parametric tests, the researcher merely ran parametric and non-parametric tests. If the results provide the same results (whether significant or non-significant), the researcher has shown what she set out to do. If the results of the parametric and non-parametric tests are different, then she would have to establish which the appropriate test is. Parametric tests are more accurate than non-parametric tests which do not consider the underlying distribution of the data involved (Personal communication, R. Hall, 2016).

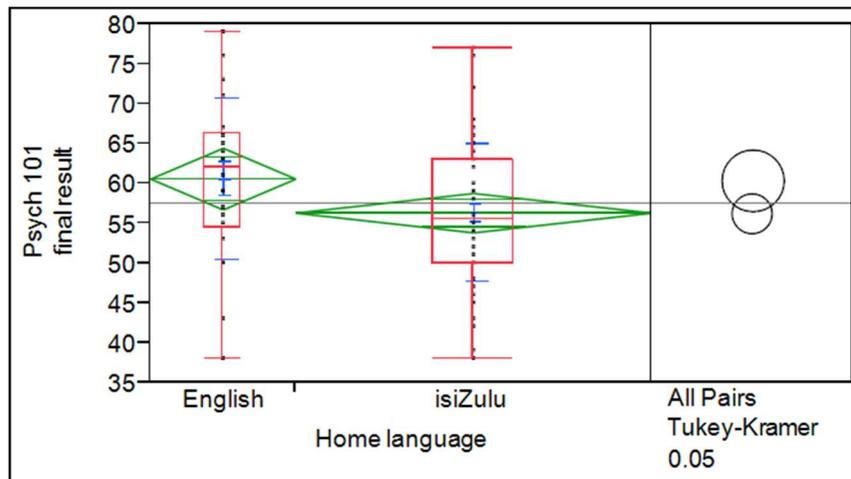
**4.2.8.5. Home language vs. academic achievement**

Table 4-26 below presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each home language group:

Home language	N	Mean	Std Dev
English	22	60.6	10.16
isiZulu	54	56.3	8.66

*Table 4-26 Descriptive statistics for each home language group*

One-way Anova results (assuming normally distributed data and homogenous variances), the result of the robust Welch test (which relaxes homogenous variances) and the non-parametric Wilcox test (Mann-Whitney U test) provided no evidence that there is a difference in the academic achievement of the various home-language speakers.



*Figure 4-12 One-way Analysis of Psychology 101 final results by Home Language*

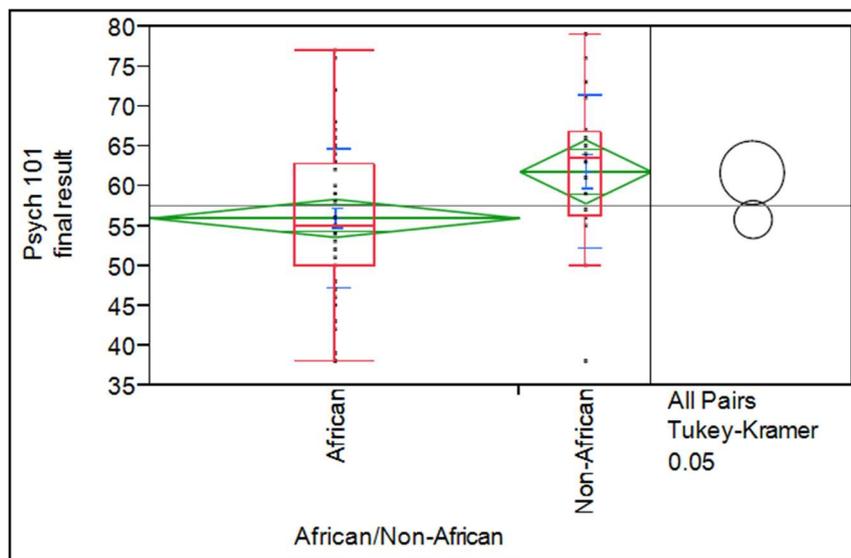
**4.2.8.6. Race vs. Academic Achievement**

Table 4-27 below presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each race group:

Race group	N	Mean	Std Dev
African	56	56.0	8.70
Non-African	20	61.9	9.65

*Table 4-27 Descriptive statistics for each race group*

One-way Anova results (assuming normally distributed data and homogenous variances), the result of the robust Welch test (which relaxes homogenous variances) and the non-parametric Wilcox test (Mann-Whitney U test) provided evidence that there is only a slight difference in the academic achievement of African and non-African students.



*Figure 4-13 One-way Analysis of Psy101 final results by African/Non-African*

#### 4.2.8.7 Qualification vs. academic achievement

Table 4-28 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each qualification category:

Qualification	N	Mean	Std Dev
BA	12	55.5	7.40
BSS	47	55.3	8.88
LLB	12	65.4	6.33

*Table 4-28 Descriptive statistics for each qualification category*

Anova test: F-ratio<sub>2,70</sub>=7.4289, p-value=0.0012

Welch test: F-ratio<sub>2,70</sub>=10.8597, p-value=0.0004

Kruskal-Wallis (Wilcoxon) Chi-square statistic=12.5918, DF=2, p-value=0.0018

Since all three tests provide the same results (without testing distributions), it was concluded that there are significant differences between the academic qualifications of the various qualifications. Table 4-29 below presents significant differences between qualifications:

Qualification	A	B	Mean
LLB	A		65.4
BA		B	55.5
BSS		B	55.3

*Table 4-29 Significant differences between qualifications*

Students following the LLB study programme achieved significantly higher marks for Psy101 than their BA and BSS counterparts.

The effect size calculated according to Cohen with multiple groups (Cohen, 1988, S. 273 ff.)<sup>19</sup> is  $d=1.75$ . This indicates a large practical significance.

To obtain a better understanding of the relationship between psychological empowerment and academic achievement which sought to answer the first research question of the study and to attempt to address the aim of exploring the nature of the relationship between the two variables,

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<sup>19</sup> In case, the groups' means are known from ANOVAs with multiple groups, it is possible to compute the effect sizes  $f$  and  $d$  (Cohen, 1988, S. 273 ff.). Prior to computing the effect size, you have to determine the minimum and maximum mean and to calculate the deviation of means manually (a. compute the differences between the single means, b. square the differences and sum them up, c. divide the sum by the number of means, d. draw the square root) (Lenhard, W. & Lenhard, 2015, para 8).

the researcher ran a number of correlation analyses and a linear regression model in SPSS 23 using the total summed empowerment scores of each respondent and their psychology 101 final results. The results of both the correlation analyses and linear regression failed to show any substantive relationship between the empowerment scores (predictor variable) and psychology 101 final results (outcome variable).

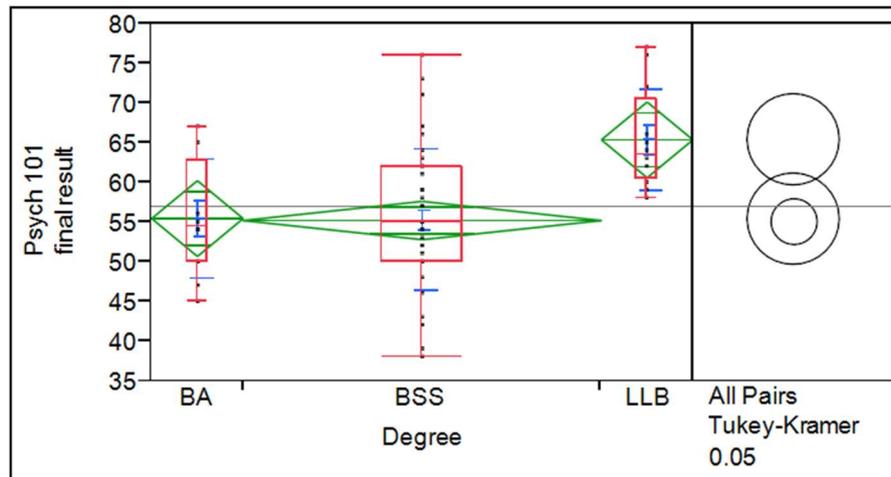


Figure 4-14 One-way Analysis of Psychology 101 Final Results By Qualification

#### 4.2.9. Item analysis (Reliability)

Due to the standardisation of Spreitzer’s PEI Scale (Spreitzer, 1995a) and the instrument’s validation in over fifty studies, including academic studies, the researcher used the constructs (factors) that were initially proposed and calibrated by the test developer which included four dimensions or subscales (competence, meaning, self-determination and impact). In a specific study of empowerment in the higher education context in Malaysia, Ghani and Raja Hussin (2009) verified the use of the PEI scale even further by running an exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis and Varimax rotation with Kaiser’s Normalisation in SPSS 15.0. The test proved that although psychological empowerment consists of three factors, a Scree test and CFA confirmed four dimensions exist on the scale with factor loadings between .76 and .92.

A number of reasons exist for using multi-item scales but the most important being the consideration of measurement error which according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) “[i]s averaged out when individual scores are summed to obtain a total score” (p. 67). Second, single

items cannot distinguish between finer degrees of an attribute. Third, single items lack complexity and scope (McIver & Carmines, 1981). This is highlighted by the fact that single item instruments are considered to be less valid, less accurate and less reliable than multi-item scales. Finally, McIver and Carmines (1981) emphasise “[i]t is very unlikely that a single item can fully represent a complex theoretical concept or any specific attribute for that matter” (p. 15).

The reliability of items in a construct can be measured in several ways. Cronbach’s alpha is a measure of the internal consistency between several items. The following Cronbach’s Alpha values are suggested as a guide by George and Mallery (2003). It has been suggested that an internal consistency score of .8 is a reasonable goal to achieve. However, although a high Cronbach’s Alpha value is a valid measure of internal consistency, it does not mean a scale is unidimensional (McIver & Carmines, 1981). Therefore, the researcher used factor analysis to determine the dimensionality of the scale, which is reported later in this chapter.

The following measures of internal consistency were found for the four PEI factors extracted above:

**4.2.9.1. Competence**

Overall Cronbach’s alpha = 0.5412 (Questionable reliability)

Table 4-30 below provides the alpha values should an item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Column	$\alpha$
1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically	0.5593
9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.	0.4233
12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.	0.3401

*Table 4-30 Competence alpha values*

#### 4.2.9.2. Meaning

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.5560 (Questionable reliability)

The following table provides the alpha values should an item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Column	$\alpha$
2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.	0.4554
5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.	0.3431
10. The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.	0.5913

*Table 4-31 Meaning alpha values*

#### 4.2.9.3. Self-determination

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.7264 (Acceptable reliability)

Table 4-32 below provides the alpha values should an item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Column	$\alpha$
3. I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study.	0.6681
7. I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.	0.5243
8. I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.	0.7056

*Table 4-32 Self-determination alpha values*

#### 4.2.9.4. Impact

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.8048 (Good reliability)

The following table provides the alpha values should an item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Column	$\alpha$
4. I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.	0.8434
6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures	0.6496
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.	0.6724

*Table 4-33 Impact alpha values*

#### 4.2.10.. *The overall reliability of the Psychological Empowerment construct*

The researcher considered the reliability (internal consistency) of the instrument by running an overall Cronbach's Alpha of all 12 (adapted wording for academic empowerment context) items of the PEI. What follows is a report on the overall reliability of the scale:

A reliability analysis on the 12 items of the construct: Psychological Empowerment yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.8111. This may be interpreted as good internal consistency.

The following exclusion table provides a list of Cronbach's alpha values should an item be removed from the construct

Excluded statements	$\alpha$
1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically	0.8020
2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.	0.8093
3. I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study.	0.7900
4. I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.	0.7980
5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.	0.7836
6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures	0.7828
7. I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.	0.7849
8. I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.	0.7990
9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.	0.7967
10. The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.	0.8352
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.	0.7880
12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.	0.7920

*Table 4-34 Cronbach alpha values of items on PEI Scale*

It can be seen that none of the excluded list has a Cronbach's alpha value that exceed the overall value ( $\alpha=0.8111$ ). Therefore, there is no justification to remove any item from the overall Psychological Empowerment construct. Despite the fact that a few of the items had questionable reliability on some of the subscales, the result's indicated that the overall test was reliable in the academic context of this study and the empowerment scale remains internally consistent outside of the context of its initial development and scope of use (organisational context).

#### ***4.2.11. Exploratory Factor Analysis (Principal Components Analysis)***

In a secondary analysis, the researcher ran an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Components Analysis (PCA) as the extraction method and Varimax as the rotation method with the purpose of exploring the underlying factors of the PEI scale after the wording had been changed from the original validated scale that was used in the study. The sample size was 84.

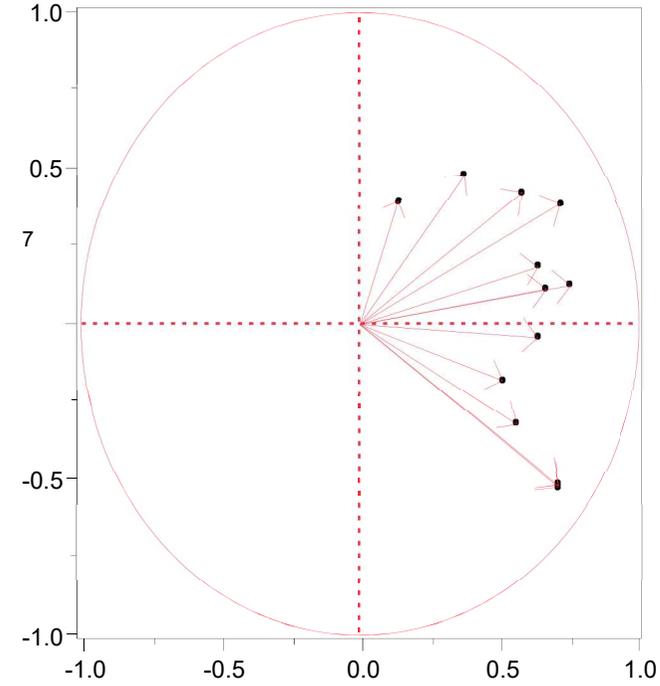
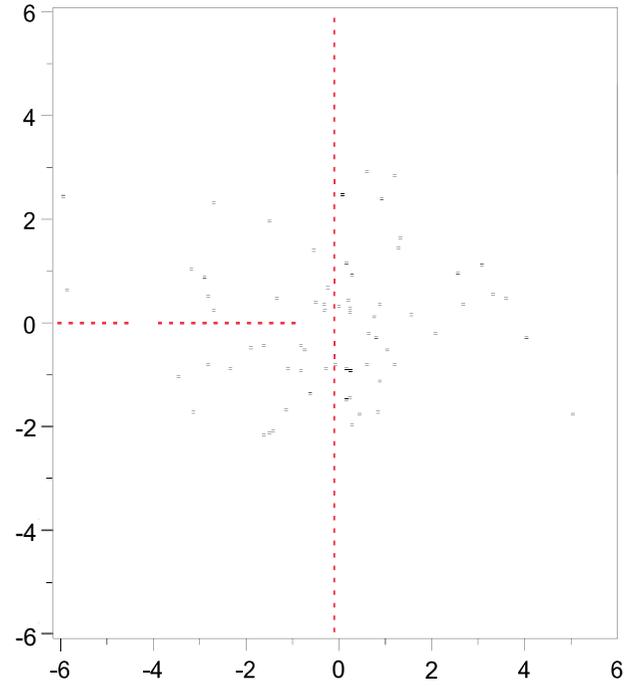
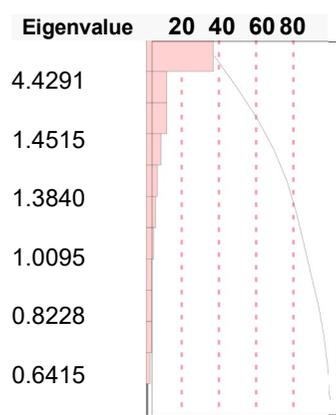
Three factors explain 69% of the variation in the data. One item (item 1) has a relatively low (but acceptable) communality of approx. 0.4

The factor loadings show that Factor 1 consists of 5 items (1, 3, 7, 9, 12), Factor 2 consists of 3 items (4, 6, 11), Factor 3 consists of 3 items (2, 5, 8) and Factor 4 only 1 item (10) This is quite different from what was expected.

Furthermore, note that cross-loadings occur. This may be due to ambiguous interpretation of statement by respondents.

The reliability of the first three factors is provided at the end of this section.

### 4.2.11.1. Principal Components on Correlations



Component 1 (36.9%)

Component 1(36.9%)

Figure 4-15 Summary Plots

- 1 My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.
- 2 I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my coursework.
- 3 I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.
- 4 I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study. 0.0
- 5 I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures
- 6 I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.
- 7 I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.
- 8 I am confident in my ability to succeed academically
- 9 I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.
- 10 Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.
- 11 I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.
- 12 The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.

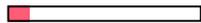
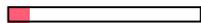
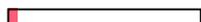
Number	Eigenvalue	Percent	Percent	Cum Percent
1	4.4291	36.909		36.909
2	1.4515	12.096		49.005
3	1.3840	11.533		60.538
4	1.0095	8.413		68.950
5	0.8228	6.856		75.807
6	0.6415	5.345		81.152
7	0.5434	4.528		85.680
8	0.4788	3.990		89.670
9	0.3985	3.321		92.991
10	0.3843	3.203		96.193
11	0.2894	2.412		98.605
12	0.1674	1.395		100.000

Table 4-35 Eigenvalue Percentages

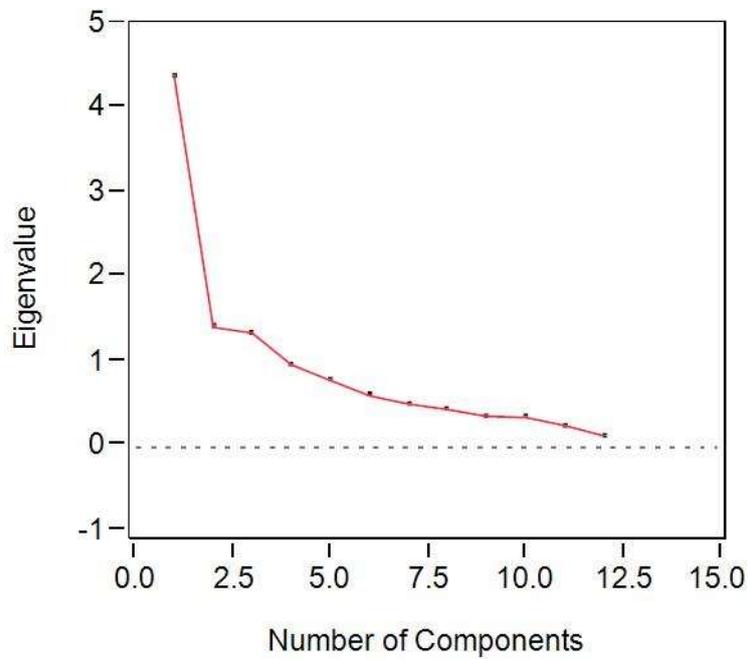


Figure 4-16 Scree Plot

**4.2.11.2. Factor Analysis: Principal Component Analysis using Varimax Rotation**

Statement (Item)	Estimate
1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically	<b>0.3893</b>
2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.	0.7514
3. I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study.	0.7020
4. I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.	0.5945
5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.	0.7253
6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures	0.8234
7. I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.	0.7054
8. I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.	0.6880
9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.	0.5645
10. The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.	0.8678
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.	0.8414
12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.	0.6211

*Table 4-36 Final communality estimates*

Statement	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically	<b>0.4332</b>	<b>0.4042</b>	-0.0730	0.1814
2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.	-0.0751	0.1313	<b>0.8321</b>	0.1899
3. I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study.	<b>0.8230</b>	0.1386	0.0348	0.0647
4. I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.	0.0392	<b>0.7273</b>	0.2511	0.0309
5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.	<b>0.4086</b>	0.2624	<b>0.6681</b>	0.2076
6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures	0.2491	<b>0.8690</b>	0.0659	-0.0427
7. I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.	<b>0.6897</b>	0.2324	0.3465	-0.2359
8. I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.	<b>0.4842</b>	-0.0166	<b>0.6238</b>	-0.2532
9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.	<b>0.6047</b>	0.2540	0.1749	-0.3221
10. The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.	0.0570	0.0181	0.1787	<b>0.9123</b>
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.	0.2407	<b>0.8824</b>	0.0636	-0.0265
12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.	<b>0.7343</b>	0.1427	0.1001	0.2270

*Table 4-37 Rotated Factor Loading*

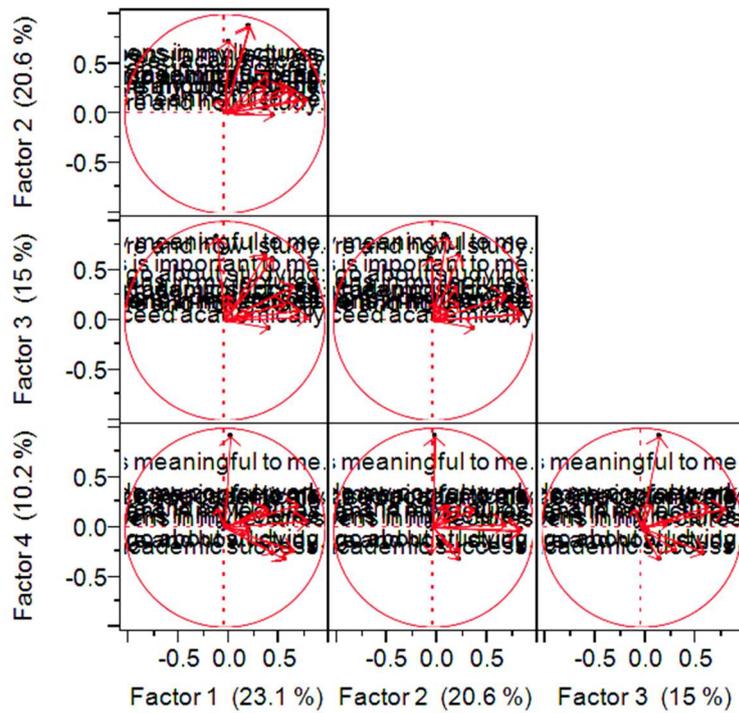


Figure 4-17 Factor Loading Plot

#### 4.2.11.3. Item analysis of the three extracted factors (Reliability)

The reliability of items in a construct may be measured in several ways. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of the internal consistency between several items.

This value varies from 0 to 1.0, where

$\alpha: \Rightarrow 0.9$  is excellent internal consistency,

$\alpha: 0.8 - 0.9$  Good internal consistency

$\alpha: 0.7 - 0.8$  Acceptable internal consistency

$\alpha: 0.6 - 0.7$  Questionable internal consistency

$\alpha: < 0.6$  Unacceptable internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003)

The following measures of internal consistency were found for the factors extracted above:

Factor 1

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.7489 (Acceptable internal consistency)

The following table provides the alpha values should an item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Col	$\alpha$
1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically	0.7604
3. I have significant autonomy in determining what, when, where and how I study.	0.671
7. I can decide on what, when, where and how I go about studying.	0.6651
9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.	0.714
12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.	0.7001

*Table 4-38 Overall Cronbach's Alpha for Factor 1*

It is noted that removal of item 1 increases the overall Alpha from 0.7489 to 0.7604, an increase of approx. 1.5%, which is not big enough to justify its exclusion.

Factor 2

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.8048 (Good internal consistency)

The following table provides the alpha values should an item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Col	$\alpha$
4. I have a large impact on what happens in my lectures.	0.8434
6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my lectures	0.6496
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my lectures.	0.6724

*Table 4-39 Overall Cronbach's Alpha for Factor 2*

Removal of item 4 will increase the alpha value to 0.8434 – an increase of 4.8%. This increase certainly warrants the exclusion of item 4 from this factor. Usually an increase of 2 – 3 percentage points is a cut-off point (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Factor 3

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.6445 (Questionable reliability)

The following table provides the alpha values should any item be removed from the factor:

Excluded Col	$\alpha$
2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.	0.6017
5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.	0.4101
8. I have considerable independence and freedom in what, when, where and how I study.	0.5913

*Table 4-40 Overall Cronbach's Alpha for Factor 3*

Although four factors emerged, the fourth factor had only one item (item 10) load on it with an Eigen value just above one. Furthermore, the Scree test found only three factors with Eigen values above one therefore, the fourth component was discarded. Finally, a Cronbach's Alpha test was performed to test the internal consistency and reliability of each factor on the adapted scale. The researcher questioned whether the small sample size influenced the findings.

### **4.3. Concluding summation**

In summary, the first question of the study, which sought to explore the relationship between psychological empowerment and high academic achievement, was addressed through the administration of descriptive statistics and correlation analyses. The analyses functioned to determine the nature of the relationship between psychological empowerment and academic achievement. Moreover, it determined the nature of the relationship between psychological empowerment and various socio-demographic variables. Furthermore, a Cronbach's Alpha test was run which reported the internal consistency of the instrument using the proposed constructs. This test functioned to establish the overall reliability and validity of the 12 items of the PEI scale after the wording had been adapted for the academic context of this study.

The researcher made use of the PEI scale not only due to its standardisation and validation in numerous studies (Beauvais et al., 2014; Ghani & Raja Hussin, 2009; Spreitzer, 1995a), but because it represented a multi-item summated scale (subscales) which Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), McIver and Carmines (1981), and Spector (1992) recommended for measuring psychological attributes. Finally, in a secondary analysis, an exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis as the extraction method and Varimax rotation was performed to explore the number of factors (constructs) that might emerge from the PEI scale with adapted wording.

Without the integration of the qualitative findings to enhance the transformative paradigm and understanding empowerment and its relation to academic achievement, the researcher found it difficult to articulate whether the respondents' understanding of psychological empowerment was not understood as their understanding of it may not have had the same cultural significance as its Western meaning. Although the findings from the two different phases of the study were not necessarily comparable due to issues with the study's design, the qualitative findings gave a richer description and understanding of empowerment and its relation to exceptional academic achievement by describing the multiple systems of support the participants spoke about. As the reader will note the description of this in the discussion section of the study, the

lack of a correlation between respondents' final Psychology 101 results and psychological empowerment was problematic in explicating whether transformation had taken place at this level. Had the respondents' final results correlated to empowerment scores it would have indicated a positive influence that academic achievement had on psychological empowerment.

## **Chapter Five: A Qualitative Exploration of Empowerment and Exceptional Academic Achievement**

### **5.1. Introduction and overview**

Chapter Five is an account of participants<sup>20</sup> experiences of empowerment related to their exceptional academic achievement. The Photo voice activity the participants engaged in was set in the context of the historical places, structures, processes, and people that have influenced and inspired them. Chapter Five presents data in the form of photographs as part of the Photo voice activity and the subsequent photo-elicitation interviews with six participants who were involved in both stages of the qualitative phase of the study. Each participant's account of the Photo voice activity, the meaning<sup>21</sup> they gave to the photographs and their importance in relation to their academic achievement and empowerment will be discussed individually and organised around three main themes that arose from the interviews. The first theme has been identified as "empowered to achieve," the second being "holistic support<sup>22</sup>" and the third being "pushing boundaries." Within each of these themes, there are sub-themes related to the behaviours, processes, and structures that empowered the participants' exceptional academic achievement, and the various support systems that were fundamental in their exceptional academic achievement. Furthermore, the last theme "pushing boundaries" is related to moving beyond physical boundaries to emotional and spiritual and intellectual boundaries. The descriptions in Chapter Five furthermore relate to question two of the study.

All six participants are from Pietermaritzburg Campus of UKZN. Each participant description drew on the data from the individual photo-elicitation interviews and a selection of the

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<sup>20</sup> In this chapter, 'participant' refers to students from the qualitative sample who was invited to participate in the Photo voice activity and data collection phase.

<sup>21</sup> In the qualitative phase of the study, 'meaning' refers to the significant relevance each participant gave to either people (i.e. role models), buildings and structures, spiritual symbols (i.e. The Bible, The Secret), physical exercise and recreational activities that supported their exceptional academic achievement.

<sup>22</sup> In the context of this study, the theme of holistic support refers to an all-encompassing view of the support systems each participant had access to that supported them to excel academically, e.g. Academic, physical, social, spiritual, psychological and family support systems.

photographs. All six participants signed informed consent forms consenting to their identities being revealed in this study<sup>23</sup>.

## **5.2. Vimbayi (School of Applied Human Sciences)**

Vimbayi was a 23-year-old third year Bachelor of Social Science degree student. After not getting into medical school due to choosing the incorrect A-level<sup>24</sup> subjects in her home country of Malawi, Vimbayi decided to take a gap year at an outdoor adventure place in South Africa (specifically the Eastern Cape). She commenced her higher education studies a year later in 2013.

### **5.2.1. Empowered to achieve – inspirational role model**

Early in the photo-elicitation interview, Vimbayi talked about the strong influence her aunt had in supporting her and influencing her academic achievements. In emphasizing how important her aunt's support was, Vimbayi commented:

She was the one person I feel believed in me the most when I had quit completely...so she aside from applying she would follow up she came to the university she would literally call and ask where the processing is and when I was accepted she called me crying on the phone. It was really sweet (Vimbayi, PI 2, 26)<sup>25</sup>.

The comments above affirms her aunt's belief in her and her support of her academic journey and her presentation of her aunt for discussion in the photo-elicitation interview (see Photograph 5-1).

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<sup>23</sup> Although it is unusual to reveal participants' identities in a study, the researcher believed that sharing the participants' personal stories of exceptional academic achievement and empowerment would help the reader and the necessary people in higher education contexts to better understand the participants' journey to exceptional academic achievement. It could further help education policy makers to revise the necessary educational changes to bring about transformation in higher education.

<sup>24</sup> A-level is a secondary school qualification that is regulated by Cambridge International Examinations and is taken by many school leavers in other African countries that were colonised by the British (Cambridge International Examinations, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> PI refers to photo-elicitation interview. The photo-elicitation interviews were conducted with six participants who completed the Photo voice activity for the study, and were numbered 1-6 in the order they were conducted.



*Photograph 5-1 An inspiration (Vimbayi, B1)*

Vimbayi further reiterated the importance she places on her aunt being an inspirational role model in her achievement in the following comments:

She's been a great source of encouragement because she started her undergrad I think ten years ago...she got through her undergrad, she got through her honours her masters, and she's just finished her PhD...and she's a full-time mother and she's got three kids and she's also a wife and she's always worked from home and I've been to her house many times and I'll find everyday she'll cook everyday she'll clean she'll make sure everyone's fed(...)she'll do her assignments, so she's I don't know she's quite an inspiration." (Vimbayi, PI 2, 32)

Vimbayi's aunt was instrumental in her entrance into the University of KwaZulu-Natal after all the challenges she had faced in not having been accepted into medical school because she had not completed the correct subjects for A-level, a resulting low self-esteem and the gap year she spent in Alicedale in the Eastern Cape.

Vimbayi's low self-esteem which had resulted from not getting into medical school because of the incorrect subjects she taken at high school and not having any direction for her future, were reflected in her comments below:

I had tried to get into med school which took up two years of my life and I had never had an option B I tried to get into university back home in Malawi and when that didn't work I was at home basically...(Vimbayi, PI 2, 20).

And

And this happened cause I finished high school in 2010 so in 2011 I rewrote some of my subjects and the rest of 2011 I was at home so at the end of 2011 my parents decided to get me into this program so I applied and they took me and at this point I had very low self-esteem and this was also before varsity so I had no idea what I was going to do with my life (Vimbayi, PI 2,53).

Vimbayi identified the place where she was enrolled in the gap year program as a place “...called Alicedale in the Eastern Cape” (Vimbayi, PI 2, 90).

Vimbayi chose to discuss the photograph of her aunt first during our interview, and this possibly reinforces the important influence she had on Vimbayi in her exceptional academic achievement. Vimbayi’s use of the words “motivates me”, “encouragement”, “believes in me the most” and “she’s quite an inspiration”, further suggests the psychological and emotional support her aunt gave to her. Her aunt’s constant encouragement and potentially her own experience of feeling empowered by her academic achievements (obtaining an undergraduate, honours, masters and a PhD while being a wife and mother), further supported the researcher’s induced sub-themes of inspirational role model and educational support.

### ***5.2.2. Empowered to achieve – academic role models and community acceptance***

A bit further into the photo-elicitation interview, the researcher asks Vimbayi to tell her about her experiences at university and who were some of the people that influenced her academic achievement at university. The theme of ‘empowered to achieve’ with the sub-theme of ‘academic role models’ is reflected in the conversation below:

Terry: Tell me a bit more about being in the university now that you’ve been here for three years...and a bit about some of the experiences and people who’ve influenced you and inspired you in your academic achievement.

Vimbayi: I’ll look for this one friend Thando...in first year I used to stay with I stayed in Res with three other girls and two of them were in third year year already and they were both very hard working students.

Terry: Wow

Vimbayi: And they told me about Golden Key<sup>26</sup>...Right so they would always talk about high academic achievers and getting into the Golden Key program and I was the sort of person...every time I did well in a test I was like oh my gosh I passed a test and I passed it really well. (Vimbayi, PI 2, 117)

Vimbayi’s comments of ‘very hard working students’, ‘high academic achievers’, ‘Golden Key Program’ (see Photograph 5-2) and ‘I passed really well’ suggests an experience of feeling empowered to achieve exceptional academic achievement. The comments below reinforce her

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<sup>26</sup> Golden Key is an academic honour that is awarded to top achievers whose marks are in the top 15% of each faculty in South African universities (Golden Key International Honour Society, 2010).

sense of empowerment and the support she received from her friend that influenced her exceptional academic achievement:

She'd sit with me the whole night and she constantly encouraged me and it became a stepping stone in rebuilding my confidence...so my friend Thando has been key in that getting into Golden Key was also another big stepping stone and at the end of last last year. (Vimbayi, PI 2, 146)

The words 'constantly encouraged' and 'became a stepping stone' that are used by Vimbayi in the highlighted text above, further supports Vimbayi feeling empowered to exceptional academic achievement. Without the encouragement and support from Thando to rebuild her confidence, she could not have felt empowered to achieve exceptional academic levels.



*Photograph 5-2 Golden Key (Vimbayi, B2)*

“And its speaking for itself cause I mean I was invited into Golden Key and the fact that I was accepted and I’m in the executive now it’s like I think those are my highlights so far” (Vimbayi, PI 2, 176).

### ***5.2.3. Holistic support – family and educational support***

Later in the photo-elicitation interview, Vimbayi talked about her mother (see Photograph 5-3) as a “pillar of support” from a very young age and through her entire school career. Referring to her mother as a “pillar of support” suggests a symbolic reflection of the strength and support her mother was to her during this time. This is reflected in her comment “...and obviously she’s been a pillar during my low moments and my high moments and I think she’s someone who constantly believed that I could get through...” (Vimbayi, PI 2, 213)



*Photograph 5-3 My Pillar (Vimbayi, B3)*

This is further reinforced in Vimbayi's comment:

So I think that's one thing I truly appreciate about my mom is every single step of the way she was there for myself for my brother and for my sister because I think she only started working I think when my little sister had started high school. (Vimbayi, PI 2, 227)

Vimbayi's mention of the support her mother showed not only to herself but also to her siblings, suggests the sacrifice she was willing to make to support her children's academic careers and the profound influence it played in Vimbayi's exceptional academic achievement.

#### ***5.2.4. Holistic support – spiritual influence***

Across all the photo-elicitation interviews, a strong theme of spiritual guidance and Christian faith were evident. At the end of the interview when the researcher asked Vimbayi if she had anything she would like to add, Vimbayi commented on the strong Christian influence in her upbringing and the significant influence it had on her exceptional academic achievement (see Photograph 5-4) below:

Ja, I'd say my faith I have a picture of a Bible but I wasn't able to send it it's on my phone though and I have a very I think my upbringing has been very Christian but I think for me the highlight of my faith has always shown most during my academics. (Vimbayi, PI 2, 473)



*Photograph 5-4 My faith and God have carried me (Vimbayi, B3)*

This is further reinforced by her comment “I mean of course I studied and stuff but like I can never say that I did all the work. I think my faith and God’s presence has always helped me a lot. He’s carried me.” (Vimbayi, PI 2) These comments suggest she has attributed her exceptional academic achievement to her faith and God’s presence in her life.

#### ***5.2.5. Pushing boundaries - holistic development***

At a point of very low self-esteem and an unknown future, which Vimbayi reflected on after not being accepted into medical school, she talked about a gap year program her parents enrolled her in and how her physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual boundaries were tested beyond her comfort.

So at the end of 2011 my parents decided to get me into this program. So I applied and they took me and at this point I had very low self-esteem...and it was one of those programs that worked on all areas of your life so your spiritual, your mental...the majority was physical. It was like boot camp for an entire year (Vimbayi, PI 2, 54).

The physically demanding nature of the year and the mental strength that was required to overcome her low self-esteem was reflected in the following extract from the interview:

Vimbayi: So we did a lot of extreme outdoor activities. I think the most demanding was probably our race called the longest day, which is a 100km race.

Terry: Wow

Vimbayi: Which we were supposed to complete within twelve hours.

Terry: A hundred kilometres?

Vimbayi: A hundred kilometres, which was a 12km kayak I think, a 72km cycle and the rest was a run. (Vimbayi, PI 2, 96)

The training required for such a race revealed the goal-directed (also a sub-theme) behaviour that was necessary to her feeling confident and empowered to achieve again. She reinforced the holistic nature of the program and the reward at the end of the year, which suggested the physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges she had to overcome, and how her boundaries were tested beyond her level of comfort:

[C]ause I think before I had quit completely [Vimbayi is referring to having given up on life and her academic aspirations at some point during 2011] and then at the end of the year we were given I think they picked the best overall student and the fittest girl and then they did the same for the guys and when they called my name for the best overall student I broke down. (Vimbayi, PI 2, 77)



*Photograph 5-5 Best overall student (Vimbayi, B4)*

The final evidence the researcher identified that supports and reinforces the theme of ‘pushing boundaries’ is Vimbayi’s comment about knowing the direction of her future. “So for me I think why this picture (Photograph5-5) is so important is because it was a big stepping stone

in helping me to believe in myself again, and this place was also key in directing me towards psychology”<sup>27</sup> (Vimbayi, PI 2, 84).

In conclusion, Vimbayi displayed a strong sense of being empowered by the academic opportunities and support she had received throughout her life. However, throughout her interview it was evident that she had struggled to overcome some of the academic obstacles that had been put in her path to her success when her self-esteem was at a low point (the end of 2011). It was however, her experience of the gap year program that had ‘pushed her physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual boundaries’ and an award for ‘best overall female student’ that contributed to her success today. Furthermore, Vimbayi strongly positioned her success to the inspiration and support she had received from her family, friends, academic community, and the spiritual guidance she had received. Her acknowledgement of God as a central attributing factor to her success and as “carrying her” had provided the encouragement she needed to excel and reach exceptional academic achievement.

An explanation of each participant’s Christian faith and or other spiritual belief systems attributed to their empowerment will be expanded on in the discussion section in Chapter Six.

### **5.3. Tsitsi (School of Applied Human Sciences)**

Tsitsi was a 31-year-old third year Bachelor of Social Science degree (General Studies) student from Zimbabwe. Prior to registering for this degree, she had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Zimbabwe in 2009. Her husband is a Mathematics lecturer at UKZN and this is how she came to study at the university. She commenced her degree in 2013 and hoped to finish at the end of 2015.

#### ***5.3.1. Empowered to achieve – academic role models***

Early in the photo-elicitation interviews, Tsitsi spoke about how at first the Photo voice activity was a struggle for her as she was reserved and not quite sure of how to proceed. However, she then went on to comment that once she began the process of taking the photographs, she realised how people, structures and places had inspired her to achieve. This is reflected in her comment below:

I really didn’t know how like the external environment influenced my achievement. I didn’t take it seriously. But when I started doing it, then I could see there’s a lot that I

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<sup>27</sup> Vimbayi chose Psychology as a major subject in her undergraduate Social Sciences degree having been positively influenced by her experience in in gap year program to help others and be a role model.

get from the people around me, from things around me that inspires me to achieve.  
(Tsisti, PI 1, 26)

This suggests that she was unaware of the roots of her inspiration until she started doing the Photo voice activity. It is possible that Tsisti became conscientised to the various people and structures that have empowered her academically; conscientisation being a key principle of Freire's philosophy of education (Freire, 2005b).

An academic inspiration and a specific role model she talked about who was an important influence in her life was that of her mother. There was a definite tone of sadness around her mother as she mentioned her mother had passed away in 2001. Tsitsi's sadness at her mother's passing away suggests the positive relationship she had with her and the inspiration she received from her mother as a role model. This is reflected in her comment "Uh only that though she is not here with me, but she's really a role model to me" (Tsitsi, PI 1, 50). Her mother's positive influence on her exceptional academic achievement is further supported by the following conversation with the researcher:

Tsitsi: She was a nurse but you know she started from a very humble background and she even wrote her grade 7 exams when she had me.

Terry: Wow

Tsisti: So looking at that, it inspires me to do more. If she could do that and passed then I can also do that and went on to do her nursing certificate and she ended up a nurse.

Terry: Wow, that's an amazing achievement.

Tsitsi: Ja, it is.

Terry: And tell me a little bit more about when you were growing up with your mother, were there ways in which, um she influenced you or in other ways?

Tsitsi: Ja, she was good in maths, so all my maths homework I was covered. I could go home and she would help me with my maths and she, she really encouraged us to do well, to do even better than her, so... (Tsitsi, PI 1, 34)



*Photograph 5-6 My role model (Tsitsi, A1)*

### **5.3.2. Empowered to achieve – academic pride**

During the photo-elicitation interview, a very strong theme of academic achievement and pride in her achievements was evident throughout. Tsitsi spoke a lot about the humble beginnings of her mother, her father, and herself. She spoke about her journey of not knowing where the future would take her when discussing a family photograph, but then going on to speak about knowing she had to do something which suggests a sense of purpose and direction; a goal. This is reflected in her comments below:

Ja, so looking where I'm coming from and where I am now, so amazing... You know, this photograph (see Photograph 5-7) just reminds me, where I came from, where I, cause here I was in grade 5 and now I'm doing a university degree. From then the future was like, it wasn't clear where I was going, where I was coming from, but now looking at this photo was like seeing I came a long way and all these people they've done something with their lives. (Tsitsi, PI 1, 132)



*Photograph 5-7 Where I came from (Tsitsi, A2)*

This suggests a theme of pride; pride related to her exceptional academic achievements and the journey she had to travel to arrive at this point. She had “...come a long way” (Tsitsi, PI 1, 136). The comment “...and now I’m doing a university degree” (Tsitsi, PI 1, 134), suggests the point she is at now [completing a university degree] has helped give her direction and a purpose for the future. Furthermore, it reinforces her feeling empowered by her academic achievements and being proud of those achievements.

### ***5.3.3. Holistic support – spiritual influence***

As was evident in Vimbayi’s interview and all the participants’ interviews, the theme of a strong spiritual influence rooted in their Christian faith and God was also evident in Tsitsi’s interview, especially in one of the photograph’s (see Photograph 5-8) she chose to discuss. She spoke about how important God was to her academic achievements and life goals and she had to put him first in all things and in prayer. She also went on to talk about the support she finds in her church community and the integral part they plays in her life. This theme of a strong faith is evident in the following comments:

(Laughing) Ah this is my church, 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventist Church, every Saturday I go to church, ja. And for me fellowship is an important part of my life. Everything I do, I put God first, so I decided to take a symbol of my church [photograph was not included here] to show my faith and – cause um, all my achievement I won’t be able to do this if it wasn’t for God. (Tsitsi, PI 1, 223)

In another comment, “In everything that I do, I pray first, ja.” and

Gina and she is my prayer partner...Ah, we pray together for our studies, for our families, for everything that goes in our lives, so when it's um towards exam times we do fast and we do pray together cause she's also a student so..." (Tsitsi, PI 1, 241)

Tsitsi's comment above shows a strong commitment to her Christian faith and the support she seeks from her spiritual community.



*Photograph 5-8 My daily devotion (Tsitsi, A3)*

#### **5.3.4. Holistic support – a father figure**

During the photo-elicitation interview Tsitsi presented a photograph of her husband who she had said was a very important person in her life and an inspiration in all facets of her life (spiritually, academically, and physically). This is supported in her comments that follow:

When you're growing up you either want to be a teacher, you want to be a nurse, all those kinds of, but him, when I finished my O levels, he made it clear that there are other avenues that I can go through and he's like a father to me. He has achieved so much in life and I just feel I want to be like him, I want to support him, cause like now he's the only, he's only bread winner in the family and I just feel I have to do more so that I can help him. (Tsitsi, PI 1, 253)

It is interesting to note that, in addition to the role he plays as her husband, Tsitsi also presents her husband as a father figure and highlights her physical and emotional dependency on him. It further suggests the spiritual influence Christianity puts on submission of the wife to her husband (Eph 5:22 New International Version). Tsitsi's comments suggest her need to support him as the only breadwinner and how she admires his achievements. It further suggests she

sees him as an inspiring role model. Her husband did not want a photograph of himself published so she provided a photograph of his academic gown, which is seen below (see Photograph 5-9).



*Photograph 5-9 A father figure (Tsitsi, A4)*

In summary, Tsitsi's description has highlighted a strong sense of achievement that was rooted in the past achievements of her family and the inspirational role they had played in her exceptional academic achievement. The pride she felt for her family members who had had a humble educational background and the way they had influenced her was important to the path she had taken to get to her success today. She ascribed much of her success to her religious beliefs and devotion to her faith and God. Furthermore, her husband's achievements were key to the inspiration she had derived from him and was important to her exceptional academic achievement today as well as her orientation of success for the future.

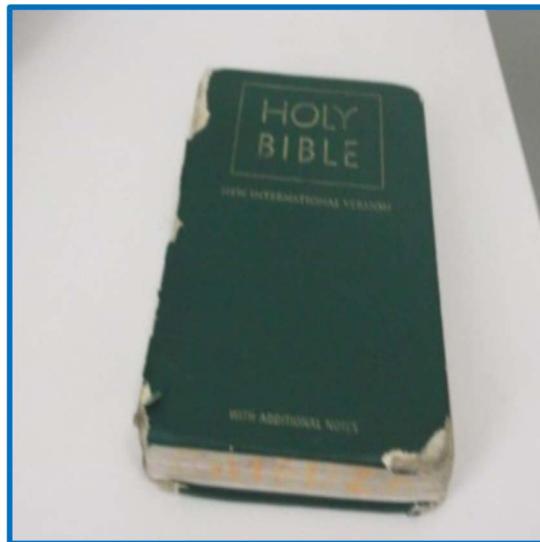
#### **5.4. Kerry-Anne (College of Humanities)**

Kerry-Anne was a 22-year-old second year Bachelor of Arts degree student from Zimbabwe. Like most Zimbabwean high school students (<http://www.cie.org.uk/i-want-to/find-a-cambridge-school>), she completed her A-levels in 2011. Her grandmother who lives and works in the United Kingdom is paying for her university fees. She started her degree in 2014.

#### ***5.4.1. Empowered to achieve – spiritual influence: The word of God is the most integral part of my studies***

Kerry-Anne’s very first photograph that she presented to be discussed [in line 23 of the transcription from the PI] was of her bible. The meaning it has for her was highlighted when she told the researcher how long she had owned it for (i.e., since she was 14 years old). She gave further significance to it when she told the researcher her mother had given it to her, she described it as ‘tattered’ and it means so much to her (see Photograph 5-10). This is reflected in her comments below:

Okay the first photograph is of my bible. I actually got this bible when I was 14; my mom got it for me. I still have it, I am still keeping it. Even though you can see how it is tattered, I told myself I am not going to lose it, I am going to keep it because it means so much. The reason I took the bible is the word of God is the most integral part of my studies. I cannot do anything before I pray. Before I study, I pray. Before I go for a lecture, I pray. Before I do anything, it is prayer and for me, the Bible is the bread for me. I live through the word of God. And basically, it is what I read that strengthens me. So for me, the Bible really strengthens me, that is why I took a bible. (Kerry-Anne, PI 5, 23)



*Photograph 5-10 The word of God (Kerry-Anne, E1)*

Her comments above further reflect how integral her Christian faith, the Bible, and prayer are to her studies and her life. It suggests a strong belief that the word of God is what sustains her and gives her spiritual sustenance and nourishment. She talks about it being like “bread for me”. Kerry-Anne’s comments related to spiritual sustenance also suggests she attributes her exceptional academic achievement to the word of God. Towards the end of the interview, she

reinforces the support she finds in her Christian community and the shared beliefs and goals she has with some of the people from her church. This is seen in the following comments:

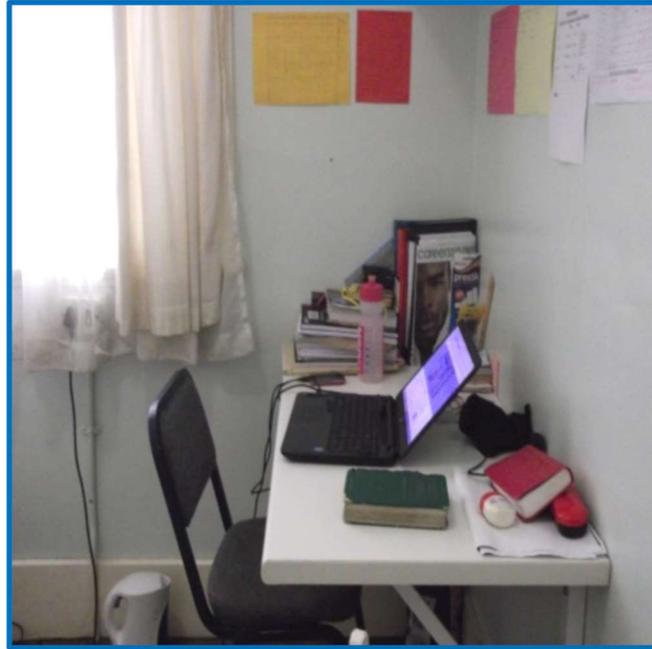
Definitely it has to be my faith, my Christian faith and my church. My church, the pastor, the girls I am with at church. The girls that surround me, they are always working hard. They always telling me K, we should study. Definitely, just being grounded and their prayers. I remembered before exams, they would declare a fast. Let's fast for exams which maybe, if it was just me, I wouldn't have done but because of just having them and the prayers of the pastor blessing us and saying you will pass in everything that you do, you will succeed, that played a very important role. So my Christian faith, believing in Jesus. And then that I am here by his grace and in everything I shall do I shall succeed and I am not destined to fail (Kerry-Anne, PI 5, 206)

In the last four lines of the above extract, the prayers of her pastor, her Christian faith and belief in Jesus, highlight her self-fulfilled belief that the word of God and the strength and support from her Christian community empower her to succeed academically and in everything she does in her life.

#### ***5.4.2. Holistic support – my study space***

The second photograph that Kerry-Anne presented for discussion was of her study space. The choice of the photograph (Photograph 5-11) suggests the importance influence her study space has on her exceptional academic achievement. During this discussion, she refers to the space as a “space of peace” and how the inspirational messages on her wall “keep her going”. She also refers to having a timetable that keeps her organised as well as writing her goals for the year and “I make sure I follow those and achieving the goals.” There are definite themes of being organised and setting goals, which reflects how important being focused, organised and surrounded by inspiration are to her achievement. The themes of being focused, organised and inspired are supported in the comments below:

I would say that is my space of peace. It calms me. This is where I do my studying mostly when the library is closed. This is where I do my studying. As you can see on the walls, I have so many papers posted up. They're basically inspirational messages. Things that keep me going. There is my timetables, there is my tut [tutorial]dates, my test dates so it helps me to know, I am sitting there and I know my exam time table...Yes I am very organised. I am very organised. What I do is usually ... I started this semester, I write out my goals. Last year I did that too. I write out my goals for the whole semester, what I hope to achieve. (Kerry-Anne, PI 5, 49)

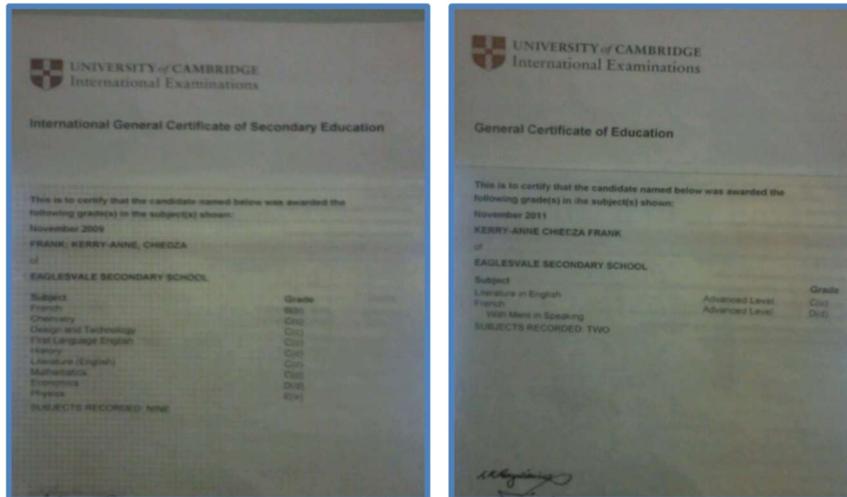


*Photograph 5-11 My study space (Kerry-Anne, E2)*

#### **5.4.3. Pushing boundaries – academic perseverance**

During the photo-elicitation interview, Kerry-Anne talked about how she struggled at high school after being a top achiever in primary school. She suggested the reason for this was she had been distracted by ‘things’ and ‘boys’ and that although she had passed her family expected more from her and she knows she was capable of doing better which suggests pushing herself and her ‘boundaries’ to reach the level of success she is capable of. This is seen in the comments below:

Okay those are my O Level results. Just generally growing up from primary school, I was always either in the top 10 or the top five. I always used to get prizes. When I went to high school, things changed. It wasn't the same anymore. I did very well Form 1, but then Form 2, Form 3, you get so side-tracked by things, boys. You forget. The results that I got, I did pass but my family knew I could do better...Whenever I look at my O level and A Level results; I remind myself that you did this but now you can do even better. (Kerry-Anne, PI 5, 175)



*Photographs 5-12 & 5-13 Academic perseverance (Kerry-Anne, E3, E4)*

Her goal of exceptional academic achievement at university and fulfilling her family's and her expectations are supported in the following comments:

Last year I did. My goal last year was to get the 75% in all my modules. And I did. In most of them, except for two second semester but then the overall goal was to get the refund. R15 000 back and I got it back. 80% aggregate. So I got that back and also I was selected for the student exchange programme. (Kerry-Anne, PI 5, 68)

This reinforces the theme of 'pushing boundaries' and the academic perseverance she has showed at university to getting back to being a top achiever.

In summary, Kerry-Anne strongly positioned her exceptional academic achievement as being grounded in her Christian faith and she acknowledged the word of God as an integral part of her achievements. It was also evident in her description, how engaging in the process of setting academic goals and time management, she had internalised the final outcome of these goals; a sense of feeling empowered. She aimed to get a distinction so she could get a refund of R15 000 which she achieved. She was acutely aware of how important it was for her to set goals and achieve these goals to plan a better life. Kerry-Anne was able to access a spiritual and educational inspiration in her study space from messages she had on her wall 'things that keep her going' which reflect her goal-oriented and future-oriented mind-set and behaviour.

### **5.5. Monique (College of Humanities)**

Monique was a 21-year-old Bachelor of Arts student from Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. She started her degree in 2013 and was completing her final year in 2015. She completed her matric in 2012 with exceptional results (i.e., six A's). She is only partially funded by a scholarship

and the remaining fees are paid by her parents. At the end of the interview, she revealed that her parents struggle financially, and paying her fees is a huge sacrifice they are making for her.

### ***5.5.1. Empowered to achieve – exceptional academic achievement***

All the way through Monique’s photo-elicitation interview there was a recurring theme of exceptional academic achievement and success from Grade 11 and 12 in high school throughout her university degree. She talked a lot about her achievements in Grade 11 and 12 and then her academic awards at university, which suggests her exceptional academic achievement, had influenced her experience of feeling empowered.



*Photographs 5-14 & 5-15 My exceptional, exceptional academic achievement (Monique, D1, D2)*

This is reflected in the following comments: “Those [dean’s commendations] are sort of some kind of showing to me that okay I am doing well, I’m trying and I’m getting some kind of reward for that ja.” (Monique, PI 4, 327) and further:

But I achieved academic colours in high school and these (Photograph 5-14 and Photograph 5-15) are that is okay this one’s honours for drama so I got my honours in drama that meant that was important to me. But that meant a lot because all of a sudden you weren’t walking around kind of you could feel proud cause on your blazer now you had this kind of outline and it just made you look smarter somehow...And for people to who never expected you to do well all of a sudden like, “Hey, you have your colours.” What happened? They’ll kind of they see you in a different light so I think it helps for you to feel accepted as being I don’t know smarter than you thought or capable of more (Monique, PI 4, 359).

The comments above further reflect academic pride and acknowledgement from others who she says never expected her to achieve exceptional academic achievement. She now feels more accepted by those people who previously hadn’t had very high expectations of her exceptional

academic achievement. Her exceptional achievement and feeling of empowerment has given her great self-confidence and self-acceptance.

### ***5.5.2. Holistic support - my family***

A few times during the interview Monique talked about how important her family's support was to her exceptional academic achievement even though they were not academic achievers themselves. She also talked about even when she was failing Mathematics in high school they were not critical at all and were always encouraging her (see Photograph 5-16).

This theme of a strong family support system is reflected in the following comments:

And then my family this is my dad my gran and my mom and myself and they have been constant pillars of support as I said earlier...Never criticising me and always supportive of wherever I am academically of course they were really happy with me I started improving but I think they were never I know they were never harsh on me when I wasn't doing as well as I am doing now. (Monique, PI 4, 395)



*Photograph 5-16 My pillars of support (Monique, D3)*

She went on to discuss how close they are as a family in a discussion with the researcher below:

Monique      Ja, so lucky and blessed to have them and ja, my dad is Afrikaans my mom is English so I think that and my gran was Afrikaans she's my only grandparent that I have ever known.

Terry          Okay oh wow.

Monique Ja, so I'm very close to them and I'm the only child so.

Terry Okay.

Monique Ja, tight knit. (Monique, PI 4, 403)

Lastly, at the very end of the interview, Monique became quite emotional in talking about how she understood what a sacrifice her parents were making for her education and how her goal was to give back to them and provide for them when she had finished studying.

### ***5.5.3. Holistic support – multiple spiritual forms of guidance***

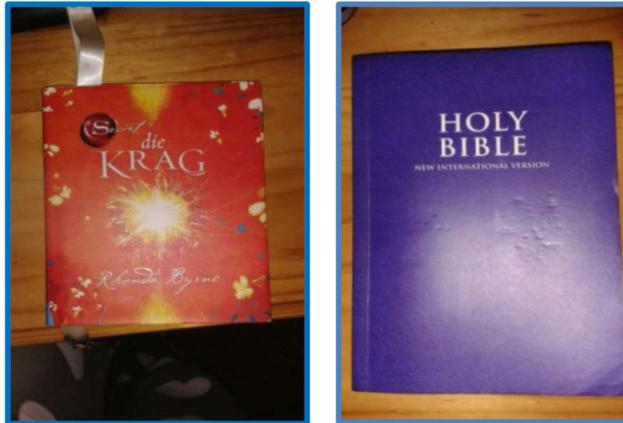
Fairly early on in the photo-elicitation interview, Monique talked about finding guidance in a book called *The Secret*. She comments, "The Secret helped me in Grade 8 actually". She further talked about being given advice by Oprah related to the Secret stating:

And she was like you can achieve anything you want in life and you can literally you just have to imagine it visualise it ask for it from the Universe...Yes put it out there, believe in it and wait for it to happen and so I literally went and I drew up this report and I put there my subjects and I put like extremely high marks (laughter) marks that I didn't think I'd ever, ever achieve but I was forced to believe that I would achieve them so I put that up I made a vision board. (Monique, PI 4, 174)

The above comments suggest a strong belief in visualisation techniques and the power of positive thoughts, as well as in *The Secret*. It is interesting and unique to Monique's interview that she also found support in Christian beliefs and principles, which she identified as being opposed to what *The Secret* refers to. This contradiction is found in the following statement:

But it wasn't only *The Secret* that helped I know some people would say you can't like you can't do that and choose what kind of a Christian you are but I also believe in I also am a Christian so I took a photo here of a Holy Bible. (Monique, PI 4, 197)

She acknowledges the contradictory beliefs and how other people may not agree with her dual beliefs but despite this fact acknowledges both having an important influence on her exceptional academic achievement. (see Photograph 5-17 & Photograph 5-18).



*Photographs 5-17 & 5-18 My opposing spiritual guides (Monique, D4, D5)*

#### **5.5.4. Pushing boundaries**

The theme of ‘pushing boundaries’ was first induced by the researcher in Monique’s photo-elicitation interview when she started to talk about the physical training that was required by her Drama teacher and was identified as a strong theme throughout the interview. The talk surrounding ‘pushing boundaries’ related to her taking drama as a subject at school and the support and encouragement she had received from her drama teacher (see Photograph 5-19). This related to physical boundaries and training that was required for drama. However, her interview suggests the physical boundaries that were ‘being pushed’ were also a way to access mental, emotional, and spiritual boundaries that would lead to her exceptional academic achievement and self-confidence.



*Photograph 5-19 Pushing boundaries to push boundaries - her motto (Monique, D6)*

This is seen in the following comments:

And because drama's been such a major part of my life it's always been a challenge for me so it forces me to keep pushing my boundaries and challenge myself. I thought I'd take this picture [a photograph not added in the dissertation] because well it symbolises like kind of a high point in my life where I'd reached in drama it was my goal to get an A and I got an A in drama and it was really hard but we did it and as a group too so group work is not easy either but... (Monique, PI 4, 40)

And

She was a major influence like in my life overall but then I think in terms of this assignment, it, she was really good for me in terms of my academics because she all of a sudden came and said you're capable of so much more it's like here's the bar where you are now and there's where you can actually go right up there and she made you like really push your own expectations of yourself and of everyone in the class so it wasn't just for me she made everyone do better than they thought they could (Monique, PI 4, 86).

Both of the above extracts suggest a very strong theme of the positive effects of her physical boundaries being pushed. These effects being; exceptional academic achievement, positive teamwork, a positive self-esteem and an inspirational role model (see Photograph 5-19).

In summary, Monique's description positioned her as having a strong internal drive to excel which had been influenced by a combination of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth. These areas of growth were strongly reflective of the theme that dominated her interview 'pushing boundaries'. Her description identified an individual with a huge capacity to access the necessary epistemic to excel in everything she did while finding inspiration in both artistic forms of drama, belly dancing. Moreover, Monique had been positively influenced by inspirational role models in her exceptional academic achievements. Furthermore, in her interview, she described her attraction to the spiritual guidance and support she received in two forms; as a non-religious spiritual guidance and a religious, Christian-based guidance. She acknowledged how this was contradictory but was necessary for her to excel in her studies. Lastly, her description reflected a future-oriented mind-set, for not only her benefit but also the benefit of her family, for giving back to her parents who had made such huge financial sacrifices to allow her the opportunity of studying at university.

## 5.6. Sizwe (College of Humanities)

Sizwe was a 23-year-old Bachelor of Arts (International Studies) from Qumbu in the Eastern Cape. He started his degree in 2013 when he was the only pupil in his matric class to be awarded a REAP<sup>28</sup> bursary. He was the only participant to have come from a rural area where access to good educational resources was limited (Gardiner, 2008). Despite this fact, he was a very confident and psychologically empowered student as will become evident in the following subsections. There were themes in Sizwe's interview that were unique to him but were central to understanding his experience of being 'academically empowered' that were used to organise and present the data in this chapter.

### 5.6.1. *Empowered to achieve – inspirational role models and “proud of our heritage”*

At the beginning of his interview, Sizwe chose to discuss people who were inspirational role models to him. In his discussion he reflected on people who had 'psychologically empowered' him in his academic achievement. He talked about his appreciation of the 'heroes' who had inspired him and acknowledged them in terms of achieving national recognition. The attainment of national recognition speaks to a 'national pride' and feeling empowered by their achievements, which can be seen in his comments below:

[T]his really gave me time to appreciate what the kind of life I've had to appreciate, the kind of people I've socialised with, the kind of the kinds of heroes that I've derived inspiration from, and the kinds of achievements our country has because to a great extent, some of the things that have empowered me in my life are actually national achievements of our country, they are part of our heritage as a country and they contribute massively to the process of nation building. So, I believe that it's, it should be a good feeling, and you know happy I'm proud of the fact that I've participated in this activity (Sizwe, PI 3, 35).

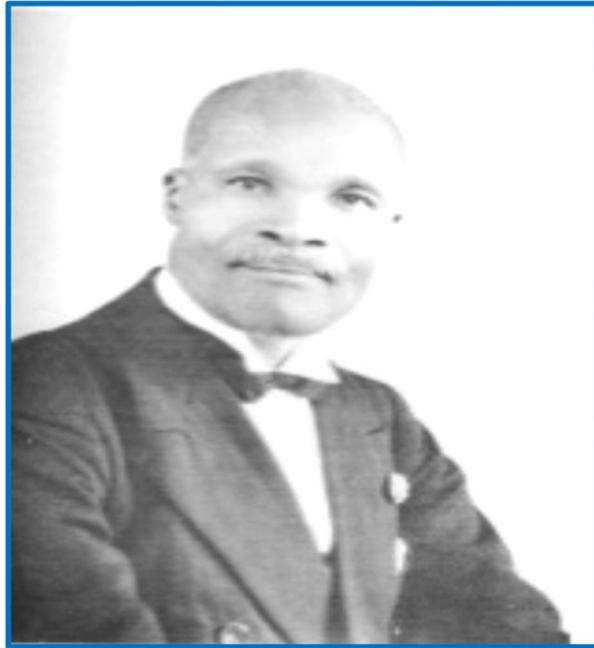
The above comments further revealed a strong collective identity he has with his African heritage, with the country and his role models who have contributed to 'nation building'. Pride in his heritage was further reinforced when he talked about his first inspirational role model, the poet S E K Mqhayi (see Photograph 5-20) which can be seen in the following comments:

Okay, this was the Xhosa writer S E K Mqhayi from the Eastern Cape so he was a well he died a long time ago but he was a writer he was a poet he's an inspiration to the Xhosa people in terms of how he encouraged them how he encourages them to, to be

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<sup>28</sup> The Rural Education Access Programme (REAP) assists students from poor rural areas with bursaries for tertiary education. They also provide information and resources to Grade 11 and 12 learners in rural schools (<http://www.reap.org.za/>)

proud of their heritage and to use the modern world as a space for them to actually demonstrate their capabilities so as a young you know person I've grown up with this with this zeal and determination to prove myself to the world and I say thanks to the literature and to the writings of this man they continue to inspire me even today. (Sizwe, PI 3, 46)



*Photograph 5-20 Inspired by his writings (Sizwe, C1)*

Sizwe went on to talk about other people who had inspired his academic achievements and his life, which included Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela. It is interesting to note how strongly he identified with such prominent political leaders, which may suggest he aspires to being empowered like them [political leaders], or to being a political leader. It further suggests feeling confident which reinforces his comments of feeling 'psychologically empowered' by his past achievements and what he will achieve in the future.

The sub-theme of 'proud of our heritage' and 'African pride' was evident throughout the interview. However, the sub-themes importantly represented who had inspired him when he talked about the role models. This emerged very strongly in his discussion of Steve Biko and is reflected in the comments below where he refers to Steve Biko's encouragement of black African's being 'proud of their colour' and 'blackness is beautiful'. He further talked about the inspiration Steve Biko gave him to be 'courageous' and to 'pursue with courage'. This courage reflected in the comments below.

[T]hats what Steve Biko symbolises to us just be courageous and pursue what you want to pursue with courage and with your own self esteem you know with a high self-

esteem(...) that's what he had he believed in his blackness and all of that he believed that people you know must be proud of their colour and that blackness as a pride blackness is beautiful...that in everything that I do I always see the importance of being courageous the importance of ensuring that I do not allow anybody to underestimate my efforts so that it's the reason why I'm so indebted to him. (Sizwe, PI 3, 161)

### ***5.6.2. Empowered to achieve – family support, cultural traditions and beliefs***

The second photo that Sizwe showed the researcher was of his home (see Photograph 5-21) in a rural village of the Eastern Cape. In the discussion that followed, it became evident that his home and the family traditions and ceremonies that were part of his upbringing were very influential in his academic achievements and him feeling “mentally and psychologically empowered”. He talked about his home being a place where he was “nurtured” and “disciplined”. This suggests an appreciation of his upbringing and the support he received from his family and community. It further suggests that Sizwe has an appreciation and respect for rules and discipline meted out to him by his parents. This is reinforced in his comment “where I...I've been beaten for doing wrong things you know, I've been disciplined, I've been told about, I've been advised...” (Sizwe, PI 3, 84)



*Photograph 5-21 Symbolic of my upbringing (Sizwe, C2)*

He went on further to speak about being blessed with the ‘protection of his ancestors’. This suggests a strong connection and identity to family and cultural beliefs related to the supernatural. He went on to discuss how he felt he ancestors were “fighting for him” and how he derived much of his inspiration from his forefathers, parents and home. This can be seen in the following comments he made about his home:

Ja, this is how in the Eastern Cape we build. You have four houses ja so this is my home and I've taken this photo to be part of this activity or to show how there's a phrase in the Eastern Cape where they say "discipline starts at home", and I believe that everything that has happened in my life, my empowerment as a young person, my mental, psychological empowerment, and you know the kind of empowerment that has inspired me in my academic or educational life has been due to you know the manner in which I've been brought up, so I've brought this to make a symbolic of my upbringing. This is the place where I've been where my mentality has been nurtured and ja, so this is where I spend time with my parents, this is where I I've been beaten for doing wrong things, you know I've been disciplined, I've been told about, I've been advised. So, everything has been done here and in the Xhosa context, there's also the issue of tradition they give when you are born, as a child you know growing up. They make a ceremony for you and say we want the ancestors to protect you. So you grow up knowing that you have certain, there are certain supernatural forces that are you know, protecting you. So, this gives you confidence in terms of everything that you do, say, "I'm going to be successful because I'm, my ancestors are fighting for me." Whether that theory is true or not, I do not know but it does give us that idea that we can achieve everything because they're our ancestors who cannot disappoint us, so you end up pursuing everything in your life. If you are studying, you say "I can get a hundred percent." Why? Because you believe that, you have the blessings of your fathers. So my home represents the place where I could say my forefathers, you know my parents; it represents the entire system of deriving inspiration from ancestors and feeling protected. You know every time and when you want to do something, you're not restricted, and say "What if I fail in this this competition? What if I don't succeed in doing this?" You end up succeeding because you have this idea that there are certain forces that are protecting me, and in this case, those are my, my, those are the blessings from, from my parents, from my grandfather, from the late people in the family, from the ancestors (Sizwe, PI 3, 76).

### ***5.6.3. Pushing boundaries – academic pride***

Later in the interview, Sizwe showed the researcher a photograph he had selected of an essay that had been published in a Nigerian online book. He is very proud of his achievement as he was the only South African to have his essay published, and he came fifth in the essay competition. His pride in his achievement is reflected in "But my essay was, I was amongst the top five, so I was very happy about that's what happened ja, that's what happened" (Sizwe, PI 3, 490).

He went on to tell the researcher that it was a subject [divorce] he did not really know anything about yet he was still able to achieve this honour. It reflects the theme of 'pushing boundaries' by writing about a subject he knew nothing about, a subject he was able to 'think beyond' his own knowledge, This is seen in the comments below:

Now I've never, I've never been what is it I've never been to a marriage scenario or situation, and I'm also not a person who's you know concerned about romantic relationships here, but I was able to think beyond that and say, I can still advise people on divorce how to avoid these things (laughing) and it was really a funny thing because I'm not even close to the topic itself in terms of my real life but I decided to do it. (Sizwe, PI 3, 482)

He also told the researcher that it was unique that he had thought of entering a competition that was in another country, which suggests he believes he is innovative which further suggests 'pushing boundaries' in his creativity. The theme of 'pushing boundaries' is reflected in his comments below:

It's just one of those things that prove that you've been inspired. When you are inspired you do things even the things that other people around you do not think of for instance, there are not many South Africans who, who would have thought of participating in a Nigerian competition you see, so but I was able to because I'm always doing my research on, on a variety of things and I came across this and I said there's a competition why should I not participate so I decided to participate and with this idea that you can do everything so I decided to participate in this competition. (Sizwe, PI 3, 453)

Towards the end of the interview, Sizwe chose a photograph of an award he had won for being the top achiever in Media and Cultural Studies in first year (see Photograph 5-22).



*Photograph 5-22 I will achieve (Sizwe, C3)*

He describes himself as a confused first year student who had come from a rural area where he had not been exposed to much and to win an academic award in first year was something to be proud of. This suggests, despite his confusion and lack of 'worldly experience', he was able to push his boundaries beyond his comfort level and knowledge at the time, to achieve such an honour. These themes are reflected in the comments below:

Yeah so just remember at that time I'm from a rural area I'm coming here, I'm confused, it's a multiracial place again you say (...) I think that (...) people are you know, much cleverer than me you have that attitude but the moment you start achieving you say wow (...) if I work hard like anybody else then I will achieve and that's what happened when I got this award. (Sizwe, PI 3, 712)

In summary, Sizwe's description highlighted the presence of an important driving force within him to improve his life through his exceptional academic achievements, despite any disadvantages he had experienced growing up. He positioned himself from rising to any challenge that was set in his path and to overcome them with the gift of an education and being the first in his family and village to be awarded a university degree. It was identified that Sizwe positioned himself as having a strong awareness of the historical past of South Africa, and a great pride in his African heritage and the role models who had inspired him to achieve such high levels of exceptional academic achievement. His description highlighted the presence of a strong vision for the future and being a role model and leader for other young African people. The vision of feeling empowered by a positive future are reflected in "I've grown up with this with this zeal and determination to prove myself to the world and I say thanks to the literature and to the writings of this man [S E K Mqhayi] they continue to inspire me even today" (Sizwe, PI 3, 50) and:

[A]nd history, it's about achievements, history, it's about achievements that create a legacy, creates a legacy and the future generations will judge you as a hero now (laughter) now I have. That's the attitude I have towards education and academic, you know the whole academic life that let me create a legacy so that the future generations can also see not only the importance of education but the need to defend it and the need to make it more progressive so to me this is just symbolic of that" (Sizwe, PI 3, 386).

Furthermore, Sizwe revealed a strong connection to his family that was characterised by the traditions of his cultural beliefs; beliefs rooted in respect for the wisdom of your elders, the acceptance of discipline and the spiritual connection to his ancestors, and their blessings bestowed upon him.

### **5.7. Danny (College of Humanities - School of Arts)**

Danny was a 33-year-old Bachelor of Arts student from Gaborone, Botswana. He was older than the other participants were and already had a diploma in secondary education from the Molepolole College of Education in Botswana. He also had a few years of teaching experience. His degree was funded by the Botswana government and he was a third year student at the time the data was collected/interview was conducted.

### ***5.7.1. Empowered to achieve – academic inspiration from historical buildings and people***

It was evident throughout the interview that many people, a variety of artistic activities and buildings that influenced his achievements, inspired Danny. However, it was the Old Main Building (see Photograph 5-23) that had inspired him in his academic achievement, which is reflected in the following comments.

[T]he Old Main Building was introduced as a historical building, that is kind of like a landmark of this university and this particular campus. It has been there for many years, untouched, unchanged. So, I know the building I am in is the building that was there many, many years ago.... The building itself has been inspirational. Very inspirational to me in if a building that sits for so many years and today still looks as fresh as it does, it means that ... you see, once you build something that is, how do I put it, something that is strong, something that is of quality, you are certain it will stand for generations. It is the same concept that I now apply in my studies. The best that I do at studies now will stand for generations. You know, the knowledge that I have acquired, I am going to share it with people, there is going to be some improvements of certain things I want to see that I have learned here and would want to take back to my country. That is how I build inspiration from this building. That build something of good quality, you are certain for generations it will stand. It will be there. I know the quality of the education that I am earning, and even myself, how I push myself to attaining the grades and marks that I attain, it will show in the long run 303)

Danny's comments reflect academic inspiration from a building that has stood 'untouched' and 'unchanged' for a very long time. He talked about it as 'still looks fresh' and 'strong'. It suggests that he perceives the building to be symbolic of a strong foundation in knowledge and in education. It further suggests his educational aspirations and ideals can be firmly rooted in the people who establish the places where education and achievement take place. He went on to discuss how building something that is strong will stand for generations to come, and likens the building to how he values his education and his exceptional academic achievement as a strong foundation for the future. The comments above further reflect his belief in himself as 'the best I do at my studies now will stand for generations' (Danny, PI 6, 315).

Danny went on to discuss what he had learned from his education here (Old Main Building, Pietermaritzburg Main Campus) and the inspiration he has received from the building, he wanted to share with people in his home country of Botswana. To see 'improvements of certain things' suggests his education and achievements had empowered him to share his knowledge for the improvement of others in his country.



*Photograph 5-23 Something that is strong (Danny, F1)*

A little further on in the interview Danny talked about being academically inspired by important role models in his life. The first person was a professor and head of Visual Arts department at the university. He commented that he had learned a lot from him was presently learning and will be learning a lot from him in the future. He also commented that he was an inspiration to him as an artist and the type of man he was played a significant role in in his high levels of exceptional academic achievement. This is supported in the extract below:

That is my professor [referring to another photo]. I have learned a lot from this man. And still learning a lot from this man and I will learn a lot from this man. He is an inspiration. Just with the work that he has done, just his profile itself. Just reading his profile and knowing about him, you would feel inspired as an artist to work alongside such a great man of stature. He has played a very important role in me attaining the grades I am attaining. He is very friendly, very open. He will tell you what to do, what to change in order for you to do well. In terms of the visual arts, he has been right next to me throughout my academic endeavour. (Danny, PI 6, 515)

Danny went on further to describe his professor as ‘very friendly, very open’, which suggests he has positive feelings about his professor and admires the type of man he is. This is reiterated where he calls him ‘such a great man of stature’ (Danny, PI 6, 518).

Danny went on to discuss his uncle (see Photograph 5-24) as an inspiration and a role model who had positively influenced him in his academic achievement. He talked about how his uncle had been the first in the family to go to university and attain a degree, and therefore, set a standard for the rest of the family to follow. He sees him as the force that drives Danny’s family. This idea is supported in the comments below:

This man is my uncle, the eldest in the family from my mother's family. From the history of my family, this was the very first person to attain his university qualification in the family... So, everyone who becomes successful, goes to university and all that, we all emulate the precedent that this man has set. His role as the eldest in the family so we kind of follow in his footsteps...And he has been there for the family even after the passing of my grandparents, he is the one taking care of the family. Build a very big house for the family and he is like pillar of the family at this point in time... there is one person that drives us and that drives the whole family to where it is going and where it is today and it is this man (Danny, PI 6, 526).



*Photograph 5-24 The pillar of the family (Danny, F2)*

Danny reinforced his admiration of his uncle and the inspiration he has received from him as the one person who has taken care of the family and he likens him to 'the pillar of the family' and the 'one person who drives us'.

### ***5.7.2. Holistic support – family support and inspiration***

A second main theme that was evident in the interview was family support and inspiration from family members. In one of the photos he decided to discuss, he showed the researcher a photograph of his family. When discussing his mother in this photo, he is referring to his aunt who took on the role of his mother when his biological mother passed away while he was in high school. He talked about how they had been there for him when he was 'at his worst' when his mother passed away, being the people who had inspired him to work hard and to being the man he is today. He reiterates the inspiration his family give to him in line 359 commenting 'My family is a very, very, very huge inspiration to me in what I do today' (see Photograph 5-25). The discussion around this photograph reflects a great appreciation of their love and support and he talked about how he can never put a value on repaying them, and that the only

way he can is to excel academically. He also discussed how he saw her as his mother and his aunt saw him as her son to the point that she introduces him as her son, which also suggests a mutual love and respect for each other.

And these people actually inspire me. I kind of have a complicated family. If I was to just briefly explain; the person that I call my mother in the photograph at the back with me is actually my mother's older sister. My blood mother is late... And you know, my family is an inspiration to me in a sense that, look Terry, these are people that have stood by me when I was at my worst. They are people that have always pushed me and inspired me to work hard, work even more. No matter how tough situations were, even after losing my blood mother, my aunt took me to stay with her. I call her my mother. Every time, I don't often tell people this is not my blood mother. She calls me her son. When I introduce her to my friends, she introduces me to her friend; she says this is my son. My family is a very, very, very huge inspiration to me in what I do today. All my academic excellence, all of that, I always say you know what, if there is anybody in the whole entire world that I owe something, it is my family. From them raising me, from being the child that I was to being the man I am today, it is because of them and I owe them for that. There isn't any value to repay that and I know that in my academic excellence, I am still paying to them what they have done for me because I am proud of the work that I do and I am excelling academically because I am proud of what they did for me. (Danny, PI 6, 344)



*Photograph 5-25 My family is a very, very, very huge inspiration to me (Danny, F3)*

Danny went on to discuss a photo that he had chosen to discuss and was very important to him. It was a black and white photograph of his biological mother who is deceased. He spoke about her as a great source of inspiration and deserving everything he has achieved today. He reinforced the inspiration he has for her by commenting 'who sets the foundation of everything I do' (Danny, PI 6, 481). He carries on commenting that even though she has passed away, she is a central part of his life. These sentiments reflect a great amount of love and respect for his

mother, the one person who was a strong foundation to his exceptional achievements today (see Photograph 5-26). This can be seen in the comments below:

Terry this is one woman that really, really, really inspires me. I want to say it now before we get to the question before picking photos that are inspirational to me; this photo has been very inspirational to me. She is no more but she deserves everything that I do today because she brought me into this world. She is one of my greatest inspirations in life. I often visit her grave when I am back at home. They sometimes clean around the grave, her grave, and all that. She has been a central figure in my life. She is no more but she is the central figure in my life... but this is the one person who sets the foundation of everything that I do. (Danny, PI 6, 472)



*Photograph 5-26 One person who set the foundation of everything that I do (Danny, F4)*

### ***5.7.3. Holistic support – spiritual support***

Fairly early in the interview, Danny had chosen a photograph of his church to discuss. It became evident to the researcher that his faith and religious beliefs were important to his life, and more specifically to his exceptional academic achievement. Danny also referred to it as a way to refocus on what was important and to let go of all the week's activities (see photograph 5-27). What he put emphasis on in this photo was that it was a way for him to 'reconnect with God' and to 'uplift your spirituality'



*Photograph 5-27 My connection to God (Danny, F5)*

These thoughts and feelings are supported in the comments below.

That is where I fellowship. I go to church every Sunday, and church is one place where you kind of get to start pulling yourself off from the week's activities and all of that and you just find your connection with God. You praise God. You fellowship it is just to uplift your spirituality (Danny, PI 6, 120).

A little further, he discussed how that everything he does in his life and all the successes he has had, especially in his academics, he attributed to God. This is reflected in the comments below:

It is very important to me because I believe with all my successes, with everything that I do, with the air that I breath and me being alive today, it is no other than God. It is God that is behind everything and I have to honour and worship him for that (Danny, PI 6, 126).

The comments above further suggest he has a very strong faith and foundation in Christianity, which has been evident throughout the interviews. Finally, it suggests that his spiritual life plays an important role in everything he does and it suggests a sense of empowerment rooted in his faith. This further suggests a

In summary, Danny's description exemplified a highly motivated individual with a future orientation of 'big dreams with the education I have acquired' and of 'changing the world'. He revealed a unique awareness of how of his academic achievements were related to his future. However, his dreams were grounded in an inspirational awareness of the historical foundation that built the university and the historical significance he gave to many of the places he had

visited. He attributed much of his exceptional academic achievement to the inspiration he derived from his family and the academic role models he had connected with at university. Moreover, he revealed a strong emotional connection to both his biological mother who was central in his life as well as his aunt who had taken on the role of his mother. Finally, Danny's description revealed an individual with the capacity to access a spirituality that was firmly rooted in a strong Christian belief system and being the most significant factor to his exceptional academic achievement.

## **5.8. Conclusion**

Chapter Five has provided detailed descriptions integrated with photographs from each of the six participants who took part in all stages of the qualitative data production phase of the study. The descriptions from these six participants were chosen to represent an account of their exceptional academic achievement from the UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus. Specifically, these questions sought to explore the places, people, structures, and processes that had influenced the participants in the exceptional academic achievement.

More importantly, these descriptions provided a platform for elucidating recurring themes of being empowered to achieve, holistic support and pushing boundaries. All six of the participants seemed to be strongly goal-directed and future-oriented, while their strategies for success involved accessing strong faith-based belief systems, a hard work ethic which was characterised by pushing their boundaries (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) inspiration derived from influential role models in their lives (historical, academic and family). Furthermore, each of the six participant accounts were underpinned by some kind of emotional experience from the past (e.g. academic struggle, lack of resources and loss of loved ones) yet they had a hopeful vision of the future. The researcher noted the dialectical nature of the analysis and interpretation of the themes in the qualitative data. This dialecticism occurred between the grounded approach, which was data-driven for illuminating recurring themes, and the top down nature of the identification of themes that were theoretically informed.

## **Chapter Six: An integration, representation and discussion of the data**

### **6.1. Introduction and overview**

Chapter Six is an integration of both the quantitative and qualitative findings. Specifically, it will compare and discuss the findings from both phases in the study to enhance the researcher's use of methods aligned with the validity of the study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher will further attempt to discuss the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study from the theoretical lens that framed the study; the transformative paradigm with a social justice ideology.

Chapter Six will be discussed in four sections. The first section functions to revisit and integrate the findings from both phases of the study that were presented in Chapters Four and Five in relation to the theory. The second section of Chapter Six will discuss the limitations of the study while a third section will discuss the potential for future research in exceptional academic achievement and empowerment. The fourth section will conclude the study.

### **6.2. Integrating and comparing the findings: convergence and divergence**

When reflecting on the findings of the quantitative phase of the study and in trying to answer the research question of the nature of the relationship between psychological empowerment and (high) academic achievement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the findings revealed the dialectical nature of student's perceptions of their psychological empowerment and its relation to their academic results (Psychology 101 results). Although, the research was exploratory, the researcher predicted the findings would reveal that the higher a student scored in their empowerment, the higher their final results would be. However, the findings did not support this hypothesis and reported no significant relationship between their psychological empowerment scores and their final results. This finding suggests the complex nature of empowerment and academic achievement. R. Hall (personal communication, 16 February 2016) conveyed a limitation of surveys is that there is an assumption that people respond honestly and have self-insight. Although the internal consistency measures of the PEI were good, it is still possible that a few or all of the respondents misrepresented their level of empowerment (positive self-presentation), or there was some acquiescence going on (tendency to agree/select highly agree answers). It is also possible that students had limited self-insight

into their levels of empowerment or they may have unrealistic estimations of their own levels of empowerment.

It further implies that students with generally high empowerment scores may not relate their psychological empowerment to academic achievement, and/or psychological empowerment in the academic context needs to be framed more holistically. The ‘holistic’ theme<sup>29</sup> was also identified in the qualitative phase of the study, which supports the potential need of the holistic approach into the incorporation and implementation of the PEI scale for culturally diverse student populations in higher education contexts. Due to the fact that South Africa is so culturally diverse, the traditional Western idea of ‘psychological empowerment’ may not be relevant to all cultural groups represented in South Africa. Moreover, it may not have been internalised by all cultural groups to represent the same ideas as what the researcher had defined or intended for the purposes of this study. In the context of this study, psychological empowerment was directly related to exceptional academic achievement which the researcher purposefully intended to measure. It is difficult to articulate whether respondents’ experiences of academic achievement influenced them to feel empowered when their final results from the PEI sample were not indicative of exceptional academic achievement.

The findings also bring into question whether the nature of academic works influences every student in the same way or to feeling empowered. Students’ empowerment may be experienced in other activities outside of an academic context such as the financial stability found in earning a salary, holding down a job, and uplifting their families and communities by providing for them. However, although the employment situation in South Africa is both volatile and unique, an education, and exceptional academic achievement in this context is generally indicative of being empowered.

Although the PEI Scale has been validated in over 50 different studies from around the world, originating from different cultural backgrounds, there is a need to further develop and define psychological empowerment to be relevant to both the cultural diversity of people in South Africa, but also its development in the South African higher education context. As transformation in higher education is a priority in South Africa, it necessitates a deeper

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<sup>29</sup> In the context of this study, the theme of holistic support refers to an all-encompassing view of the support systems each participant had access to that supported them to excel academically, e.g. Academic, physical, social, spiritual, psychological and family support systems.

understanding of those students who are excelling academically and who have both experienced and internalised psychological empowerment.

It is interesting to note however, the demographic variable of qualification significantly influenced academic achievement with LLB students achieving significantly higher marks than students registered for the BA and BSS qualifications. This finding suggested LLB students generally perform better academically than students registered for BSS and BA degrees. This finding can however, be explained by the fact that a LLB degree has a higher matric entrance requirement than BA and BSS degree requirements at UKZN (University Of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016). Therefore, students who register for an LLB enter university with higher matric marks. Furthermore, despite anecdotal claims that matric does not equal high performance at university, research has affirmed many times over, the predictive validity of matric results. In other words, students who perform better in matric, generally perform better in university. It is therefore, logical that students doing Law and Economics university modules would perform better when compared with BA and BSS students (Foxcroft, 2006).

The theme of 'empowered to achieve' in the qualitative phase of the study however implies that although the sample were purposefully chosen to represent higher achieving academic students, the majority of students who responded to the researcher's invitation to participate in the qualitative phase of the study, were from the Humanities. Qualifications in the Humanities are generally represented by BA and BSS degrees with differing routes of specialisation e.g. political studies, media studies and psychology. The experience of high levels of empowerment and academic achievement of the qualitative sample of the study (higher achieving students) could possibly be explained by the type of students (from the College of Humanities) who were willing to take part in the qualitative phase had a greater interest in issues of empowerment and academic achievement. Furthermore, the researcher noted higher achievement by LLB students in the Psychology 101 sample from the quantitative phase. Both the LLB, BSS and BA students who were highly empowered may be better able to articulate themselves. m

When investigating the findings related to the student's scores of psychological empowerment and the constructs the students were the most dominant on, the researcher found the most dominant constructs to be Meaning (54%) and Self-determination (34%) with the least dominant construct of psychological empowerment being Impact (0%). Meaning is defined as the value students perceive in the role they play in their learning environment in relation to their own value and belief system, and Self-determination is defined as a student's sense of

choice in regulating their actions in their environment (Spreitzer, 1995b). The dominance of these two constructs support and reiterates some of the themes that emerged from the qualitative phase of the study. In the qualitative phase of the study, the ‘meaning’ the participants gained from their belief systems was strongly rooted in their spiritual and cultural belief systems, as well as the support they received from family, and their friends from their educational context. The main themes related to the construct of ‘meaning’ (see subsection 5.1. footnote 2) were ‘spiritual guidance’, ‘pushing boundaries’ and ‘holistic support’ which included sub-themes related to family support and academic achievement. The theme that emerged from the qualitative phase of the study that is related to the construct of Self-determination is ‘holistic support-my study space’. The theme of ‘holistic support – my study space’ described the importance that students placed on their study environment and the role it played in their exceptional academic achievement. Having a strong sense of self-determination seemed to empower the participants/students to regulate their environment that included the hours they spent studying and timetabling, where they could study the most effectively, and the control of that space that allowed for inspirational wall messages, neatness, energy and correct light. Another theme that was identified and related to the construct of Self-determination in the PEI scale was ‘holistic support-spiritual guidance’ (see Chapter Five, Subsections 5.2.4, 5.2.5, and 5.5.3). This theme is related to Self-determination in that participants seemed to have the power to regulate where their spiritual support came from. One of the participants reflected on the importance of having this spiritual support as a way to refocus and let go of the week’s activities, thereby controlling their environment and regulating their actions and choices in that environment.

The theme ‘holistic’ emerged from the multiple systems of support the participants’ described in their accounts who had influenced their exceptional academic achievement. Not only was their exceptional academic achievement been influenced by their own intrinsic motivations but by the multiple external support systems such as inspirational role model, physical boundaries being pushed, peer and family support and positive study spaces. The researcher felt that this collection of support systems had holistically influenced the participants’ exceptional academic achievement.

Other themes that emerged from the qualitative findings of the study that were related to Meaning in the PI were ‘inspirational role models’ and ‘pride in our heritage’ (see Chapter Five, Subsection 5.2 and Subsection 5.2.1. and 5.6, Subsection 5.6.1. respectively). These themes further support the notion of a holistic perspective to account for the diverse

understanding of empowerment and academic achievement in a higher educational context undergoing transformation. A holistic perspective is the all-encompassing support system students derive motivation to achieve from. This motivation is derived from multiple support systems. All six of the participants from the qualitative phase of the study emphasised that one of the key factors that had influenced them in their exceptional academic achievement was the inspiration they derived from their academic role models. These role models had either been family members who had excelled academically, fellow academic peers, professors in their faculties or political leaders and struggle poets. All of them had played a vital role in the participants' journey to exceptional academic achievement and empowerment. In some of the participant's interviews, the identified role models emerged not only as an inspiration but were the driving force and motivation for the participants to 'push their physical and mental boundaries' and realise their potential for success. This further reiterated the holistic nature of their success and experience of empowerment. The experience of empowerment is linked to the theme of 'meaning' as it was described earlier in Chapter Five. Participants attributed meaning to important people (i.e. role models) in their lives, buildings, structures, spiritual symbols (i.e. The Bible, The Secret), physical exercise, and recreational activities that supported their exceptional academic achievement.

The researcher noted that the majority of the participants who volunteered to participate in the qualitative phase were international students. This finding is potentially an indication that due to the generally accepted view that a number of African countries outside of South Africa have a better quality of education, the participants felt more empowered to achieve at an exceptional level. Moreover, it is potentially indicative that having to come to a new country to study away from home and overcome many of the language and cultural barriers they are faced when coming to a foreign country, it was an important motivation to achieve exceptional results at university. Furthermore, the finding is potentially indicative of their ability to create supportive networks of people while studying in a foreign country as well as the type of value their families place on exceptional academic achievement and a tertiary education. Lastly, the fact that the participants were from the college of humanities indicates a need to understand the complexities of people and the arts, how people are inspired by external forces and the need to feel empowered.

The theme of 'pride in our heritage' was unique to one participant and illuminated his strong sense of identity with his African heritage and culture. His discussion around "pride in our heritage" further revealed the participant's identity was inextricably linked to a collective

African identity. This African identity was seen in his constant referral to the collective pronoun of 'we' as representing black African people. His reference to his role models being prominent political leaders and struggle poets further supported his identification with his African heritage and the apartheid struggle. The striving forward in unity for African people and being empowered by his role models' courageous acts highlighted his level of empowerment. These were the people who had inspired and motivated him to high levels of academic achievement, which in turn, led him to feeling empowered. It further elucidated the positive attitude he had towards an education and the vital role it played in his life and the life of his community. Furthermore, it highlighted how that despite his humble beginnings (growing up in a rural Eastern Cape village) and the past injustices of an oppressive regime, he felt empowered by his education and wanted to be a role model for other young people.

The researcher noted the uniqueness of Sizwe's account when compared to the other participants' accounts. His unique account is revealed in the way he focuses on his inspiration for his exceptional academic achievement; his African heritage. While the other five participants strongly identified with their Christianity and had a deep faith in God, Sizwe strongly identified with his African heritage and based his academic achievements in inspirational African role models such as Robert Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela.

Moreover, Sizwe's identification with his family's belief system rooted in their ancestors is unique when compared to the other participants' Christian belief systems. Ancestral belief systems are common in many African cultures and it is therefore unique that with five of the six participants being of African descent, only Sizwe identified with his ancestral beliefs. His account of his family's ancestral beliefs does however indicate some discomfort and or embarrassment surrounding them. This may be indicative of the rural setting he grew up in and his subsequent acceptance and acculturation of a Western education and Western life choices. This acceptance of his Western education is further indicative of his contradictory beliefs and perhaps his discomfort with completely abandoning his cultural roots and completely accepting a Western education and lifestyle. These factors are in contrast to the other five participants' accounts of their families and cultural roots where a seemingly Western education and lifestyle were part of their upbringing and family life. This could be due to the countries they were from and the accepted ways of life in those countries as well as the Western influence of Christianity in their lives.

Although initial findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study showed divergent results, the researcher was able to integrate findings from both phases of the study that elucidated similarities across phases and coalesced well while explicating any differences in the findings between phases. The researcher was further able to relate the rich descriptions of higher achieving participants in the qualitative phase of the study to the findings of the quantitative phase. These rich descriptions and themes that emerged from the participants sought not only to validate a mixed methods design but increase the credibility, dependability, rigour and transferability (Denzin, 1978; Guba, 1981) of the qualitative methods, and the validity and reliability of the quantitative instrument and methods. This is supported by the acknowledgement that one of the main strengths of using mixed methods is it can minimise the biases and weaknesses of individual methods (Curry, 2015, p. 186). Finally, it strengthened the overall findings of the study and validated the use of mixed methods for future empowerment and academic achievement studies.

### **6.3. Fowler’s faith development theory as an explanation of the participants’ empowerment**

For the researcher to expand on each participant’s emphasis on their faith as a core reason for their empowerment, she drew on the work of Fowler (1981) to elucidate its importance. Much of Fowler’s work was influenced by the works of Kohlberg, Erikson and Piaget which influenced his faith development theory. Fowler (1981) defined faith as “a generic feature of the human struggle to find and maintain meaning” (p.91). However, Fowler (1981) explained his understanding of faith as being separate from religion and should be viewed as way to explicate the meaning that people attribute to their lives at different stages of their lives. This is not to say that individuals’ faith cannot be attributed to their religious beliefs but can be a relevant explanation for those individuals who do not follow the beliefs of any religion. In this particular study, this was not the case as all six of the participants’ attributed a great proportion of their exceptional academic achievements and empowerment to their Christian faith and or multiple spiritual beliefs systems such as Monique. Fowler (1981) explained:

[t]he differences among beliefs, faith and religion are related to the environment individuals’ beliefs allow them to convey their ideas about the environment they exist in. Religion operates as a specific method of faith and its ideas about the world. Faith results from interactions and experiences that individuals have in the various

components that make up their lives and unites these components so that they can feel their lives are whole (p. 25).

Fowler (1981) developed his faith development theory into 6 stages and included a pre-stage. He defined these stages based on different ages from infancy through to later stages of adulthood. Below is a discussion of these stages as the researcher perceived them related to each participant's stage of faith development.

As previously discussed above, although Fowler (1981) believed an individual's faith to be separate from their religion or lack thereof, and is more attributable to the meaning individuals find in their lives, Vimbayi's Photo voice interview revealed her belief in God and her Christian faith as 'carrying her' greatly influenced her empowerment and the stage of faith development she is at. Although Fowler's (1981) individuating-reflective stage occurs for people in their twenties which Vimbayi is, and where they start to question what their faith means to them, Vimbayi's empowerment is firmly rooted in her religious beliefs. However, the researcher found that the emotional challenges she had to overcome related to not getting into medical school and then finding meaning in her life from a number of support systems and excelling academically were relevant to this stage of her faith development. She had questioned her purpose and where she was heading in her future and eventually found it after being inspired and encouraged by various role models, family members, her boot camp experience and her exceptional academic achievements.

Tsitsi's empowerment was also greatly influenced by her deep faith in Christianity and her devotion to it. Her view of her husband as a father figure and relying on him for her emotional and physical needs is linked to her religious beliefs and her worldview that a woman submits to her husband. As a more mature student being married and having a child, and firmly rooting her academic achievements to her faith in God, her husband and her family members, the researcher felt Tsitsi was in the conjunctive faith stage of Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory. Her exceptional academic achievements had reinforced her faith and giving her environment meaning and purpose for the future.

Kerry-Anne's empowerment and exceptional academic achievement can be perceived to be firmly rooted in her Christian faith. The way she spoke about praying about everything and reading the Bible a lot of the time was evidence of her faith. She further attributed her academic achievements to her spiritual community who supported her. From Kerry-Anne's Photo voice interview and her consistent references to prayer, her faith in God and her strength originating

from her faith, she is in the fifth stage of Fowler's Faith Development Theory; the conjunctive faith stage. Kerry-Anne had been exposed to many different ways of life as a university student but had remained firmly grounded in her Christianity where her own views about her faith were reinforced.

Monique's focus on her spiritual development revealed her dual belief systems were in opposition to each other yet she was still able to accept this and be comfortable with having these beliefs that gave her a purpose and meaning in her life. The evidence of dual belief systems indicates she is in Fowler's (1981) conjunctive faith stage where she has explored other belief systems to reinforce her empowerment and exceptional academic achievement. She is able to merge ideas that may have previously seemed in opposition to each other. She is willing to accept other belief systems to push her boundaries to excel and to give her life a purpose.

Sizwe's belief systems were unique in that they are rooted in the history of the country, a collective pride in his African heritage, the respect for family, community, ancestors and cultural beliefs, and his belief in Christianity as a moral guide for his life. The researcher found his exceptional empowerment and academic achievements steeped in complexity and rooted in all these belief systems, which indicates he is the individuated-reflective faith stage. The researcher felt this stage was relevant to his stage of faith development as he had come from a deeply rural area in the eastern Cape and had to acculturate to the life of an urban university student with immensely confusing times and many changes. However, in his Photo voice interview, he did reflect on whether his cultural beliefs in his ancestors was something he still believed in. This may have arisen from the knowledge and education he has gained from university and being influenced by modern, Western ideals.

Finally, the researcher felt that from Danny's Photo voice interview he is also at the conjunctive faith stage of his spiritual development where he has integrated a number of belief systems. These beliefs are firmly rooted in family support, inspirational role models and his Christian faith. They have influenced his exceptional academic achievement and empowerment and given his life meaning and a purpose.

#### **6.4. Highlighting the use of international students**

A section on international students was introduced in Chapter One as it was relevant to the historical context of higher education in South Africa. Not only was South Africa purposely excluded from participating in the international higher education arena during the apartheid era but it negatively impacted on the lack of international students who wished to study in South Africa (Jooste, 2014). This exclusion essentially slowed down any efforts of South African higher education institutions to become sought after places to study and become politically and culturally acceptable to all groups of students.

The importance of highlighting international students' academic performance and the potential challenges they face when studying abroad in foreign countries was presented in Chapter One due to the fact that four of the six participants in the qualitative phase of the study were from foreign African countries. Although the researcher initially intended to use South African participants in the Photo voice activity, the lack of response from South African students from the university was a motivation to invite students from other countries to participate in the study.

Moreover, the research on international students' academic performance in foreign countries provided a comparison of academic performance between local students in their home country universities and international students at those same universities. It further provided valuable insight into the challenges international students have to overcome when studying in a foreign country and learning in a language that is not their home language. The exceptional academic performance of the four international students in this specific study was necessary to highlight as they formed the majority of the qualitative sample and revealed they had multiple supports systems that helped them achieve exceptional academic success.

#### **6.5. The transformative paradigm and psychological empowerment**

Throughout this dissertation, the researcher attempted to highlight the transformative paradigm while explicating various authors' conceptualisations of psychological empowerment and how the two are linked. With the principle of social justice as the foundation of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010) and understanding psychological empowerment it was important to highlight how the conscientisation (empowerment) of students is linked to their freedom from

oppressive systems and effect policy changes relevant to the structural support systems necessary within transformative higher education systems.

## **6.6. Limitations of the study**

The researcher will discuss the limitations of the study in two sections. The first section will discuss the limitations of the quantitative phase but more specifically the adaption of the PEI scale, sampling, and design flaws.

One of the first limitations the researcher identified was the sampling method. The use of purposive sampling inhibited the capacity of the study to generalise (Creswell, 2013) about psychological empowerment from the PEI to academic achievement in university students as the sample only consisted of first year students registered for Psychology 101 from five different qualifications at UKZN.

Second, the adaptation of the PEI for the academic context of students in higher education may have compromised the validity and reliability of the study. Although the PEI instrument had been validated in a number of studies in the academic context (Spreitzer, 1995a), minor word and phrasing adaptations took place so as to provide a better fit to the academic context. These adaptations may have affected the stability and internal consistency of items (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). However, the researcher's use of both quantitative and qualitative methods strengthened the overall validity and reliability of the study. Moreover, the Cronbach Alpha test of the PEI revealed the overall scale had a good reliability. Validity of the study was increased by embedding the study in a transformative paradigm with a social justice focus. Social justice in the context of this study was described as the researcher's awareness of previous injustices associated with marginalised and oppressed groups reiterated the researcher's focus on social justice. Moreover, the researcher's goal of bringing awareness to and acknowledgement of systemic changes needed to empower and/or emancipate those previously marginalised groups from oppressive systems. Furthermore, the researcher increased the validity of the study by bringing a multicultural awareness to the study through the authentic understandings and interpretations of the participants in the study (Kirkhart, 2005).

A third limitation of the study was the sampling strategy. Psychology 102 students who attend lectures will obviously provide a skewed sample of Psychology 101 students. There is further

a possibility that those with lower Psychology 101 results either did not attend Psychology 102 lectures, chose not to participate in the study because of their results, or were not required to take any further psychology courses for their qualification.

Furthermore, using a convenience sample of psychology students, was not necessarily the best strategy due to the general findings that have reported the underperformance of first year university students, which would negatively influence any correlation between psychological empowerment and the academic results of Psychology 101 students. In South Africa, a number of factors influence the underperformance of first year students with a key factor being the under preparedness of students for the academic level required at university (Makoni, 2010). Other important factors that affect underperformance are psychosocial and cultural factors (Petersen, Louw, & Dumont, 2009), poor proficiency in the language of instruction (Butler & van Dyk, 2004) and the institution's teaching methods which can contribute to poor academic performance of first year students at university (Feast, 2002). However, due to a limited time frame to complete the research for a master's degree and what was practically feasible and affordable, the researcher chose to use convenience sampling of psychology 101 students. A further design flaw of the use of the PEI scale was related to the informed consent form as a separate document. The low response rate of the sample was related to the fact that many completed the PEI scale but did not attach their informed consent form to their questionnaire and many were separated or lost when handed in to the researcher.

One of the main limitations that the researcher identified in the qualitative phase of the study, was the sample of higher achieving students (the majority were international students from other African countries) was not necessarily representative of many South African students (previously marginalised). However, the researcher suggests that scholarship lists at other research-intensive South African universities are probably similar, and so the study may be transferable to other similar higher education institutions in South Africa.

The researcher noted a second limitation of the qualitative phase was that the sampling technique excluded students who may be achieving moderate<sup>30</sup> levels of exceptional academic achievement but who may still feel empowered. However, the use of higher achieving academic students was justified, as the results of the study could inform future studies to

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<sup>30</sup> In the qualitative phase of the study, participants were purposefully selected from a sample of students who had excelled academically and were awarded scholarships. However, there may have been participants who had only achieved average (moderate) academic results but who still felt empowered by their achievements.

develop academic programmes that empower those students who are achieving moderate levels of exceptional academic achievement to reach higher levels of academic achievement by understanding the processes, structures, and people influencing the current sample.

The researcher tried to refrain from imposing her own beliefs on the participants in the interpretation of the interviews and photographs as well as engage in reflexive writing during and after data collection. The practices are linked to the criteria of confirmability in qualitative research, where the findings of the study are shaped and developed by the participants and not researcher bias, motivation or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher questioned whether her epistemological beliefs related to the focus on exceptional academic achievement by attempting to understand both the traditional psychological views of empowerment and the interpretive and contextual complexities of empowerment was able to discover whether students could authentically experience empowerment and at the same time be emancipated from the very systems that had oppressed them. If according to Freire's theory (2005) students who become conscientised to the oppressive systems they are living in, surely they would be empowered to remove themselves from living within these systems?

## **6.7. Overall limitations of the study**

Overall, the complexity of using a mixed methods research design was a limitation of the study as the samples used for the quantitative and qualitative phases were not necessarily comparable and therefore created a challenge for the researcher in the way the findings and outcomes were presented in the integration and interpretation stages in Chapter Six. The use of multiple perspectives further complicated the way the findings were presented. It was difficult for the researcher to coherently integrate and articulate the findings.

Many of the epistemological beliefs of the researcher's goals of achieving transformation were not achieved in the study due to a number of challenges in the research design and in the limited time frame for the study. These challenges will be discussed in more detail below.

Transformative goals such as the equitable distribution of resources, the implementation of an action plan and conscientising students to emancipate themselves from oppressive systems based on the findings of the study were not achieved due to the limited time frame to complete

the research, lack of resources and the complexity of the study's research design. Furthermore, these goals are usually more attainable over a longitudinal study or in applied research settings.

Although the participants may have experienced transformative empowerment on a personal level with their exceptional academic achievement, participation in the Photo voice activity and the photo elicitation interviews in the qualitative phase of the study, transformation at systematic levels was not possible. This would only be possible over a longer time frame and where systematic and structural changes were made in the higher education institution. Furthermore, the researcher questioned whether the participants' goals of exceptional academic achievement within the systems and structures that had previously oppressed them, implicates their complicity in maintaining the oppressive practices of current higher education institutions in South Africa.

Due to the differences in the samples chosen for the different phases of the study it created difficulties for the researcher when integrating and analysing the data across phases. A flaw with the choice of participants for each sample was related to the differences in level of students. The quantitative sample consisted of 1<sup>st</sup> year psychology students while the qualitative sample consisted of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students from the college of humanities. In retrospect, the researcher realised that it would have been better to use students on similar levels. This is discussed in the recommendations section.

Lastly, although beneficial to the validity, reliability, transferability and rigour of using mixed methods in a study, the mixed methods in this study added to the complexity of research design and in the researcher clearly integrating the findings from both methods.

## **6.8. Recommendations and future research**

The following is a discussion of future recommendations for further studies in the context of higher education, exceptional academic achievement, and empowerment from a transformative paradigm. Recommendations are discussed related to each method used in the study and for the overall findings of the study.

Firstly, in the quantitative phase of the study, the outcome of a Cronbach's Alpha test of the overall PEI scale which revealed a good internal consistency suggested reliability of the scale outside of the organisational and work context it was developed in, and suitable for use in the academic context of transformation in higher education settings. However, as briefly mentioned above, the PEI scale may need further investigation and development to include a

more holistic understanding of the role psychological empowerment plays in academic achievement. Within this holistic perspective, the concept of psychological empowerment may need further refining to extend to a more culturally diverse understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher recommends the use of a randomised sample from the student population to account for the limitations associated with convenience sampling even though the populations the sample was drawn from in the current study was directly related to the research context and question.

A third recommendation related to the PEI scale and the quantitative phase of the study, is the use of an average score for each respondent based on their overall academic results for that semester or the previous academic year.

Fourthly, it is suggested that future research could explore the relationship (correlation) between empowerment and academic results by including 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in the sample as literature has suggested the underperformance of first year university students is related to under preparedness (Makoni, 2010) and a number of other factors related to university adjustment that would not be the same for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students due to their academic assimilation.

Fifth, it is recommended that the design of the PEI questionnaire should have the informed consent form attached to the questionnaire and include a space for the participant's student number to be able to correlate it to the biographical information section of the questionnaire should it become separated from the questionnaire. This will lessen the need to discard any questionnaires that had been filled out but did not have the informed consent form attached. Lastly, the place where respondents are required to fill in their student number needs be higher up on the page in the first or second column so it can be more visible to respondents. Although a number of respondents correctly filled in the questionnaire in all other sections, they either did not see the place to fill in their student number or deliberately chose not to fill it in due to potential embarrassment regarding their psychology 101 marks.

While the researcher could not exclude non-South African students from the qualitative sample, the researcher recommends that when a longer research time frame is allowed for, that future research include participants that are more representative of the racial majority of the country (South Africa) when trying to explore empowerment of higher achieving students in a transformative context. Only two of the six participants in the qualitative sample were South African (1 African and 1 White participant). Secondly, the researcher recommends the

inclusion of higher achieving students with physical, mental, or learning challenges in the sample as little or no research has studied the psychological empowerment of this population of students. Transformation not only applies to previously racially marginalised groups but groups such as physically and mentally challenged students who have been discriminated against and marginalised in the education sector.

Thirdly, the researcher recommends the inclusion of focus groups with the participants involved in the Photo voice activity, to gain a broader understanding of the people, processes and structures at a community level that influence students either positively or negatively in their exceptional academic achievement and psychological empowerment.

Finally, it is recommended that future research plan a time frame to include photographic exhibitions to allow students to express their levels of empowerment and academic achievement, and sharing these photographic symbols of achievement with the academic staff associated with the higher education institution in the study.

## **6.9. Conclusion**

The use of the qualitative phase strengthened the validity of the study. Essentially, while the quantitative phase addressed the need for objectivity and the application of scientific methods, the qualitative phase addressed the weaknesses inherent in quantitative methods; the inability to critically reflect on and explicate the complex nature of human beings and the world around them. The qualitative phase further functioned to highlight the inherent capacity of dialogue with participants to direct the research.

With the limited capacity of the quantitative findings to explain psychological empowerment and its relation to academic achievement, the qualitative phase of the research strengthened the study by attempting to focus on the goal of social justice within the transformative paradigm. Moreover, it highlighted how involving participants in a participatory research activity (Photo voice) gave them the power to express their academic achievement and the power to direct the research that reflected the people, places, structures and systems that empowered them and not the researcher's voice. It created the space for qualitative methods (photo-elicitation interviews, audio recordings, and transcription) to be implemented, which is a necessary part of a mixed methods design with the goal of strengthening and merging the findings.

The progress of transformation as identified by a number of universities in South Africa was briefly discussed in chapter one. These guidelines revealed how the legal and regulatory requirements of transformation had been addressed and some strides had been made toward achieving transformation at an institutional level. However, core epistemological changes related to curriculum and the way students learn need to be addressed by universities to see the successful consequences of social justice. The success of social justice may have been easier to identify and articulate if only one method had been used such as the qualitative Photo voice activity and interviews. The participants' accounts would have allowed for richer interpretations of their levels of empowerment related to their academic achievement than trying to integrate the quantitative findings in a coherent manner.

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**Appendix 1: SECTION 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT INSTRUMENT (PEI) (Spreitzer, 1995) (Adapted)31**

Psychological empowerment can be defined as “a set of psychological conditions necessary for individuals to feel in control of their own destiny” (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2008, p. 314<sup>32</sup>). In the academic environment, psychological empowerment may therefore assist a student to achieve in their studies. Four dimensions of psychological empowerment (motivation) have been identified (competence, meaning, self-determination and impact) in people’s behaviour in relation to the different roles they have in their lives (Learning context, work context, family context). Measuring these four domains will assist us in understanding your level of psychological empowerment in your learning environment and how it influences academic achievement at university. Please complete the following questionnaire to help you discover your level of psychological empowerment, and how this may assist you in improving your academic achievement goals.

**Section 1: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (Please mark the relevant blocks with a tick (v)).**

<b>1) What is your nationality?</b>		<b>2) How old are you?</b>	
South African		Years	
Other country (please specify)		Months	
<b>3) What is your home language?</b>		<b>4) What is your gender?</b>	
English		Female	
isiZulu		Male	
Afrikaans		<b>5) What is your ethnicity</b>	
Xhosa		African	
Tshivenda		Coloured	
Sepedi		Indian	
Siswana		White	
Northern Sotho		Other ( Please specify)	
Southern Sotho		<b>6) What degree are you studying?</b>	
Ndebele		BA	
French		BSS	
Other (please specify)		BSc	
<b>7) Student number?</b>		BCom	
<b>8) What campus are you studying on?</b>		LLB	
Pietermaritzburg		Other (Please specify)	
Westville		<b>9) What year of study are you in?</b>	
Howard College		1 <sup>st</sup>	
Medical School		2 <sup>nd</sup>	
Edgewood		3 <sup>rd</sup>	

<sup>31</sup> Permission has been granted by Prof Gretchen Spreitzer for use of an adapted version of the PEI at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for teaching and research purposes

<sup>32</sup> Spreitzer, G. M. & Doneson, D. Musings on the past and future of employee empowerment. In T. G Cummings (Ed.), *Handbook of Organization Development* (pp. 311-324). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Section 2: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT INSTRUMENT (PEI)**

Listed below are a number of self-orientations (statements about one’s self). Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, by marking a tick (✓) over the appropriate block. Please be as honest as possible.

1. I am confident in my ability to succeed academically.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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2. Achieving exceptional academic achievement is important to me.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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3. I have significant autonomy in determining how I study.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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4. I have a large impact on what happens in my learning environment.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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5. My learning activities are personally meaningful to me.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my learning environment.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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7. I can decide on how I go about studying.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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8. I have considerable independence and freedom in how I study.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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9. I have mastered the skills necessary to achieve exceptional academic achievement.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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10. The degree I'm studying is meaningful to me.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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11. I have significant influence over what happens in my learning environment.

<b>(1) Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(2) Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>(3) Disagree</b>	<b>(4) Neutral</b>	<b>(5) Agree</b>	<b>(6) Strongly Agree</b>	<b>(7) Very Strongly Agree</b>
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12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to do my course work.

(1) Very Strongly Disagree	(2) Strongly Disagree	(3) Disagree	(4) Neutral	(5) Agree	(6) Strongly Agree	(7) Very Strongly Agree
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**SECTION 3: Transfer your scores for questions 1 – 12 to the relevant blocks in the columns below each question number. Then total your score for each row. To calculate an overall psychological empowerment score add the total sum of each domain and divide by 12.**

	Question Number			Total	Average	Interpretation
Score	1	9	12			<b>Competence</b> is a student's belief in their own abilities to perform an assignment well to achieve their goals (Frymier et al., 1996).
Score	2	5	10			<b>Meaning</b> is the value students perceive in the role they play in their learning environment in relation to their own value and belief system (Spreitzer, 1995a).
Score	3	7	8			<b>Self-determination</b> is a student's sense of choice in regulating their actions in their environment (Spreitzer, 1995a).
Score	4	6	11			<b>Impact</b> is whether or not students believe they can have an influence on the processes and structures in their learning environment (Spreitzer, 1995a).
				<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>Overall Average</b>	

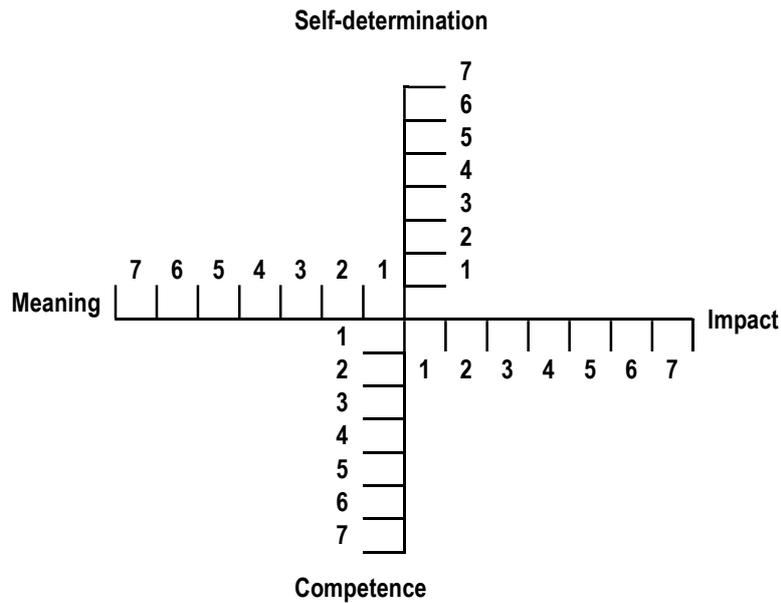
## SECTION 4: Student Information Sheet -Understanding your Psychological Empowerment Profile

### Understanding Your Psychological Empowerment Profile

Spreitzer (1995a) identified four domains that were manifested by the intrinsic experience of psychological empowerment (motivation) of people's relationship to their work role; *meaning, competence, self-determination and impact*. These domains have been adapted for the academic learning environment and will assist you in understanding which domains you are more empowered in, and which domains you need to work on to help you attain high levels of academic achievement.

- **Meaning** is the value students perceive in the role they play in their learning environment in relation to their own value and belief system (Spreitzer, 1995a).
- **Competence** is a student's belief in their own abilities to perform an assignment well to achieve their goals (Frymier et al., 1996).
- **Self-determination** is a student's sense of choice in regulating their actions in their environment (Spreitzer, 1995a).
- **Impact** is whether or not students believe they can have an influence on the processes and structures in their learning environment (Spreitzer, 1995a).

These four cognitions together reflect the active role people take in their learning environment and are able to take control of their tasks in their studies. Although distinctive on their own, combined they are supposed to measure the overall construct of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995a). To further help you understand which domains you are dominant in, use the plot below to build an empowerment profile.



- Plot the average score you recorded for *meaning* on the left hand line above.
- Plot the average score for *self-determination* on the top line.
- Plot the average score for *competence* on the bottom line.
- Plot the average score for *impact* on the right-hand line.
- Lastly, connect the points in each quadrant to form a four-sided figure. (kite-like shape). This allows you to readily see the more or less dominant areas of your empowerment profile (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001, p. 55)

## *Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet: Phase 1 (PEI UKZN Psychology 101 students)*

Dear Student,

### **Participant information sheet: Research study on psychological empowerment of psychology 101 students and its relationship to academic achievement (questionnaire)**

#### The research study

We are conducting an institutional research study on first year psychology students at UKZN and their experience of psychological empowerment and its relationship to high academic achievement. The aim of the project is to explore how psychological empowerment can affect academic achievement in a learning environment and the people, processes and structures that contribute either positively or negatively to students' academic achievement. The results from the study could assist UKZN to understand how psychological empowerment could be implemented into all aspects of the students learning environment that encourages and supports high levels of academic achievement. You have been invited to complete a questionnaire on psychological empowerment among psychology 101 students.

#### The questionnaire

The questionnaire poses a series of questions aimed at eliciting your views on your experience of psychological empowerment in the UKZN learning context, and all questions simply require you to select a response on a seven-point scale (with response options ranging from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree). The questionnaire should not take you longer than 20-25 minutes to complete, and you should complete it on your own, and only once.

#### Confidentiality, anonymity, and risks/benefits

Although the questionnaire requires you to fill in your student number, no form of identification by name or student number will be used in the findings of the research and your anonymity will be guaranteed. (i.e., in the publication of the dissertation) The purpose of using your student number is with your informed consent, we wish to access your academic record to investigate whether there is a relationship between your psychological empowerment score and your academic marks. There are no foreseeable risks to your completing the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire you will have a good understanding of your psychological empowerment that you experience in your learning environment. You will also see which of the four domains you are most empowered in. Please note a psychological empowerment score is not the same as a personality trait score which tends to remain stable over time. Your empowerment score is a reflection of how empowered you are now in your learning context, and may change over time and in different contexts.

### Storage of information and accessing more information about the study

The responses you add to the questionnaire will be stored in a secure safe and will be accessible to the research team. All data collected as part of this research study will be stored securely for a period of five years and may be used for future research, postgraduate student dissertations, and journal publications. No identifying information about you will be published. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact any of the research team members detailed below.

### Voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw from the study

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason. By reading the above information and signing informed consent, you confirm that you understand the contents of this information, the nature and purpose of the research project, consent to the use your academic records, and that you consent to participating in the research project. You also understand that you are free to withdraw from the project/questionnaire at any time should you so desire.

A summary of the findings from the research study can be made available to you on request.

Thank you

Terry Shuttleworth  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Cell: 082 663 7947  
shuttlebug38@gmail.com

Nicholas Munro  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Tel: 033 260 537/53351  
munron@ukzn.ac.za

***Appendix 3: Informed Consent for Phase 1 (PEI UKZN PMB sample) (To be attached to Phase 1 PEI Participant Information Sheet) (Adapted)<sup>33</sup>***

Dear Student,

**Informed consent to complete the Psychological Empowerment Instrument**

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled “Empowerment and Academically Exceptional Students” by Terry Shuttleworth.

I understand the nature, purposes and procedures of the study.

I understand the purpose for the use of my academic record and I have given consent to the researcher to access these records.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about the benefits of participating in the study.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at ([shuttlebug38@gmail.com](mailto:shuttlebug38@gmail.com), 082 663 7947).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

Terry Shuttleworth  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Cell: 082 663 7947  
[shuttlebug38@gmail.com](mailto:shuttlebug38@gmail.com)

Nicholas Munro  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Tel: 033 260 537/53351  
[munron@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:munron@ukzn.ac.za)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

<sup>33</sup> (HSSREC, 2008)

## ***Appendix 4: Approval from instrument developer to use adapted Psychological Empowerment Instrument***

**Gretchen M. Spreitzer**  
Keith and Valerie Alessi Professor of  
Business Administration  
Professor of Management and  
Organizations

**Stephen M. Ross School of Business**  
University of Michigan  
701 Tappan Street, Room R4372  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1234  
Tel 734.936.2835 Fax 734.936.6631  
spreitzer@umich.edu  
<http://webuser.bus.umich.edu/spreitzer/>



February 10, 2015

Terry Shuttleworth-

Thank you for your interest in the psychological empowerment assessment. You have my permission to use the instrument in your research. Please share your findings so that I can learn from you. Best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Gretchen M. Spreitzer'.

Gretchen M. Spreitzer  
Keith and Valerie Alessi Professor of Business Administration  
Professor of Management and Organizations

*Appendix 5: Approval to administer PEI and access to psychology 101 students' academic records from UKZN Registrar*



8 April 2015

Terry Shuttleworth  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Pietermaritzburg Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [215079541@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:215079541@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Terry

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"Empowerment and academically exceptional students".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by randomly handing out questionnaires to Psychology students on the Pietermaritzburg campus at UKZN.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book.

Yours sincerely

---

**MR B POO**  
**REGISTRAR (ACTING)**

---

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

*Appendix 6: Approval from the Registrar to conduct research for the overarching study: The student academic exceptionality project*



6 January 2015

Dr Nicholas Munro  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Pietermaritzburg Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [munron@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:munron@ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Dr Munro

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"The student academic exceptionality project: Equity and exceptional academic achievement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample as follows:

- with a request for responses on the website. The questionnaire must be placed on the notice system <http://notices.ukzn.ac.za>. A copy of this letter (Gatekeeper's approval) together with the ethical clearance must be simultaneously sent to [govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za) or [ramkissoob@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ramkissoob@ukzn.ac.za). You are not authorized to distribute the questionnaire to staff and students using Microsoft Outlook address book.
- access to UKZN data.

Please note that the data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

**MR BAATILE POO  
REGISTRAR (ACTING)**

**Office of the Registrar**

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



1910 - 2010  
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Faculty of Education   ■ Edgewood   ■ Howard College   ■ Medical School   ■ Pietermaritzburg   ■ Westville

*Appendix 7: Approval from UKZN Ethics Committee for the student academic exceptionality project (overarching study)*

---



12 February 2015

Dr Nicholas Munro 316183  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Dr Munro

Protocol reference number: HSS/0060/015CA

Project title: The student academic exceptionality project: Equity and exceptional academic achievement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

**Full Approval – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received on 3 February 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

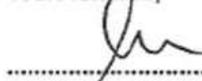
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

*Appendix 8: Preliminary approval from module coordinator to access Psychology 100 students at the Pietermaritzburg Campus*



Dear Ms Shuttleworth

**Re: Research study on empowerment and exceptional academic achievement and Psychology level 100 students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus)**

Provided that the Registrar of the University of KwaZulu-Natal provides gatekeepers approval, permission is hereby granted for you to access the Psychology level 100 students on the Pietermaritzburg campus to invite them to participate in your study.

Once gatekeepers approval and ethical clearance approval has been provided for your study, please discuss with me a suitable lecture or tutorial time for you to address the students.

Sincerely



Nicholas Munro, PhD  
Lecturer and Module Coordinator: Psychology 101 and 102  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus

**School of Applied Human Sciences**

Postal Address: Private Bag X01, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg 3209, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)33 260 5166 Facsimile: +27 (0)33 260 5363 Email: [munron@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:munron@ukzn.ac.za) Website: [psychology.ukzn.ac.za](http://psychology.ukzn.ac.za)

## *Appendix 9: Email invitation to high achieving students to participate in the Photo voice project*

Dear student,

### **Invitation to participate in the Photo voice project by high achieving students at UKZN**

#### The research study

We are conducting an institutional research study on undergraduate students who excel academically at UKZN and their experience of psychological empowerment and its relationship to high academic achievement. As an undergraduate student who has excelled so far at UKZN, you have been invited to participate in the research study. The aim of the project is to explore how psychological empowerment can affect academic achievement in a learning environment and the people, processes and structures that contribute either positively or negatively to students' academic achievement. The results from the study could assist UKZN to understand how psychological empowerment could be implemented into all aspects of the students learning environment that encourages and supports high levels of academic achievement. Your involvement in the study will include a Photo voice activity. Empowerment will be explored in the photo-elicitation interviews.

#### The Photo voice activity

Photo voice is a participatory research strategy, and if involved in this activity, you will be:

- inducted into the ethics and processes of Photo voice (approximately 45 minutes)
- provided with a digital camera
- asked to take photographs of the spaces, structured, and processes that enable and constrain your academic achievement (approximately 120 minutes of your personal time)
- invited to an individual photo-elicitation interview with one of the researchers to discuss your photographs (approximately 60 minutes)
- encouraged to organise a campus and/or College specific photo-exhibition on how students can excel academically (approximately 180 minutes of your personal time)

#### The photo elicitation interview

You will be asked to select one photograph from the first collection and one from the second collection. You will then be asked to explain your choice of photos, what are in the photos, what are not in the photos and describe the meaning they have for you.

With your consent, the photo-elicitation interview will be audio-recorded so the researcher can transcribe and analyse the interview at a later stage.

There are no foreseeable risks to your participating in the research project. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact any of the research team members detailed below, or Ms Phume Ximba of the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (031 260 3587, email [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)).

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason. A summary of the findings from the research study can be made available to you on request.

Thank you

Terry Shuttleworth  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Cell: 082 663 7947  
[shuttlebug38@gmail.com](mailto:shuttlebug38@gmail.com)

## *Appendix 10: Informed Consent Phase 2 Photo voice (high achieving students)*

Dear student

### **Consent to participate in a research study on empowerment and exceptional academic achievement by UKZN students**

#### The research study

We are conducting an institutional research study on undergraduate students who excel academically at UKZN and their experience of psychological empowerment and its relationship to high academic achievement. As an undergraduate student who has excelled so far at UKZN, you have been invited to participate in the research study. The aim of the project is to explore how psychological empowerment can affect academic achievement in a learning environment and the people, processes and structures that contribute either positively or negatively to students' academic achievement. The results from the study could assist UKZN to understand how psychological empowerment could be implemented into all aspects of the students learning environment that encourages and supports high levels of academic achievement. Your involvement in the study will include a Photo voice activity. Empowerment will be explored in the photo-elicitation interviews.

#### The Photo voice activity

Photo voice is a participatory research strategy, and if involved in this activity, you will be:

- inducted into the ethics and processes of Photo voice (approximately 45 minutes)
- provided with a digital camera
- asked to take photographs of the spaces, structured, and processes that enable and constrain your academic achievement (approximately 120 minutes of your personal time)
- invited to an individual photo-elicitation interview with one of the researchers to discuss your photographs (approximately 60 minutes)
- encouraged to organise a campus and/or College specific photo-exhibition on how students can excel academically (approximately 180 minutes of your personal time)

#### The photo elicitation interview

You will be asked to select one photograph from the first collection and one from the second collection. You will then be asked to explain your choice of photos, what are in the photos, what are not in the photos and describe the meaning they have for you.

With your consent, the photo-elicitation interview will be audio-recorded so the researcher can transcribe and analyse the interview at a later stage.

There are no foreseeable risks to your participating in the research project. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact any of the research team members detailed below, or Ms Phume Ximba of the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (031 260 3587, email ximbap@ukzn.ac.za).

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason. A summary of the findings from the research study can be made available to you on request.

Thank you

Terry Shuttleworth  
Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Cell: 082 663 7947  
shuttlebug38@gmail.com

#### DECLARATION

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name) hereby conform that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

#### Additional consent

I hereby consent to:

Audio recording of the in-depth interview that I participate in	YES	NO
For my actual name to be used in the research study	YES	NO
For my photographs to be used for the research study	YES	NO

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Appendix 11: Participant Information Sheet: Phase 2 Photo voice (high achieving students)***

Dear Student,

### **Photo voice information sheet and agreement to abide by Photo voice ethical and privacy considerations**

#### ***What is Photo voice?***

Photo voice is a participatory research method where the research participant:

- takes photographs in response to a prompt provided by the researcher,
- presents and discusses these photographs with the researcher in an interview, and
- selects some photographs from his/her collection to present and discuss with relevant stakeholders at campus exhibitions

In this research project, you will be taking photographs of the spaces, structures, and processes that enable and constrain your academic achievement at UKZN.

#### ***What privacy and ethical considerations are there is taking photographs within a research project?***

Three privacy and ethical considerations are important for you to remember. It is unethical for you to:

1. Take a photograph of someone without their consent (even if they are in a public space) as this could be an intrusion in their privacy,
2. Portray someone in an embarrassing or false light through a photograph, and
3. Use the photograph for commercial gain

Therefore, when participating in the Photo voice activity, you should always obtain consent from a potential photograph subject (or the subject's parent/guardian if the potential subject is a child). If a person (i.e., a potential photograph subject) refuses to have their photograph taken, you should not take the photograph.

You do not need consent if you are taking a photograph of a crowd of people, and individual identities in the crowd are not obviously recognisable. Or, if your focus of the photograph is an object (e.g., a building), and someone inadvertently walks into the photograph frame, you do not need that person's consent to take their photograph (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

***How will I take the photographs?***

You may take the photographs with your own digital camera (or camera enabled cell phone). However you may also request the use of a camera from the researchers, who will make this available to you.

***Who owns the photographs and how will they be used?***

A photographer owns the photographs he/she takes. However, we will request your consent to use copies of your photographs for research purposes (i.e., analysis and publication). We will only use the photographs for these purposes, and will not use the photographs for commercial purposes.

Terry Shuttleworth

Discipline of Psychology, School of Applied Human Sciences

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Cell: 082 663 7947

shuttlebug38@gmail.com

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understood what Photo voice is, and agree to abide by the ethical and privacy issues raised in this document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signed**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

*Appendix 12: Photo voice participant prompt*

To be supplied to each Photo voice participant as a prompt to taking photographs

**Taking Photographs:**

Photo collection 1:

- Take approximately 10 photographs that reflect the current spaces, structures, and processes that have empowered you to achieve exceptional exceptional academic achievement.

Photo collection 2:

- Take approximately 10 photographs that reflect the historical spaces, structures, and processes that empowered (and restricted) your (exceptional) academic achievement prior to starting your studies at UKZN (You could also choose some existing photographs for the second collection).

### *Appendix 13: Acknowledgement and release forms for photographic subjects*

To be handed to and signed by each photographic subject (or subject's guardian).

#### **Potential adult photographic subjects**

##### **Why are you being asked to have your photograph taken?**

- You are being asked to have your photograph taken by a student (and research participant) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal as part of a research project. The primary researcher for this project is Nicholas Munro, and he can be contacted on 033 260 5371, 071 607 3937 or munron@ukzn.ac.za. Please contact him should you have any questions about the research project.
- The research project is a study on exceptional academic achievement at UKZN, and the student who is taking the photograph is part of the study.
- The student is aiming to take photographs that represent the activities they engage/d in and experience/d as part of their pursuit towards exceptional academic achievement.

##### **How will the photograph be used/not used?**

- The student will show the photograph to Nicholas, and will have a discussion with him about the meaning of the photograph.
- The student may also show the photograph to a small group of other people at UKZN (either other research participants, or other UKZN students and staff interested in academic achievement at UKZN).
- The photograph will NOT be sold, or used to generate any income.
- If the student consents, the photograph may appear in the write up of this study, and/or in any publications or documents arising from this.
- Although your name and other identifying details will not appear along with any reproductions of the photograph, it is possible that others may recognise you from the photograph. If you are concerned about this, please decline the request to be photographed.

##### **Who owns the photograph?**

- A photograph belongs to the person who takes it. However, the student should offer to provide you with a copy of the photograph, and make the necessary arrangements to get this to you.

Agreement statement: By signing this consent form, I agree to have my photograph taken, and for the photograph to be used as mentioned above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Photographer**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Potential child photographic subjects

### Why are you being asked to have a photograph taken of your child?

- You are being asked to have a photograph taken of your child by a student (and research participant) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal as part of a research project. The primary researcher for this project is Nicholas Munro, and he can be contacted on 033 260 5371, 071 607 3937 or munron@ukzn.ac.za. Please contact him should you have any questions about the research project.
- The research project is a study on exceptional academic achievement at UKZN, and the student who is taking the photograph is part of the study.
- The student is aiming to take photographs that represent the activities they engage/d in and experience/d as part of their pursuit towards academic achievement.

### How will the photograph be used/not used?

- The student will show the photograph to Nicholas, and will have a discussion with him about the meaning of the photograph.
- The student may also show the photograph to a small group of other people at UKZN (either other research participants, or other UKZN students and staff interested in academic achievement at UKZN).
- The photograph will NOT be sold, or used to generate any income.
- If the student consents, the photograph may appear in the write up of this study, and/or in any publications or documents arising from this.
- Although your child's name and other identifying details will not appear along with any reproductions of the photograph, it is possible that others may recognise them from the photograph. If you are concerned about this, please decline the request for your child to be photographed.

### Who owns the photograph?

- A photograph belongs to the person who takes it. However, the student should offer to provide you with a copy of the photograph, and make the necessary arrangements to get this to you.

Agreement statement: By signing this consent form, I agree to have a photograph of my child taken, and for the photograph to be used as mentioned above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's age

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/guardian's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Photographer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***Appendix 14: Interview schedule: Phase 2 Photo-elicitation Interview Guide***

1. Introduction and debrief
2. Gather consent forms
3. Discuss the choice of photos with students. Some guided questions may include:
  - a. Tell me about the photo.
  - b. Why did you take it?
  - c. What's in the photo?
  - d. What's not in the photo?
4. A discussion will follow and the researcher will identify themes of empowerment.

## Appendix 15: Turnitin Originality Report

https://www.turnitin.com/newreport.asp?r=33.5960317702902&svr=10&lang=en\_us&oid=650129314&pbid=2&ft=1

preferences

turnitin Originality Report

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Word Count: 54704  
Submitted: 1

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dissertation  
By Terry Shuttleworth

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Empowerment and academically exceptional students Terry Shuttleworth

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Social Science, Research Psychology, in the School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal 47

March 2016

What if becoming who and what we truly are happens not through striving and trying but by recognizing and receiving the people, places and practices that offer us the opportunities we need to unfold? 38

Supervisor: Dr Nicholas Munro Declaration I, Terry Shuttleworth, declare that 1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research. 2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. 3. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. 4. This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then: a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics and inside quotation marks, and referenced. 5. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections. 2

The cover page from a Turnitin originality report is included as Appendix 15. Signature of student Signature of supervisor Date: 15th March 2016

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Hestella Schaninn, whose dedication and

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Class Masters student  
Assignment Masters dissertation  
Paper ID: 483320912
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[Submitted to University of South Africa](http://www.southafrica.net)
- < 1% match (Internet from 25-May-2014)  
<http://www.psyc.org>
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- < 1% match (Internet from 01-Nov-2014)  
<http://db3sqepoi5n3s.cloudfront.net>
- < 1% match (Internet from 13-Sep-2014)  
<http://prj.co.in>