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**Transitioning from homelands to South Africa: coping mechanisms  
employed by international students at institutions of higher learning**

**Masters Dissertation by**

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**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**  
**School of Built Environment and Development Studies**

**DECLARATION**

I, Nokuphila Dawn Ngema declare that:

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## ABSTRACT

While the number of international students studying in South Africa has increased in the past years, South Africa has become one of the few African countries where higher education is attainable and tertiary institutions are ranked amongst prominent international universities. However, the transition of international students from their homelands to South Africa may have a toll on them, which poses some unforeseen challenges. The aim of this study is to explore and analyse the experiences of international students and the various strategies or mechanisms they adopt to cope in South African universities and other institutions of higher learning. The secondary data used in this study was accessed through existing previous research studies, credible and authenticated published research from different reputable universities and credible online news sources. A content analysis strategy was used to analyse this information. Research shows that universities are increasingly required to educate a new generation of internationally competitive students to create an environment where innovation, adaptability, and change are encouraged, to make connections between global and local demands, and to maintain their cultural identities. Findings of this study show that international students often experience a variety of challenges as immigrants in host countries, and these include cultural shock, financial incapability, lack of communication due to language barrier and home sickness. In addition, students reported experiencing xenophobia, social and financial exclusions, and poor integration into the new environment remains some of the critical issues that affect international students in South Africa. With these experiences, the international students have developed different coping mechanisms, including joining immigrant social organisations, religious organisations, adaptation through learning local languages as a security measure and relying on other international student communities to tackle different social and economic hurdles. This study recommends that universities should provide compulsory local language proficiency training for international students, make services and opportunities inclusive and freely available for international students and encourage them to seek professional help for any psychological challenges due to different life stress and academic pressures.

**Key words:** international students, coping mechanisms, higher learning, South Africa

## **DEDICATION**

**Dedicated to my late father (Mr. Jefferey Langa Ngema) and my mother (Mrs. Jabu Witness Ngema)  
I love you both, and dad I miss you beyond measure. With mighty love, Mom and Dad this is for you!**

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*“Dominion and awe belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven.” (JOB 25:2)*

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa
AU	African Union
CHE	Council of Higher Education
GATS	General Agreement on Trade Services
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HSSREC KZN	Humanities and Social Research Ethics Committee KwaZulu-Natal
IAPO	International Academic Programmes Office
ISO	International Student Offices
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NDP	National Development Plan
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SA	South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Committee
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
SRC	Student representative Council
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
YU	Yale University

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# **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

## **1.1. Introduction**

Universities are increasingly required to educate a new generation of internationally competitive students, to create an environment where innovation, adaptability, and change are encouraged, to make connections between global and local demands, and to maintain their cultural identities (Khumalo 2017). Hillman (2019) define international students as students that are enrolled in an institution of higher education in a country where they are neither citizens nor refugees nor immigrants and they are there for a specified time. Students travel abroad for various reasons, some solely to improve their language skills, while for others it is to advance their specialised studies (Wu et al. 2015). For students in developing countries, travelling abroad to study may be because suitable tertiary education is either in short supply or unavailable altogether in their home countries. However various challenges may arise that affect the cross-cultural adaptation of international students like discrimination or loneliness just to mention a few.

The chance to explore a different culture, learn new ways of thinking and behaving, make new friends, and improve cross-cultural knowledge and skills can also be amongst the reasons why students pursue international study (Kolesovs and Melne 2017). Though challenges may arise coping strategies are always implemented by international students to fit into the new culture. However, studies have shown that it is easier to assimilate into the new culture if one was exposed to another culture at a young age, that is, a child who migrates with their parents to an international assignment or being a spouse of the sojourner (Khumalo 2017). In South Africa there is limited literature on the experiences of international students, despite South Africa being ranked among the top destinations for international students in the region and in the world. Thus, this study focuses on identifying the coping mechanisms put into play by international students, and the term international students and foreign students will be used interchangeably.

In this chapter, the background to this study is explained in detail, the problem statement is outlined, the main question and sub-questions are listed, summary of research findings and recommendations is provided, the purpose explained, and the chapter ends with a brief-outline of all the chapters.

## **1.2. International Students a Global Perspective**

With technological transformation there has been witnessed an increase in the volume and speed of global flows of people, information and images, investments, policies, and knowledge at an unprecedented pace and scale (Ratshilaya 2017) and this necessitated the global connectivity of higher education. In 2012, close to 4.5 million students were enrolled in institutions outside their country of citizenship, more than double than in 2000, with an annual growth rate of 7 % (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2014). For a long time, the English-speaking and western European countries have been the destination of many foreign students, the top five of these being the US, the UK, Australia, Germany, and France, which accounted for about 50 % of the world's students in 2012. Yet this trend has changed as other developing countries are becoming more favourable and accommodative in hosting foreign students (OECD 2014). A handful of developing countries now host a substantial number of international students coming from other developing countries, with India and the Philippines leading in this regard (Ratshilaya 2017).

The number of international students in institutions of higher learning has steadily increased worldwide. This can be attributed to the increase in the recognition of international qualifications and diversification of the work industry demand across the globe (Callaghan 2015). While there is a long history of people studying across borders, this trend has been on the rise since at least the mid-20th century, with the United States hosting the largest number of international students. South Africa, of late, has been a destination of many international students. For students in developing countries, travelling abroad to study may be because suitable tertiary education is either in short supply or unavailable altogether in their home countries. In addition, in many parts of the world, a foreign degree, especially if earned from certain countries, is honoured more than a local one. However, it has been noted that international education occurs across shared borders throughout the world. Among all OECD countries, 21 % of international students study in countries sharing a direct land or maritime border with their homeland (OECD 2014) and such border patterns have been generally observed within western and eastern Europe, East Asia, Latin America, and southern Africa.

A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2012) report on SADC students indicated that students from Southern Africa are the most mobile students worldwide, with six out of every hundred higher education students studying abroad. The new trend shows that more and more students strive to study within their own region rather than travel to more distant destinations. For example, the European Union, supported by the Erasmus programme

supports students who take the initiative to study in the same region, followed by the 15 southern African states within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). There has been a rapid cross-border exchange on the African continent, a clear pattern of movement from other African countries to South Africa (Sehoole 2016). In 2006, South Africa hosted over 53 000 international students, 67 per cent of whom were from other African nations (Du Plessis and Fourie 2011 cited by Khumalo 2017).

Statistics on student mobility show that in 2004, more than 2.5 million tertiary students studied outside their home countries compared to 1.75 million in 1999 that is a 41% increase (Hillman 2019). The Global Student Mobility 2025 report (Böhm et al. 2002) predicts that the demand for international tertiary education will increase to 7.2 million in 2025. While there is a long history of people studying across borders, the dawning of the mid-20th century, foresaw the United States (US) having an increase of 1 200 per cent since 1954 (Hillman 2019). The US and the United Kingdom (UK) hosted the largest numbers of international students: 764 495 and 480 755, respectively (OECD, 2014). The past few years which followed witnessed a rise of foreign students throughout all continents and they are taking centre stage in development due to their diversified knowledge.

Africa possesses the oldest system of higher education, which can be traced back to the age of the University of Timbuktu in the Kingdom of Mali, the school of Holy Scriptures in Ethiopia and Al-Azhar in Egypt (Chinyamurindi 2018). The migration of students from their country of origin to developed countries began especially during the colonial era but became more common when most of these colonised countries attained their independence. The movement pattern from Africa to Western countries was determined by colonisation, where student mobility was linked to countries of the previous coloniser. Most students from Francophone countries found themselves enrolling at French universities, while in Anglophone countries most students preferred to study in English-speaking countries (Woldegiorgis and Doeverspeck 2015). Hyams-Ssekasi et al. (2014) observe that the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), France and Germany enrolled most international students from African countries.

### **1.3. International students in South Africa**

South Africa, of late, have been a destination of many international students in pursuit of higher education. Recent studies and surveys report that there has been a huge growth in foreign

students studying in South African universities (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). This may be due to the proximity of the geographical region, historical connections, language, and the perceived high quality of education, accessibility, affordability, and high employability rate of South African graduates in the country (Mokhothu and Callaghan 2018). MacGregor (2014) observes that South African universities registered 12 557 international students in 1994; this increased to 72 999 in 2014. South African higher education has experienced fundamental change driven by local priorities. Since the attainment of its independence, South Africa made university education accessible to those who were previously excluded from attending elite top-tier universities reserved for white students under the apartheid government. This being the first step, South Africa being aware of the new trend and globalisation, has been about forging both a global and a national identity that takes into consideration local concerns and an international scope, hence incorporating international students in its educational cycle (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019).

The post-apartheid South Africa witnessed an increase in immigrants maybe due to the stable economy and better and greener pastures it provided. Universities and other institutions of higher learning foresaw an increase of international students. South African universities within the year 2013 saw close to 74 000 international students (undergraduate plus postgraduate) enrolments, which accounted for nearly 8% of the student body (ICEF Monitor 2013) and as the years progressed the number of international students increased. Most notably, the growth appears to be students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. It is argued that South Africa needs this enrolment from international students, as this provides much needed intellectual capital to the country (Ratshilaya 2017).

UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) study (2012) has pointed out that the South African higher education sector attracts many African international students because it is better resourced than its counterparts in other African countries. The lower cost of living and lower tuition fees in South Africa (SA) when compared to those of developed countries is another factor which attracts international students. Because of bilateral agreements with SADC countries, SADC students are subsidised at the same level as local students in SA public universities. According to MacGregor (2014), international students at SA's 23 public universities quadrupled since 1994 from 12,557 to 53,733 in 2006. Two out of three of the international students in SA universities are from the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC), with Zimbabwe as the major "source" country, followed

by Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. The numbers of students from non-SADC African countries also nearly doubled during the period 2001 to 2006.

The increase of international students in the South African universities may be credited for the educational gains in the SA society, the increase in the number of black graduates, and the expressed intention of non-SA PhD graduates to stay in SA after graduation (Sehoole 2016). These may contribute economically and with this South Africa has been put in the category of a predator country because of this brain drain. However, there are perceptions in SA that the universities, especially the historically white universities, were admitting the international black students to meet the admission quotas they have been set for black students. As Mahembe and Odhiambo (2019) notes, preference for non-SA black students over local black students is a result of the observation that the non-SA students tend to be more academically prepared and stronger than the local black students, and therefore, the universities do not have to spend copious amounts of resources in remedial and academic development of underprepared students, hence killing two birds with one stone by incorporating international students and meeting the government's quota.

In as much as foreign students benefit from the quality higher education liked to that of the developed countries, South Africa on its part yields benefits from these student's presence. Local South Africans through interactions with international students have gained global experience. The South African tourism industry has experienced significant growth by the arrival of foreign students who would want to explore the country's places of interest (Adams et al. 2014). This has translated into huge revenue generation and employment opportunities for the economy. Hence South Africa being the hub of foreign students has its perks.

#### **1.4. Case study of South Africa**

The popularity of South Africa as a leading destination of choice for African students and others from other continents makes it a worthwhile case study to better understand the phenomenon of international students. Like the top global recipients (US, the UK, Australia, Germany, and France), South Africa's inbound rate exceeds its outbound rate (Lee 2015). Of late, an increase in international students choosing South Africa as a destination for the purpose of higher education has been witnessed. According to Mokhothu and Callaghan (2018) out of 380 376 students from Africa who chose to study abroad (a total which represents approximately 10% of international students globally), South Africa took the second position

about the preferred destination of international students, with a 15% market share, whilst France remained the leading destination with 29.2% of sojourners electing to study there. Though by the passing of years there has been a change in the whole statistics, South Africa reigning high.

## **1.5. Problem Statement**

The number of international students studying in South Africa has increased in the past years as South Africa has developed to be one of the few African countries where education is attainable and where tertiary institutions have been ranked amongst prominent international universities (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing, 2015). South Africa like most developing countries seeks to attract foreign students to its universities to improve the quality and cultural composition of the student body, gain prestige and earn income (Ratshilaya 2017). However, this transition from their homelands by these international students may have a toll on them, posing some unforeseen challenges. Research shows that international students face various challenges which include, difficulties in finding accommodation, learning the education system and academic culture of the country, discrimination, developing new friendship groups and life-threatening incidents like xenophobia. Strategies foreign students employ from the results show foreign students associating with students from the same culture as a strategy which enhances the adjustment process. Universities were seen providing orientation to international students to make them feel accommodated. However, from these there is need for the continued and improved support from the government and universities to accommodate foreign students. Thus, whilst previous studies have focused on understanding the experiences of migrants or international students, this study focus on the coping mechanisms, how students from different countries cope in the South African environment, the strategies they apply to fit especially in institutions of higher learning. Hence it is this gap this research seeks to explore, which was neglected by many researchers. South Africa has emerged not only as a regional hub but as an international destination for students who wish to pursue tertiary education. This is clear from evidence that nearly half of international students prefer South Africa as their higher education destination (Lee and Schoole 2015).

## **1.6. Key Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyse the experiences of international students and the various strategies or mechanisms they adopt to cope at South African universities and other institutions of higher learning. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyse various challenges faced by international students in South Africa's institutions of higher learning.
- To examine the various coping mechanisms employed by international students in the host country.
- To evaluate the initiatives by the government in assisting international students in their challenges.
- To identify the initiatives by the institutions in assisting the international students to cope.

## **1.7. Key Research Questions**

The research study sought to investigate the coping mechanisms employed by foreign students in institutions of higher learning in the host country. Therefore, the key research questions which guided this study are as follows:

- What are the various challenges faced by international students in South Africa's institutions of higher learning?
- What are the various strategies employed by international students as coping mechanisms in the host country?
- What are the initiatives put in place by the government in assisting international students with their problems?
- What are the initiatives put in place by various institutions in assisting international students to cope?

## **1.8. Research Structure**

### **Chapter 1**

This chapter introduces the background of the study, its aims, and objectives. The research problem of the study is also presented. The chapters in this dissertation are also briefly outlined in this section.

## **Chapter 2**

This chapter explores the literature and the theoretical framework of the study. International and South African literature is reviewed for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon under study. The theoretical framework is discussed. In this study Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration model (SIM) is explained and each component of the model is discussed.

## **Chapter 3**

This chapter outlines the research methodology and the method utilised in conducting the study. A desktop study is adopted. The secondary analysis is discussed in detail as the research methodology of this study. Secondary data for this study is collected through the review of books, journal articles, websites, news articles, local government policies, government publications and relevant documents on international student's experiences.

## **Chapter 4**

This chapter interprets and analyses the research findings of the study. Findings derived from the analysis of responses from various research of international students from South African universities will be analysed.

## **Chapter 5**

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

### **1.9. Summary**

This chapter lays a foundation for the better understanding of the whole research. Key background of this study has been highlighted, which include the coping mechanisms employed by international students at institutions of higher learning, in the host country. The challenges they also faced have been explored and the contribution of the government and universities in lessening the whole ordeal brought out. A brief background to the birth of international students was outlined. The problem statement, key research questions and objectives of the study were clearly outlined in this chapter. It also presented the structure of the chapters of the study. The next chapter is going to explore the literature available on

international student's experiences and analyses Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of student integration which is the theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Introduction**

South Africa is witnessing a growth in international student enrolment, and this is prompted by various factors. The tertiary education sector has witnessed a massive expansion over the past decades. According to Beall (2015), tertiary education is increasingly seen by governments as a major contributor to national wealth and economic development, however due to the increasingly competitive external environment, the need then arose for continuous improvement by countries and adopt an international stance. Thus, to maintain global relevance, internationalisation of both teaching and research has become critical objectives for most tertiary institutions (Beall 2015).

The understanding of matters that affect international students can be useful in the provision of high-quality service (Nzivo and Chuanfu 2013). As Shao and Scherlen (2011) cite that international students should be viewed as valuable customers in how they operate. Therefore, to ensure a thorough understanding of the study the researcher perceived the importance of studying existing literature on experiences of international students. The goal being able to have an enhanced understanding of some of the experiences and challenges that come with being an international student in a foreign country (Khumalo 2017), but the focus zeroed in on understanding how the foreign students cope and present some of their highlights about being international students.

### **2.2. Defining International Student**

There have not been conflicting ideas when it came to define international students amongst scholars (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019). According to McClure (2007), international students are defined as students, usually in early adulthood, who study in foreign educational schools and universities. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2014), define international students as those who travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study. These students may travel abroad solely or mainly to improve their skills, or to advance their specialised studies. In many parts of the world, a foreign degree, especially if earned from certain countries, is honoured more than a local one. (Mda 2010).

International students are individuals who come from different countries with diverse religious beliefs and political structures; yet these individuals share similar situations as international students, allowing them to be grouped and identified as one (Misra and Castillo 2004). Kelo et al. (2006: 210) highlights that international students have at least a certain unit of a study program or a period time in a country in which they moved. Amaechi et al (2013: 1), go on to define international students “as students that are enrolled in an institution of higher education in a country where they are neither citizens nor refugees nor immigrants”. This means that international students hold some form of documentation that is different from other foreign nationals such as asylums, refugee, or citizen documentation. They may use what is termed a study permit which is also used in South Africa (Khumalo 2017).

### **2.3. Understanding the “Push and Pull” factors for International Students to study in South Africa (SA)**

There are a growing number of international students enrolling in different universities across the globe mainly in industrialised countries in the US, the UK and France (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). However, South Africa has been witnessed to be rising amongst these giants becoming the hub of many foreign students, and Africans falling within the SADC region dominating in SA universities (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019). Among other reasons for Africans to choose SA universities include the proximity of the country geographically, historical connections and language. Various push factors have been noted to this recent development of why foreign students leave their homes for South African universities.

Economic and social forces within the home country serve to "push" student's abroad (Yao 2016). However, the decision as to which host country they will select is also dependent on a variety of "pull" factors. Although there are enticing factors which can draw an international student towards a certain country, it should be noted that the decision for the desired destination rests entirely upon the individual (Chinyamurindi 2018). The reasons for studying in South African universities given by students from industrialised countries differ from those of students from the Third World (Kraak 2013).

The reasons why students pursue international studies differ. They include the chance to explore a different culture, learn new ways of thinking and behaving, make new friends, and improve their cross-cultural knowledge and skills (Khumalo 2017). So as for some it will be to pursue development whilst for others it will be mainly to expand their language base and cycle

of friends (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019). On a personal level, international students may develop new outlooks, increase their self-esteem and confidence, and mature because of their independent life experiences in another culture. The need to develop pushes many international students especially in the African continents toward SA which has proved to be already the hub of many foreign nationals. Thus, for some foreign students acquiring foreign education is mainly feeding on their ego or the zeal to explore.

Third world countries do not have enough tertiary institutions. Taking the examples of Lesotho, Botswana, and Namibia each only boast one public university (Sehoole 2011, Chinyamurindi 2018). Therefore, such a scenario compels different individuals to look towards South Africa for further education. In some countries local academic programmes are very limited and highly selective (Nghia 2015). An increase in the prospective student population in some countries also had an impact on the movement of students and South Africa becoming the desired destination. So, a great number of students, who do not obtain admission to academic institutions at their home countries, often choose to move overseas for their education and those in the African continent tend to flood SA universities (Chinyamurindi 2018). Thus, the limited number of tertiary institutions and increasing number of students seeking higher education in most third world countries compel students to seek solutions abroad, in this case South Africa the hub of many international students especially those in the African continent.

The on-going debate about globalisation had directed emphasis to be on economics as well as cultural and social independence (Ang and Van Dyne 2015). This encourages competition, intellectual and skills development amongst nations and this factor is perceived to be a motivator of student's movement to other countries. According to Sehoole (2016), globalisation therefore is one of the factors that make students seek access to degrees from countries other than their own. Since competition and development would be amongst intellectuals from different countries, it becomes advantageous for prospective students to seek programmes that could offer them training which would enable them to become competitive. Thus, the need to be competitive and sustainable in the global world necessitated the need for international education.

The lack of the preferred course or degree programmes in the home country, a stable and peaceful academic environment and diversification of the academic experience prompts students especially in African countries to seek enrolment at South African universities, which possess all the above attributes (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). South Africa has

proved to be harbouring a diversified student board and workforce. This not being the picture prevailing in many developing countries it becomes more than necessary for students to enrol in universities outside their country to have a taste of diversity and a broader academic exposure.

Politics also play a significant part in the migration of students from their home country to South Africa. Since the attainment of independence in SA it has been believed to be peaceful and booming economically (Sehoole 2015). Findings from a study done at KwaZulu-Natal university brought out that political instability in many countries but stability in South Africa favoured this movement. The politics prevailing in Zimbabwe had left most of its institutions nearly crippled and many people running to SA for higher education in the hope of getting employed in the host country upon completion of their degrees (Lee 2017). In addition, Zimbabwean international students reported political instability, coupled with high rate of unemployment and inflation that compel them to want to pursue their tertiary studies in South Africa (Lee 2017).

South Africa's institutions had proved to be possessing affordable fees structures compared to the western country's universities (Kraak 2013). So, it has become a preference for many parents or sponsors. Many students in many developing countries then find themselves left with only two options, to either choose SA as the dream destination for pursuing higher learning or study home. This also being a cycle for years, family and peer influence began to dominate and every relative who studied at any SA university encouraged kin and offered referral of SA being the ideal destination for any higher learning experiences. Students may have their own personal reasons for preferring to study in South Africa (Lee and Sehoole 2015) but most international students at South African universities have been influenced by several regional policies that seek to promote regionalisation and brain circulation within Africa.

The promotion of the regionalisation of higher education by the AU (African Union) is aimed at encouraging African students to study within the region so that critical human resource capacity does not move out of the region (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck 2015). Governments in different countries have also embarked on different initiatives to support those seeking to pursue their education in SA. For instance, Lesotho students, who wished to further their studies in the institutions of higher education in South Africa, could get financial support from the donor agencies and their government (Kuili 2000). Students from Zimbabwe are also sponsored by presidential scholars and other independent donors. The British Council in the

late 1990s also realised that paying fees for a student in Britain cost them thirteen thousand pounds a year, an amount which would pay for seven students if it was a South African university (Kuili 2000). Thus, all the above scenarios become push factors for students to study in SA as they are to dance to the tunes of such initiatives to get a sponsored higher education.

It has been noted that students from industrialised nations move to other countries for linguistic training, cultural enrichment, and in some cases for the experience of living in another unfamiliar place (Kolesovs and Melne 2017). Some academic institutions in North America and Western Europe award academic credit for foreign study in such fields as foreign languages making studying abroad an important part of the curriculum. As Kurpis and Hunter (2016), argued SA has been a destination of a diverse population, rich in different languages and cultures, hence provides the so wanted cultural experience and development.

Callaghan (2015) noted that a combination of demographic and economic drivers, bilateral trade patterns, and shifts in inbound and outbound student flows linked to growing global competition and rapid expansion of tertiary education capacity, will re-shape the global higher education landscape by 2020. This has been witnessed and many nations are striving to cope in the dynamic world. South Africa had undergone rapid development since its attainment of its independence in 1994 and has attracted a vast majority of international students especially from other African nations. This may be due to SA being closer to home for students from sub-Saharan Africa, the cost of living being reasonable, living conditions good, and visa requirements often minimal (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). South African higher education has also been noted to be affordable, particularly relative to the UK and US, and government subsidies exist under which regional students pay the same fees as local students. South African schools are of high quality, and South African qualifications are well-recognised across Africa. Thus, it is a combination of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors which determine the choosing of SA as a destination of many international students.

#### **2.4. Challenges Faced by International Students in South Africa**

Studying outside one’s home country has been described to be a “life changing venture” and associated with “hardship and struggle” for the student (Forbush and Foucault-Welles 2016: 1), and such an experience does not only demand total commitment but also the need to constantly re-adjust to changes as they are presented. The journey may be experienced differently among sojourners and student community. Whilst for some students living in a new

country and experiencing a new culture may be exciting, fulfilling and stimulating, for others it might be frustrating and confusing.

Higher education is of paramount especially in stimulating a country's economy and empowering young people with the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for the 21st-century workplace (CHE, 2013). However, numerous factors have been noted that can negatively impact the pursuit of a tertiary qualification by a university student (Cilliers 2014). These include financial constraints, interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges, academic under preparedness and difficulties in balancing academic and personal life just to mention a few (Lewin and Mawoyo,2014; Van Zyl 2016).

The high cost of housing is a major concern, with housing problems coupled with financial constraints it becomes stressful for the international student (Bartram 2013). This challenge is further escalated if students are not being housed by the university, which is usually the case given the high demand and short supply of university housing. In SA, international students who are to acquire their own housing in places like Cape Town find accommodation to be scarce and very expensive (Marginson et al. 2010). International students financially challenged may unfortunately find themselves living in overcrowded and unsafe living conditions (Van Heerden-Pieterse 2015).

Wang et al. (2015), posits that as much as enrolling at a tertiary institution can be seen as a very positive event, rendering great opportunities for the academic and social development of an individual, it can also be accompanied by multiple and significant life challenges. Students always fail to cope with the new environment and the stressors associated with it and this feeling is usually strong amongst the first years (Gomes et al. 2014; Mudhovozi 2011). These challenges may contribute towards psychological and physical ill-health because of the sense of not belonging (Kolesovs and Melne 2017). Several studies conducted on international students have found that poor language competence is at the root of feelings of loneliness, homesickness, sadness, and frustration (Gomes et al. 2014, Martinez-Callaghan and Gill-Lacruz 2017).

Culture shock upon entry into a new country and culture is one of the challenges experienced by international students (Chinyamurindi 2018). This can be exhibited through irritability, hypercritical thoughts, sadness, fear, and frustration. The unfamiliar language, food, situations of daily life and the way things look are not what the international student is used to. This is in line with Maundeni et al. (2010) study which reported that international students encounter

language problems, lack of social support networks, financial problems, and role strain. The most notable challenge faced by international students, however, comes from making successful intercultural transition whilst remaining centred to their academic objectives (Chen and Song 2012).

Language barriers seem to be the root cause of most of the challenges of international students (Martinez-Callaghan and Gill-Lacruz 2017). The issue of language appears to emerge due to the cultural differences that may be in existence especially within a campus setting (Yao 2016). As Gebhard (2012) notes, adaption to the university life for the international student solely rests on being quickly phased with the local language(s). International students often complain having trouble understanding the professors and their expectations and the grading systems they use (Khumalo 2017). This lack of skill in the language on the part of the foreign student limits their social interaction and social networking with other social groups, especially if they are students from non-English speaking countries (Li et al. 2014; Telbis et al. 2014; Hegarty 2014; Lin and Scherz 2014). International students with language and cultural barriers tend to feel isolated and lonely (Wu et al. 2015).

A growing body of research indicates that international students in South Africa's higher education institutions are exposed to ever greater levels of stress (Van Zyl 2016). Increases in stress levels could negatively impinge on students' academic performance and levels of well-being (Mudhovozi 2011). A study among South African medical students identified the academic curriculum, workload issues, personal problems, communication and language difficulties, and financial challenges as prominent stressors (Naidoo et al. 2014). Various findings suggest that university students often view stress as a negative experience and tend to adopt ineffective coping strategies, and struggle to access resources that could assist them in managing challenges (Lewin and Mawoyo 2014). The impaired student is at a heightened risk for the development of, amongst other things, psychological disorders, and academic attrition (Van Zyl and Rothman 2012). The latter could ultimately result in low quality of life among university students (Van Zyl and Rothman 2012).

Moving to a new country or environment means meeting new people and making new friends (Ang and Van Dyne 2015). Before attending university, students spent much time with the same group of friends and peers at secondary school. There they develop strong support groups and friendship structures. These, together with academic challenges, which include demanding coursework and a heavy academic workload can be stressful for the foreign student (Chen et

al. 2014). A great deal of time is needed to develop intimacy which students often find they do not have, particularly in their first year of their studies at tertiary institutions. Other challenges like problematic relationships with roommates and significant others may arise (Secuban 2012). Negotiating respect of personal property, personal space, sleeping and relaxation needs can be a complicated task, especially when roommates are of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds with different values (Ratshilaya 2017). Students' inability to cope with this type of challenge is likely to culminate in depression and confusion (Khumalo 2017).

The new environment in which the students find themselves with new processes, procedures and people can create emotional problems (Schreuders-van den Bergh and Du Pless 2016). Students may feel intimidated and become inhibited, in turn reducing positive learning and social experiences. Homesickness which becomes the common feature can often cause a delay in the adjustment process of students because their focus is missing home (Yao 2016). International students often lose focus of their main priorities which should be making new friends and beginning their academic career if all they are thinking about is home. Hence, they keep living in the past and not the current university life. Isolation and anti-social behaviour usually develop in the process chasing away potential peers (Callaghan 2005). Students who isolate themselves spend much of their time in their rooms alone, making no effort to make friends or getting involved in sport or other student activities (Farris, 2010).

Khumalo (2017) argued that though South Africa had put into place laws which were to do away with racism and discrimination since its gaining of independence, the shackles of its inequality can still be felt in some parts of SA. The university system has officially broken with the apartheid system of the past, but discrimination related to race, gender, and socio-economic standing have persisted (Ratshilaya 2017). Though South Africa is about 80% black, universities such as the University of Cape Town register less than 25% of blacks and fees of any sort are disadvantaging black students, who typically come from economically challenged backgrounds or countries. This means for the foreign student financial support positively influences their retention at university especially in the first year. Sledge (2012) further adds that an essential aspect of the decision to go to a higher education institution is whether a student can afford it or not.

International students sometimes are faced by financial problems upon entering a higher education system. A study by Letseka et al. (2010) revealed that the most common reason for dropping out of university by mainly Black African students is financial problems. Families,

often offer financial support, making tuition affordable for students, however, for many African family's tertiary education fees are a burden. International students find themselves having to supplement student loans or bursaries by finding part-time employment (Forbush and Foucault-Welles 2016). It must be noted that sometimes students must work, while studying, as they need to financially assist their families (Marginson et al. 2010), thus this places additional pressure on the student. However, the foreign student situation in this regard can be further complicated by student visa stipulations, which not uncommonly restrict the number of hours the students may engage in paid employment (Kraak 2013). The financial problems reported by international students range from struggling to make ends meet; receiving remittance requests from family members back home; and refraining from asking family for financial assistance, a gesture not to also burden them. For female international students, especially Africans it has been noted that where part time jobs were not paying much or were not in one's reach, they would resort to prostitution to make ends meet (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019).

The newly found independence and responsibility on the part of the first-year university student can pose some challenge for some time (Khumalo 2017). As Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) note first year students may have difficulty adapting to university life and handling their new-found freedom with minimal adult supervision. They may experience anxiety when they leave behind the social support of family, friends, and familiar surroundings. As they are usually told what to do, how to do it, and where to go being their own masters can be a bit hectic until after adjustment. At university, only a few directives are given and from there students are expected to assume responsibility for making decisions and are given the freedom to do so (Kraak, 2013). For the foreign student it means being independent for the first time and in a foreign and unfamiliar environment. High schools provide frequent checks on whether the assigned task has been prepared compared to universities where performance is measured per semester (Khumalo 2017). Thus, it takes time for a foreign student to get the ropes of the new environment and know the extent of one's knowledge at university.

Mbara and Celliers (2013) reported that traffic congestion, long waiting times for public transport, harassment from taxi drivers and assaults are challenges that frequently affect first year students residing off campus. Since they will not be accustomed to the way activities are carried out in South Africa foreign students always fall prey to the locals who are not humane enough to be accommodative. Wu et al. (2015), further postulate that the perceived cultural discrimination, verbal insults, and physical assaults experienced by international students both

inside and outside the university have less to do with their own adjustment and have more to do with the host institution and the host society's shortcomings.

More so South Africa faces pressing economic problems that have had an impact on the higher education system and its students (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). This has resulted in pressing social concerns relating to discrimination and xenophobia became apparent. Anti-immigrant sentiments became pronounced in the early 1990s when South Africa transitioned into a democracy and experienced an increase in immigration from other African countries and the numbers are still increasing (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019). Violence against immigrants from other African nations have become a regular sight and international students especially from African states have fallen victim hence they live in fear and sometimes isolation.

Chimucheka (2012) suggests that the movement of international students is limited due to the perceived discrimination by South Africans to foreign nationals. Evidence exists that international students refrain from travelling for leisure purposes (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). This discrimination is observed in many current contexts, such as fingerprinting and profiling procedures, the long processes that international students must go through to get their study permits or visas approved (Khumalo 2017).

In as much as financial challenges have been noted as one of the problems encountered by foreign students, it has been reported that international students in South Africa do not necessarily share similar financial concerns as students are not a homogenous group and they come from different parts of the world with different monetary resources (Khumalo 2017). Thus, while international students from the Americas, Asia and Europe tend to be well funded and economically secure managing to spend and travelling to many leisure places, international students from Africa may experience more financial concerns (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). Thus, the challenges international students face in South African universities differs depending on the background and country of origin (Du Plessis and Fourie 2011).

## **2.5. Historical Overview of Experiences of International Students in SA: Coping Mechanisms**

People constantly redefine themselves through interactions with a multitude of individuals from distinguishable and diverse intercultural settings and situations (Ang et al. 2007). This may be the first step into coping by assimilating and familiarising with a different culture. Knowledge of cultural adjustments is important to be able to operate effectively in a new

cultural setting (Brislin et al. 2006; Callaghan 2015). Transition to university life requires that students learn to cope with a different interpersonal environment which imposes many intellectual, social, and instrumental demands (Wintre et al. 2011). International students use different types of coping strategies so that the selected strategies coincide with the situational context (Doumit, 2012). Coping has been found to have two main functions, that is, to regulate emotions and to direct behaviour in addressing the problem (Ramesar et al., 2009).

As the saying goes birds of a feather flock together, according to Zhai (2002), literature points out that international students have a tendency of associating with one another as a coping mechanism. A study on international students in Thailand by Zhai (2002) showed that international students usually consulted with their other fellow international students on personal issues as they shared similar adjustment issues and seems to have understood one another's struggles. In the case of foreign students in South Africa, the same scenario seemed to be in existence as foreign students seek emotional support and advice from fellow country students (Mudhovozi 2011).

Hendrickson et al. (2011) stated that international students have more friendships with people from their country of origin. This has been to some extent seen to decrease homesickness and loneliness. As Pangle (2002) argued that friendships are regarded as important components in individual lives as they satisfy deep personal and emotional need. The feeling of social exclusion would be minimised. The need of belonging and love would have been achieved (Zalenski and Raspa 2006) as per the fundamental needs of human needs as highlighted in the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Social support is another powerful tool used by foreign students in dealing with stressful life changes (Khumalo 2017). Families form the biggest support system of international students for the effective psychological and academic adaptation (Liamputtong 2011). Maundeni (2001) reported that communication with roommates, religious group members, and host families also facilitated adjustment. Association with students from the same culture enhances the adjustment process by providing much needed social network and they also provide the much-needed family not physically present.

When faced with an educational, vocational, or a personal problem, international students seek help from faculty members (Wang et al. 2015). Though in the South African context westerners were found to be visiting the universities counselling division for assistance or talk their problems out, some international students, Black African and Asian students, did not make use

of these services (Hyams-Ssekasi et al. 2014) as they associate counselling with mental weakness (Heggins and Jackson 2003). Thus, the African and Asian students feel more comfortable when sharing their frustrations or receiving advice from their elders or senior students from their home country (Lee 2010), while the students from the western countries favoured the counselling service. Hence coping differs depending on one's background.

Loneliness can be venom which can cause a foreign student contemplate suicide, so to cope with loneliness, some international students may engage in various religious activities (Sawir et al. 2008). Religion according to Davies and Thate (2015) is a powerful force which can unite everyone under one cause. It is believed that religion has a beneficial effect of increasing self-control, helping individuals to accept the situation and adjust the self by exerting greater control over their own behaviours (McCullough and Willoughby 2009). Religion also promotes fellowship with others thus expanding one's social network.

The social media have gained dominancy worldwide as it has become a source of interaction and socialisation. Many foreign students have resorted to social networking as a mechanism to deal with personal loneliness. Constant communication with friends and relatives from their home country kills the boredom and make them have that sensation of still being home with their families. This kind of interaction with family and friends through social networking has emerged as a source of support that helps foreign students to persist academically (Gomes et al. 2014).

According to Farris (2010), a student who finds himself or herself isolated during their first year at university face a difficult in adjustment. To compact these foreign students, get involved in different social or sporting activities. This makes it easier to assimilate in a more cheerful environment where team-work spirit is entailed (Salami 2011). Contemporary areas of investigation have also pointed to the importance of, amongst other things, mindfulness, meditation, cognitive behavioural strategies and healthy living through exercise, nutrition, and sleep as relevant coping strategies (Brown and Gerberg 2010; Cuddy 2015; Robertson 2010).

These coping strategies were found to be common amongst foreign students from western countries (Brown and Gerberg 2010, Cuddy 2015, Robertson 2010 and McGonigal 2015). Mason (2017) in his qualitative research involving a sample of first year South African foreign students identified that actively searching for meaning could assist students in coping more effectively with any form of stress. Religious orientation, social relationships, and academic studies, which were the source of meaning, appeared to play a role in supporting students in

pursuing and realising important life outcomes (Nell 2014). The process of active meaning-making may serve as an important coping strategy to the international student (Nell 2014; Manning-Jones et al. 2015; Mason 2017). Thus, once one finds meaning derived following stressful experiences, then offering solutions and coping mechanisms becomes easier.

According to Mudhovozi (2012), positive coping is usually witnessed amongst students who would have allowed themselves the experience of university life and somehow find solutions to some of the problems it presents. When it comes to academic pressure, Molapsi (2009), reports that other foreign students use positive methods of coping to deal with them like breaking down modules into sections, form study groups and try to avoid time-wasting activities, hence making ends meet academically. International students also were found consulting lecturers and studying hard to cope with the challenge of facing different instructional methods and increased workload in a tertiary environment (McGonigal 2015). Though some foreign students opted for avoidant and withdrawal as coping strategies to the new environment such a tactic had negative impact like depression (Kraak 2013).

Since SA has become the dream destination of many foreign students it had automatically created a big community of foreign students, who already share the plight of being foreigners (Khumalo 2017). The increasing number, of international students in the universities is making it easier for foreign students to feel comfortable away from home and though most of them may not necessarily be close to local students, sharing the experience of being foreign with many others unites them. Also sharing the same language of communication and of learning especially for those who speak English makes it easier to adapt away from home for being in the majority lessened the feeling of being foreign (Robertson, 2010).

In different institutions, different clubs or societies have been formed to make foreign students feel at home or cope at a rapid pace (Chinyamurindi 2018), and these include a Mauritian Club at the University of Cape Town, and a Zimbabwean Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Mauritian student in KwaZulu-Natal is a regular at the Zimbabwean Society functions.

Mda (2010) also notes that some students chose to study in the part of SA where they felt they already fit perfectly. As Mda (2010), in his study states a Mauritian student had chosen Durban since she obviously looks like South Africans of Indian origins thereby seen as a local, as the Durban population has a large concentration of people of Indian. This was a benefit and a better coping strategy to choose an area dominated by people who seemed like of the same origin.

However, as she did not share the history of the local Indian-South Africans and had a problem with being classified” “Indian” when she had no heritage links with India or Indians, upon being discovered to be an outsider hostility was levelled against her. The difference in culture and history from the SA Indians resulted in divisions among the people of the same country (Mda 2010). Obviously in her case she felt closer to the foreign Zimbabweans than the local Indians.

The strong desire by foreign students to belong and to feel socially accepted sometimes compels them to engage in maladaptive coping mechanisms (Kraak 2013). These practices may involve illegal drug use, alcohol abuse and promiscuous sexual behaviours” (Thurber and Walton, 2012; Fischer, 2009). Though to students it is a way to cope with the new environment and newfound freedom, scholars such as Fischer (2009) and Leong, et al. (1997) argued that these types of avoidant coping methods are dysfunctional and can lead to withdrawal, negative attitudes, and avoidance of the real problems.

Reviewed literature also brings out the contribution of most international institutions of higher education devoted resources to facilities, programmes and services aimed at assisting international students to integrate successfully in the new country and institutional culture (Hyams-Ssekasi et al. 2014; Gomes et al. 2014; Schweisfurth and Gu 2009). Though the issue of assimilation and coping may rest entirely on the individual, these facilities may act as catalysts to facilitate coping. Students have been found to cope differently basing on their background or country of origin. Students from individualistic cultures such as America use primary or externally-targeted control strategies to cope with stress (Morling et al. 2002), which is the attempt to influence the external environment according to the self’s needs whilst African students because of their collectivistic culture tend to use secondary or internally target control strategies , which is the attempt to adjust part of the self to accept the situation (Morling et al. 2002 Thurber and Walton 2012; Khademi and Aghdam 2012).

Monkhe (2015) propose that the country’s long history of segregation contribute dearly to the negative behaviour of citizens towards foreign nationals. Xenophobia attacks due to the socio-economic and political conditions can be argued to be attributes of the past (Khumalo 2017). In as much as stable coping styles do exist, and are important, coping is highly contextual and for its effectiveness it must change over time and contexts (Eisenbarth 2012; Folkman 2008; Govender et al. 2015). A significant amount of international evidence exists about the experience of stress and coping among university students in international contexts (Bowers

and Lopez 2010; Kim et al. 2010). However, stress and coping among undergraduate students within a South African context still deserves more attention (Naidoo et al. 2014).

## **2.6. Opportunities for International Tertiary Graduates**

Studying outside one's own country has got its perks, despite experiencing the new culture and environment, globally an internationally educated student is more competitive than the one educated in the country of origin (Beall 2015). This has made an international student after graduation to have a higher chance of getting easily employed. A strong body of empirical evidence suggest that internationally produced research is of highest quality at least because it provides solutions to global challenges and benefits more than one nation (Beall 2015). Thus, it is this diversity research and knowledge most countries and organisations will be gunning for, which make international tertiary graduates' valuable assets.

It was observed that students moved to other countries to gain expertise so that when they reached their homes, they could be appointed to leadership positions in domestic, local, scientific, and academic communities (Ratshilaya 2017). It is a great perception that the worlds value the knowledge and institutional patterns of major industrialised countries, hence being part of such a country can empower an individual (Leung et al. 2014).

Foreign students are then witnessed moving to universities recognised abroad, to attain the standards that the international community had legitimised. Thus, students presumably to have acquired their university qualifications in countries like the US or UK associated with an industrialised mind and preferences for a plethora of job vacancies.

Studying abroad can be a life-changing experience for students, from enhancing the student's global network to experiencing a new culture thus the benefits of one's education and career are significant (Kurpis and Hunter 2016). Having a global connection to some extent may make it easier for a foreign student to acquiring a job anywhere in the world. Studying abroad helps in building invaluable relationships with people from all over the world, hence it broadens the international connections while having the opportunity of meeting people that could turn into life-long friends. Some connections can even lead to career opportunities, including internships, job offers, and business partners. The various friends and exposure may be actors on which a foreign student can refer and consult for various employment opportunities across the globe (Ang and Dyne 2015). So, unlike a student who would have learnt in his or her own

home country confined to the knowledge of his own nation, the employment pool which an international student must choose from is broad (Ang and Dyne 2015).

Shulsinger (2017), also notes that the benefits of being a foreign graduate is that foreign qualifications are significant on the national or international labour market and usually reward the possessors with higher salaries and good possibilities for higher positions. An internationally recognised qualification also comes with better remuneration and higher post in an organisation (Chen et al. 2014). Thus, it is easier for a student with an internationally recognised qualification to filter quickly to a higher and handsomely paying post within any organisation. Given this scenario, it's no wonder that the number of students earning a degree outside of their home country has tripled over the past 25 years (Scianna 2019). Over a million students are scattered throughout the globe in the hope to attain a foreign degree which will render them eligible or a perfect fit in any country for the completed program.

Mokhothu and Callaghn (2018) also note the importance of enriching one's language skills by studying abroad. Studying a language in class and applying it in real life situations have been discovered to be not at par. While studying a language in class is rewarding, applying it to the real world is an entirely different experience (Welch 2014). An international student can pick up conversational language not studied in class, enabling him or her to speak like a local. This in turn can have a positive impact on an individual's career. Organisations with multinational or global presence have been found to be in a position of favouring the employing of international graduates because of their strong diversified language skills. A graduate interested in breaking into the world of international business or global health, for instance, need to have a strong foreign language skill and experience that demonstrates those skills can help the resume stand out to employers (Shulsinger 2017).

Many careers in international relations and diplomacy rely heavily on foreign language skills, so international students possess such attributes, making them the outstanding candidates for such posts. As Bhagan (2018) state, although there are no specific language requirements to become a foreign service officer however proficiency and experience with a foreign language is a key component of a candidate's competitiveness during the selection to become a diplomat, ambassador, or other positions with the United Nations. Hence emerging as a foreign graduate has advantages.

It is common belief that for an international student to cope in a host country he or she should adapt to that countries culture (Schreuders-van den Bergh and Du Pless 2016). So, it is also

this belief that can help launch an international graduate's career as they are believed to be more competitive in the workforce. It gives the international graduate the opportunity to show future and current employers that they have the open mind, resourcefulness, and drive needed to adapt to a different environment as they have already proved able during their tertiary life ((Shulsinger 2017). The dynamic world is looking for labour which is flexible and adaptive to any work setting or environment hence graduates with international experience become the answer.

Students who study abroad offer more to the workplace than those who do not (Lombardi et al. 2015). They offer a fuller package than just a student who has looked at how things are theoretically, as opposed to students who can apply the concepts in their studies to real jobs and experiences across various cultures. Many companies miss out on international business opportunities due to a lack of personnel with international experience. International students take the concepts from the classroom and put them into play across various cultural settings (Shulsinger 2017). Hence, they have become the centre of attention of many organizations who desire sustainability.

Oftentimes the cultural background of individuals has a huge impact on how they react to different situations (Callaghan 2015). It is of great significance to gain a variety of perspectives which can help to look at experiences in an entirely new way. Studying abroad, means meeting people with different upbringings, hence it widens and broadens an individual's mind. According to Bhagan (2018), it is this vast amount of the worldly knowledge that makes an international graduate outstanding and a competitive individual in any work setting.

Hillman (2019) has associated international graduates with good and sustainable leadership skills. The challenges an international student faces and resolve in a host country is believed to groom them to become future mature leaders. Employers have understood that foreign graduates often thrive in new, unexpected circumstances due to their diversified language skills and improved self-confidence (Kurpis and Hunter 2016). The opportunity to work on cultural competencies renders foreign graduates to be sensitive to other cultures, learning how to adapt to new situations, and tolerating ambiguity. Lombardi et al. (2015) argued that these skills are important to almost any job for when working with people from other countries in any job a foreign graduate will be more comfortable with people from different backgrounds, be able to value their unique experiences, and establish a stronger relationship with them, which in turn creates commitment within the workforce in the process harnessing the best ideas out of them

to the companies benefit. This is a fact which has not gone without notice in the eyes of most employers.

In a 2010 ASSAf PhD study once carried out in South Africa, it was reported that one third of non-South African doctoral students who were studying in SA during the time of the study, intended to stay in SA after graduation. Whilst a small number of SA national graduates had intentions to return to their home countries or migrate to other countries (ASSAf 2010), it is without doubt a clear observation that the graduates had confidence they could fit into any country and work setting following their internationally acquired education. South Africa had been accused of brain drain retaining the foreign graduates to the development of their own country (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014), thus international students in SA had greater chances of employment at the expense of the locals.

Oftentimes, organisations hiring international employees want to see evidence that candidates can thrive in a global environment (Hillman 2019). Being a foreign graduate, itself is a strong resume of an individual's endurance in a global environment. This can be further strengthened if a graduate had attained his or her qualifications in an area where he or she would be interested in working. This gives the international graduates the chance to showcase their skills and relevant experience and understanding of international policy. For them it would be easier hence they can penetrate the work market easily.

Emerging a foreign graduate has its benefits especially better chances of easily penetrating any work industry. Studying abroad can help an individual gain more confidence by improving certain skills that help connect with different people (Welch 2014). Confidence in turn can mould an individual's leadership and management skills (Bhagan 2018), hence international students have the prowess to inspire and steer the organisation to a competitive edge. It is these attributes which have made international graduates the high on the list to get candidates for various career or job opportunities.

## **2.7. Law and Legislation Pertaining International Students**

Governments and institutions globally participate in various international, continental, regional and domestic initiatives with the aim of reducing obstacles which might affect student mobility (UNESCO UIS 2012). Governments and institutions of higher education have invested resources and time in recruiting international students (Green and Koch 2010). It would however be a fruitless step if the government and the host institutions do very little to assist

these foreign students to sail in their new environment and culture (Dzensi and Monnapula-Mapesela 2012).

In the UK, both the government and the universities have been engaged in an initiative to improve the international competitiveness of the higher education offering (Universities UK 2006). The then Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1999 called upon universities to ‘open a window on the world’ that is embracing more foreign students in the country. The second Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI), launched in 2006, wanted to understand the experiences of foreign students and how best to improve their condition (Lee and Schoole 2015). International students in the UK are seen as vital and their higher education is perceived a contribution academically and culturally as well as financially (Burslem 2004).

Britain and Australia introduced differential fees for international students at the end of 1970s which marked the first move from ‘aid to trade’ (de Wit 2008). By the mid-1980s, driven by the European Commission, continental Europe shifted its focus from aid to cooperation and exchange. By the end of the twentieth century, international student recruitment marked the transition of incorporation in Europe (de Wit, 2008). The end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, foresaw a significant increase and competition for international students, particularly in the form of the provision of cross-border education in the developed world (de Wit 2008; OECD 2008).

In Africa, the SADC Protocol on Education and Training (1997) makes a specific provision for facilitating the migration of students and academics in the region for the purpose of study, research, teaching and any other pursuits relating to education and training. South Africa is a signatory to the SADC Protocol on Education and Training that requires students from SADC member states to be afforded the same status as domestic students, universities reserving 5% of admission slots for the enrolment of students from SADC countries (UNESCO UIS 2012). Also, to counter the brain, drain and its negative impact, Africa’s countries were required to retain human resources and expertise within the continent through various initiatives such as Mwalimu Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme (MNAUSS) designed to encourage academics to remain and study in Africa. This was the idea of the African Union (AU) to foster mobility of students within the bounds of Africa (UNESCO UIS 2012). However, many African countries have found themselves losing their human resource to South Africa which has become the hub of many international students.

In 2008 an act was enacted at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) which urged the compulsory inclusion in the HSRC, staff compliment of African scholars, including interns, and this formed part of performance indicators for the various Research Units. The objective, “help build research capacity and infrastructure for the human sciences in the Republic and elsewhere in the Africa,” gave birth to a quota being set for the appointment of research interns from the continent. The HSRC management then decided on a ratio of 75% and 25% for interns from SA and those from other African countries respectively. This however excluded many African students from participating since the interns were to be registered students at a South African local university. On this notion, SA universities were required to ensure representation of all racial groups in admitting students to the universities, hence admission no longer limited to merit only (Mda 2010).

Universities around the world have established various strategies to assist international students. According to Rushton (2006), orientation courses that aim to familiarise international students with Universities and the cultural differences that exist between their countries of origin and the host societies; international student forums in which students meet weekly to discuss matters relating to their course(s) or institution(s); and community outreach programmes that allow international students to visit and forge links with local schools are some of the strategies employed to help students quickly assimilate. Psychosocial services provided by health, counselling and wellness centres in some universities may be a great contributor in helping foreign students to quickly get accustomed to their host country (Mesidor and Sly 2016).

The African Union, through the Accra Declaration on General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa, committed itself to promoting both national and regional agreements regarding quality assurance, accreditation, and the recognition of qualifications (UNESCO UIS 2012). Many African countries became part of this and the South African higher education system, through the Council of Higher Education (CHE) also participated in the Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa. This was a stand to resolve and to promote students’ mobility within the African continent by reducing obstacles that limited student mobility (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015).

## **2.8. The SA Experience**

South Africa had its fair share of protests which had at a certain time (2006 protests) come to disrupt even the core of higher education (Khumalo 2017). The unrest which existed resulted in the temporary closure of some universities causing some foreign students to reconsider studying in South Africa. The violent, the disruptions and xenophobic attacks nearly painted the booming SA black. Mindful of the level of disruption that has occurred to the foreign students, the government took steps to address these problems. The inconvenience caused on the part of the foreign student was rectified by the administration or government by issuing a blanket visa extension to those whose documentation had been set to expire at the end of 2016, setting a conditional date of 31 March 2017. It has been noted the great disruption of the protests and the SA government assisted in resolving the problem.

South Africa to strengthen its support for international students' initiatives enshrined in the constitution the rights even of foreign students. The constitution, states that all citizens have the right to further (as opposed to basic) education and that the state must make this progressively available and accessible, and this should become the obligation of everyone to enforce. Various initiatives also came into the picture like The National Development Plan, adopted in 2012, and the Durban Statement on Transformation, from 2015, which listed a series of goals for strengthening higher education in South Africa.

## **2.9. Theoretical Framework**

This study focused on the coping experiences of international students at South African universities. In this study the researcher employed Tinto's model that is his 1975 and 1993 student integration model. Tinto's primary aim upon the development of this model was to explain the retention or dropout in higher education institutions (Ratshilaya 2017). The theory explains the academic and social integration experienced by students when they enter the higher education institutions bringing out clarity of the process a student undergoes up to the stage of deciding whether to persist in his or her studies or drop out. This approach is relevant to this study since it tries to bring out and explain why students, in this case international students, find it difficult to fit in a new environment at first, the challenges they face, identify factors which can facilitate coping and influencers to either a student staying or leaving the new environment. The exploration of the integration experiences of international students at South African institutions requires attention to academic and social integration.

Lee (2010) argued that the education experiences of international students can best be explored by using student retention or dropout theory. Thus, Tinto's student integration theory, which was developed primarily to explain student attrition, became the basis of most research trying to understand the plight of an international student in the host country. Ghalayini (2014) contends that Tinto's theory explores the journey of a student from the time of joining a university or college, up to the time that this student is rejected or fits into the new institutional culture. Academic integration and social integration form the focal point to the understanding of the integration experiences of university students in Tinto's models (Karp et al., 2008), including international students in South African universities. The degree to which a student is integrated into the academic and social life of the university, and the degree to which a student is committed to her or his studies and the goals of the university, are predictive of student persistence (Tinto 1975; McCubbin 2003).

Tinto's theory of student integration entails various concepts paramount to the understanding of the model, and these include pre-entry attributes; intentions, goals, and commitment; academic integration; social integration; and persistence or departure decisions (Tinto, 1975, 1998). These are the cornerstones of the theory on which the decision for an international student to either persist (cope) or drop out can be explored.

### **2.9.1. Pre-Entry Attributes**

When students join a university or college, they come with pre-entry attributes from their levels of previous academic preparation (Tinto 1975). Meaning the same principles and academic rules which governed them would persist into the new environment. Their academic background and abilities would be still part of them. These previous academic experiences according to Tinto (1975) may include an individual's grade scores that determine the student's preparedness to join the higher education institution. The argument is that secondary school scores are the predictors of a students' future academic performance. Zhou and Zhang (2014) are also of this notion stating that international students come with foreign educational system experiences that differ from those of the host institution and this may have an impact on their future performance.

According to Gomes et al. (2014) student's families may influence student integration within the new learning culture. Their constant keeping in touch and moral support may be the well desired company until a foreign student becomes accustomed to the new environment. Tinto

(1975, 1993) is of the notion that students draw support and strength from their family members who have especially had experience in higher learning institutions; hence the family is important for student integration.

According to Tinto's (1975, 1993) model, dropout is perhaps the greatest problem facing institutions of higher education. This may be since while attendance in primary and secondary education is compulsory, up to age sixteen, attendance in higher education is voluntary in which one may choose to continue or not following various reasons. Vincent Tinto's 1975 Student Integration Model of attrition was designed to explain all the aspects and processes that influence an individual's decision to leave college or university.

### **2.9.2. Intentions, Commitments and Goals**

Tinto (1975) believes that the decision for a student to stay or leave is based on the positive academic and social integration experiences. These influence student commitments to goal attainment and in turn to the institution since individuals assess their goal commitment based on their integration experiences (Brunsden et al. 2000). As Tinto (1975) further argued excelling academically influences student goal commitment and institutional commitment is influenced by enough social integration or socialisation. Thus, a student's decision to persist or to drop out from a university is influenced by academic and social integration, individual goals, and institutional commitments (Tinto 1975). Hence a clear picture of why foreign students encounters challenges and how best they can cope is availed through Tinto's model.

According to Tinto while a student's commitment to complete his or her degree is driven by career expectations and educational plans (Brunsden et al. 2000), for some international students' it's simply a prestige to acquire qualifications from a foreign higher education institution. This is done by both parties irrespective of the host countries shortfalls like xenophobia, neo-racism, and discrimination (Pithouse-Morgan et al. 2012). The motivation is to be associated with prestigious universities that offer internationally acclaimed qualifications (Kwaramba 2012). Thus, a foreign student's prowess to cope or fail lies in the reasons which would have driven him or her in that host country.

### **2.9.3. Academic Integration**

Grade performance and intellectual development are indicators of academic integration in higher learning. Tinto makes the point that the progressing of an individual academically

determines the grade performance. Successful integration into the new academic is then measured if there is positive academic performance and student-faculty or staff interaction (Ghalayini 2014). Positive academic experiences lead to students becoming attached to the intellectual life of the institution (Karp et al. 2008). Thus, as argued by Tinto, international students coping is then witnessed by the acceptance of the institutional life by the foreign student and his or her relation to faculty members or staff. The commitment of international students to the institution is also the result of feeling comfortable with the institution's academic policy and academic progress, as academic performance (Tinto 2014).

Tinto (2014) argued that the classroom experience forms the basis of a student's academic integration, since most interaction is established within the bounds of the classroom (Arnekrans 2014). Academic progress or achievement among international students is influenced by interaction between academics and students, teaching culture and the language in the classroom thus poor interaction on the part of students results in both insufficient intellectual development and low-grade point averages (Tinto, 1975). Pangle (2002) stresses the importance of friendship to cope in a new environment. Friends will act as pillars to quick language development and getting one up to speed pertaining to the countries learning system, especially if they are locals. Insufficient intellectual development of international students according to Tinto is attributed to a failure of students to integrate in the climate of the new academic system (Ghalayini 2014).

#### **2.9.4. Social Integration**

Tinto (1975) describes social integration as the interaction between the student and the social environment. In the case of international students' social integration is made possible through formal and informal interaction that is, with in the classroom and after the classroom activities (Ghalayini 2014). Positive social integration of international students is evident when they become members of a social group and can establish friendships with local students and other foreign nationals not from their country of origin. Tinto (1975) goes on to argued that, to some extent, it is this friendship that influences the academic performance of international students (Tinto, 1975), especially when the group is academically strong.

Tinto year (1975) further argued that over-socialisation by students, for instance partying and dating, may result in poor academic performance and may lead to academic dismissal. This is in line with Thurber and Walton (2012) notions that illegal drug abuse and promiscuous

behaviour on the part of the foreign student may become a coping strategy regardless of them being destructive. On the other hand, insufficient social interaction may also lead to voluntary withdrawal from the institution. Thus, as per the student integration model argument if students fail to socialise with local students or to communicate effectively with other students, also not participating in various extracurricular activities such as sports, or in student organisations and social programmes within the community it is a clear indication of insufficient social integration. Thus, there should be balance between having fun and academic work.

Gomes et al. (2014) argued that international students who manage to establish friendships with domestic students and participating in extracurricular activities are more likely to persist. The argument is that peer group interaction influences individual student social integration experience and increases the level of institutional commitment (Ghalayini 2014). Tinto year greatly believes that there is a parallel relationship between high levels of institutional commitment among students and high-level goal commitments, thereby resulting in persistence.

#### **2.9.5. Persistence and Departure Decision**

Tinto (2014) argued that the decision of students to persist or withdraw from university or college can be attributed to several factors. These may include and not limited to lack of both academic and social integration, adjustment, and academic difficulties. Lack of student integration and adjustment difficulties are the greatest challenges that foreign students find themselves entangled in upon arrival in the new environment (Mudhovozi 2011; Ghalayini 2014). Persistence or dropout is then a result of how effective the interactive process between international students and their new learning environment was (Zhou and Zhang, 2014). As per the argument of Morling et al. (2002) foreign students either cope when they are either able to influence the external environment according to the self's needs whilst or adjust part of the self to accept the situation.

Tinto (1975, 1993) in his model states that the decision to persist or to drop out by a student in higher learning is influenced by pre-entry attributes, the degree of commitment to a goal, and the student's academic and social integration experiences when interacting with the higher education system. According to Tinto year, insufficient integration makes the possibility of dropout relatively high; while enough integration experiences increase the level of persistence since such students can be regarded as committed to their goals. Hence successful integration

on the part of the international student means a fruitful coping strategy applied. Thus, following this Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration theory will help in the understanding of the experiences of the international students in South Africa.

#### **2.9.6. Overview of Tinto's student Integration Model**

Tinto's model of attrition drew from Durkheim's model of suicide but was not solely based on it because of the theory's shortcoming, that is, Durkheim's failure to take account of individual psychological characteristics that predispose some individuals to suicide. Tinto year understood this, and his work included assessing the degree to which individual characteristics affected attrition. A good example is a student who spent most of his time studying sparing little time for social activities and vice versa, his or her academic performance would probably suffer.

Durkheim's in his famous work, "Suicide" (Durkheim, 1951), states that suicide can be attributed to the individual's lack of social and intellectual integration into the social life of his or her society. Tinto (1993) whose model is rooted in Durkheim's work argued that, although dropping out from a higher education institution is not necessarily equivalent to failing, there are some similarities with the process of suicide in the sense that both behaviours can be thought of as a form of voluntary withdrawal from a particular society. Hence, from this point of view international students when faced with the challenge they may fail to cope to may choose to have a change of scenery or head back home. Hence with such a stance Tinto's year model gives a clear picture of why international students might resolve to dropping out over adopting coping mechanisms.

According to Tinto's year model, the student's experience at college (academic and social integration) will continuously modify, that is either weaken or strengthen, the individual's initial goals and commitments. The model argues that the modified level of goals and commitments may be determinants to the student's decision to pursue or leave the tertiary education (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto year added that the student's external commitment, such as family and job commitments affect both the initial and subsequent level of his or her goals and commitments. Thus, strengthening an individual's goals and commitments guarantees a student to stay in college and pursue his or her studies as most negativity would have been overcome. This helps any researcher to understand the need for international students to be focused on their new environment for positive adjustment to be achieved.

The students' view of their own higher education experience is obviously all important in their decision to drop out (Tinto 1997). Tinto year thinks that students assess their own higher education experience in terms of a cost benefit analysis. Thus, dropout can be influenced by aspects of the individual's personality. Eisenbarth (2012) is also of the same view but a different angle stating that coping styles do exist, and are important, but coping is highly contextual and for its effectiveness it must change over time and contexts. Hence Tinto year leaves the coping of international students into the new environment to their discretion.

Tinto (1993) also adopted the views of the work of social anthropologist Van Gennep (1960) on the rites of passage in tribal societies to describe the longitudinal process of students' integration into the societies of their academic institutions. According to Van Gennep cited by Tinto (1993), the transmission of relationships between succeeding groups is marked by three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto (1975) found the rite of passage notion is more appropriate in understanding the transitioning of a student from secondary to the point when he or she can cope with the new learning environment (tertiary environment). Tinto (1975) argued that students' experiences, especially in the first year of college, are marked by these stages of passage. A student's persistence or departure reflects his or her success or failure in navigating the stages towards incorporation into the community or the institution (Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice2008). These stages as they are brought out by Tinto year paint an understanding to the challenges and coping strategies encountered by international students to fit thus will be of paramount in the analysis of the study. Despite its critics, Tinto's Student Integration Model remains "the most influential model of dropout from tertiary education" (McCubbin 2003, p. 1). This theory provided a useful framework within which to explore experiences of international students at South African universities, through the analysis of secondary data collected from seven South African universities.

## **2.10. Summary**

The literature looked at the coping mechanisms adopted by international students to cope in the host country. The challenges which foreign students face were also explored. Reasons why students migrate to other countries for higher learning education were reviewed and the benefits of being an international graduate brought out. Tinto's year student integration model, which is the theoretical framework was also explained and analysed, all these mainly in the context of South African institutions of higher learning. The next chapter looks at the methodology used by the researcher in this study, which is secondary analysis.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Research is a logical and systematic search for new and useful information on a topic. It is an investigation of finding solutions to scientific and social problems through objective and systematic analysis. It is a search for knowledge, that is, a discovery of hidden truths (Rajasekar et al. 2013). Thus, research is a systematic inquiry to describe, explain, predict, and control the observed phenomenon and it involves inductive and deductive methods. This chapter presents the research methodology of the study. Research methods are specific procedures for collecting and analysing data and developing the research methods is an integral part of the research design (Rajasekar et al. 2013). There are numerous methodological ways of conducting a research study (Rajasekar et al. 2013) and this study made use of secondary data collection through desktop method.

### **3.2. Research Method for the Study**

This study used secondary data method. This method was used because of its flexibility in several ways which entail analysing historical material and various available documents concerning the topic or subject (Johnston 2014). Johnston (2014) suggests that secondary analysts should understand how the existing data were collected for authenticity. This study sought to explore the coping strategies of international students in South African Universities.

#### **3.2.1. Secondary Analysis**

Secondary analysis involves the researcher working on existing data that was collected by someone else for different purposes. It may also occur that when a researcher who collected data has completed analysing them in a primary study but decides to work on the data again to answer different research questions in another study. In this case, the researcher poses questions that are addressed through the analysis of datum set that they were not involved in collecting. This means that the same data set can be a primary data set to one researcher and a secondary data set to a different one (Crossman 2019). In exploring a novel research question, collecting primary data would be advisable, but if the researcher wants to synthesize existing knowledge, analyse historical trends, or identify patterns on a large scale, secondary data might be a better choice.

Crossman (2019) makes a clear distinction between primary data and secondary data - primary data is any original information that is collected for the purposes of answering the research question for example surveys, observations, and experiments, whilst secondary data is information that has already been collected by other researchers for example in a government census or previous scientific studies. Hence in the case of this study an integration of various studies in the same field as this were explored to have a better view of the coping mechanisms employed by international students in the host country, South Africa.

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

*Step 1: Develop the research question*

The secondary analyst must develop a research question guided by theoretical knowledge or a conceptual framework. In this case Tinto's (1975) student integration model was utilised and the available literature concerning experiences encountered by foreign students in the host country explored.

*Step 2: Identify the data set*

The secondary researcher should establish whether the existing data set will answer the secondary study's research question. Hence the need to engage extensively with the literature as this will reveal whether a relevant data set already exists or not.

*Step 3: Evaluating the data set*

In evaluating the existing data set, the secondary researcher will determine its relevance by establishing the following: the purpose of the original study, the person(s) responsible for collecting the data or information, the nature of the information that was collected and the methodology employed when obtaining the data (Johnston 2014). Thus, as per the argument of Foley et al. (2018), since the secondary analyst is not the one responsible for the primary data collection there is need to familiarise with the data by learning about the data collection method used, the targeted population, the objective of the original study, and evaluate how the data were analysed.

### **3.2.2. Benefits of Using Secondary Data Analysis**

The biggest advantage of using secondary data is that it can be more economical. The data is already in the reach of the researcher since someone else has already collected it (Crossman 2019), so the researcher does not have to devote money, time, energy, and resources to this phase of research. Sometimes the secondary data set must be purchased, but the cost is almost always lower than the expense of collecting a similar data set from scratch, which may entail travelling, and transportation, office space, equipment, and other overhead costs (De Vos et al. 2014).

Since the data is already collected and usually cleaned and stored in electronic format it means researchers can spend most of their time analysing the data instead of getting the data ready for analysis (Crossman 2019). A researcher can collect data that spans longer timescales and broader geographical locations, hence more time devoted to analysing data for the best results.

Another important advantage of using secondary data is that the data collection process often maintains a level of expertise and professionalism that may not be present with individual researchers (Crossman 2019). Since most of the data will be collected by experienced personnel with many years of experience in that survey, for the secondary analyst it means having an array of information from people with expertise rather than data collected by students sometimes working part-time.

The use of secondary data also affords novice researchers the opportunity to access large data sets (Johnston, 2014). So, it can be argued that desktop research is less complicated hence it affords even a novice researcher to have at his disposal most of the information he or she may need without going into the field. For any researcher it is agreeably that this the most flexible approach to research amongst all of them.

### **3.2.3. Delimits of Using Secondary Data Analysis**

Secondary analysis as much as it is a plausible approach to research it also has its share of disadvantages. Secondary data may not be able to answer the researcher's specific research questions or contain specific information that the researcher would like to have (Long-Sutehall et al. 2011). The information may not have been collected in the geographic region or during the years desired, or within the specific population that the researcher is interested in studying. Taking for example, a researcher who is interested in studying adolescents may find that the secondary data set only includes adults (Crossman 2019). Thus, this poses great challenge on

the part of the secondary analyst. Additionally, since the researcher did not collect the data, there is limited control over what is contained in the data set. This usually can limit the analysis or altogether alter the original questions the researcher sought to answer. A good example is a researcher who is studying happiness and optimism, the researcher might find that a secondary data set only includes one of these variables, but not both and in challenging cases the variables may have been defined or categorised differently than the researcher would have chosen.

Another significant disadvantage of using secondary data is that the researcher has no knowledge of how exactly the data collection process was done or how well it was carried out (Tasić and Feruh, 2012). Information about how seriously the data is affected by problems such as low response rate or respondent misunderstanding of specific survey questions is not privy to the researcher. Though sometimes information can be readily available, as is the case with many US data sets, many other secondary data sets are not accompanied by this type of information, and it is the secondary analyst duty to learn to read between the lines to uncover any potential limitations of the data.

De Vos (2014) noted that secondary analysis may pose a challenge if the data available is deemed outdated and there would be no new available data to replace it. For example, the national census is not usually updated yearly whilst there are changes in the country's population since the last census. Thus, someone working with the country's population will have to settle for the previously recorded figure even though it is outdated.

### **3.3. Research Design**

Research design refers to the overall strategy that one chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring the research problem is effectively addressed, it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). This study made use of the exploratory and case study research designs. These types of designs allow the researcher to understand human behaviour within a chosen social context or environment. While this study applies secondary data methodology, the case study research design would help the researcher to draw on perceived experiences and perceptions that were highlighted by previous studies and available literature drawing on international students. This would the researcher to explore the coping mechanisms employed by international students in South Africa by using already available literature and contributing to the meagre available literature. Therefore, exploratory and case

study designs allow for a clear analysis of lived experiences without even conducting field research.

### **3.4. Research Approach**

According to Bhattacharjee (2012) quantitative research, qualitative research and mixed methods are the three recognised and well-known approaches to research. Saunders and Tosey (2013) suggest that quantitative research involves numerical data, calculated with figures, and analysed using statistical techniques. On the other hand, qualitative research seeks to acquire a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon basing on the views of the participants (Creswell and Miller 2000). However qualitative data was analysed, even though the data was from mixed methods, De Vos et al. (2014) suggests that qualitative research is more appropriate for studying experiences, attitudes and perceptions in this instance exploring the coping strategies of international students in South African universities since human experiences are explored in depth using qualitative research (du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). This type of research was useful in the exploration of how or why things have occurred, interpreting events, and describing actions (Creswell 2014).

### **3.5. Study Sample**

According to Creswell and Miller (2000) sampling is the process of selecting individuals or objects which represents the entire population in a study. On that vein, Bhattacharjee (2012: 32) highlights that the two sampling methods are probability sampling and non-probability sampling techniques. As this was a desktop research existing research studies, credible and authenticated published and unpublished research from different reputable universities and credible online news sources was sampled, all zeroed on the experiences and strategies to cope employed by foreign students in institutions of higher learning.

### **3.6. Research Instruments**

Research instruments are tools used to measure or collect data on a variety of variables ranging from physical functioning to psychosocial wellbeing. They include questionnaires, interviews, observations, focus group discussions and experiments. But since this is a desktop research study a variety of secondary data sources was utilised. Secondary data sources refer to data which was published or unpublished and already available from research or publications

completed and analysed by someone (Kothari 2004) and can be available in libraries, internet, organisational materials, or governments (local or state) publications (Kothari 2004). Secondary data for this study was collected through the review of books, use of university websites, articles, journals, news articles, blogs, government publications and relevant documents relating to the coping strategies of international students in South African universities and other countries. Though a disadvantage rose for not being able to engage in face-to-face interviews with the international students under study, the primary data available was able to avail the desired objectives of having a better understanding of the experiences of foreign students.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

Data is the information that a researcher collects for the purposes of answering the research question and the data collection methods used depends on the type of data needed (Luo 2020). Data analysis is described by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) as a process of transforming, inspecting, and modelling data with the aim of highlighting useful information suggesting conclusions and support decision-making. A qualitative content analysis (QCA) technique was employed in analysing the data collected. Qualitative content analysis is an analysing tool which is effective in reflecting on various unique themes that illustrative of various meanings that stand out in the study (Zhang and Wildermuth 2005). The key themes of this research identified in the objectives and key questions of the study were unpacked through QCA strategy. Denscombe (2009) notes that when engaging in a desktop research study, it is crucial to authenticate sources through credible assessment that ensures that there are valid conclusions of the research study.

QCA allowed the researcher to engage key theoretical challenges and themes, test them and then qualify them in relation to the available data and findings of the research study (Elo and Kyngas 2007). To conduct content analysis, a researcher should systematically collect data from a set of texts, which can be written, oral, or visual (books, newspapers, magazines, interviews, web content and social media posts and films (Luo 2020). Content analysis allowed for the identification of the key themes that existed in available data on international students and their coping strategies in South Africa's institutions of higher learning. It allowed for these themes to be analysed from different theoretical and conceptual perspectives.

### **3.8. Data Quality Control (validity, reality, trustworthiness)**

Scholars agree that validity and reliability are important to both quantitative and qualitative research (Briggs et al. 2014; Creswell 2014). It is important that the findings of a research should be trusted by readers and other researchers to follow. Validity in qualitative research is about determining whether the findings of a study are trustworthy by using strategies such as triangulation, member checking, thick description, bias, negative or discrepant information, peer debriefing and external auditing (Creswell 2014). In this study, triangulation, negative or discrepant information and an external auditor were used as strategies to determine validity. On data analysis the researcher relied on reviewed literature and on the data at hand to arrive at themes that addressed the research questions.

According to Creswell (2014), external auditing occurs when a researcher uses someone's knowledgeable to review the entire study and provide an objective assessment. This assists in eliminating bias on the part of the analyst (Briggs et al. 2014). The researcher's supervisor who had extensive knowledge of student migration and socialisation of international students assessed the study. Above all, the supervisor had access to the data sources the researcher analysed, and they made an objective assessment that assisted in validating the findings of the study.

### **3.9. Limitations of the study**

Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) describe limitations as constraints or limits which the researcher is aware of but cannot do anything to address those constraints. Secondary studies are not immune from any potential weakness that might arise during their conduct. The researcher had the opportunity to validate possible questionnaires to establish whether the existing data answered the research questions, however according to Rew et al. (2000), in secondary studies, the existing data may not be adequate to address the research questions, thus this poses a challenge. It is common that limitations arise from the inadequacy of existing data to answer the research question in a secondary study, since the purpose of the primary study would have been different from that of the secondary study (Smith, 2008). Hence another gap can be found though a considerable amount of literature was found by the researcher which answered the study's research question.

### **3.10. Ethical Considerations**

Even though a secondary analyst does not have any contact with participants, he or she is still required to adhere to the ethical principles of research. These include issues such as obtaining permission from the custodians of the data, applying for ethical clearance from the appropriate ethics committee and ensuring non-maleficence (Thorne 1998). Ethics approval for this study was granted by the UKZN Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee. All the necessary steps required; the researcher was able to follow to uphold the ethics principles. Also, in this study, the privacy of participants was upheld, and no attempts were made by the secondary analyst to meet them. Though the results of the analysed data already contained pseudonyms, the researcher used code(s) such as IS 1 (International Student 1) and further uphold anonymity and privacy.

### **3.11. Summary**

This chapter outlined the research methodology utilised in this research study. The study used an exploratory research design which gave a detailed understanding of the coping strategies of international students in South Africa's tertiary institutions. The use of desktop research method helped in completing this research study within the desired time since there was not much set time which could have allowed for field work research. This chapter also outlined how this research study was conducted, points out the methodology that was used, and explains how the data was collected and analysed. The following chapter will then deal with the interpretation of the study and the research findings.

## **CHAPTER 4: INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter analyses the data collected from the secondary sources that were key and relevant to this study. The research findings are also presented. In this chapter the findings on the challenges of international students are explored and the coping strategies which they employ to assimilate in South Africa and its universities are discussed. Themes such as cultural change, discrimination, language barrier, harassment, economic disintegration, homesickness, and financial constraints were found under challenges encountered by the international students studying in South Africa. Coping strategies used by international students to cope in South African universities or tertiary of higher learning were analysed in the lenses of three categories, the foreign student, the government, and the institution. Themes such as support structure, religion, social support, social media extracurricular activities, academic demand and workload, maladaptive strategies, student faculty interaction, student orientation, support clubs and counselling were identified.

This research also utilised Tinto's student integration model to have a better understanding of the experiences of international students in South Africa. The reason why students face challenges especially in their first years were brought out through this theory and the reasons why a foreign student can choose to cope or not. So, the research findings are presented according to the themes identified in the key questions of the research study. Hence, the chapter outlines the challenges faced by international students and the coping strategies they employ, and strategies implemented by the government and various South African institutions they are enrolled in.

### **4.2. International Students in South Africa**

The study focused on South Africa due to various factors. The fact that the country has become the dream destination of many international students made it a spotlight for research and worth exploring. From the findings it was noted that a great deal of literature has been on the experiences of international students and their academic adjustment in developed countries such as the US, UK, Canada, and Australia (Adams et al. 2014), hence limited research in African

countries and on the coping mechanisms employed by foreign students to assimilate in the host country.

South Africa, of late, has become the hub of many foreign students in pursuit of higher education (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). From the findings this may be due to the close geographic proximity in the region, the perceived high quality of education, accessibility, affordability, and high employability rate of South African graduates in the country (Mokhothu and Callaghan 2018). Thus, many foreign nationals would want to be part of this country and its presumed opportunities. South Africa like the top global recipients (US, the UK, Australia, Germany, and France), its inbound rate exceeds its outbound rate (Kuili 2000). A report published by France (2013) found that out of 380 376 students from Africa who chose to study abroad (a total which represents approximately 10% of international students globally), South Africa was second in position about the preferred destination of international students, though through passage of time SA has dominated taking the lead over France.

### **4.3. Challenges faced by International Students**

There are several challenges that are faced by international students in South African institutions of higher learning that were identified across literature. A thorough review of existing studies indicates that these challenges have affected and still affects more international students in institutions of higher learning even in this day (Chinyamurindi, 2018; Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015; Forbush and Foucault-Welles 2016; Ratshilaya, 2017). Some of the consistently identified challenges are presented and discussed in this section.

#### **4.3.1. Cultural Change**

The studies reviewed show that studying outside one's home country can be a life changing venture which can also be associated with hardship and struggle for the foreign student thus demands constant re-adjustment to changes as they are presented. This has been found to be frustrating and confusing on the part of the foreign student (Forbush and Foucault-Welles 2016). Culture shock as per the findings has been witnessed upon entry into South Africa and the new culture (Chinyamurindi, 2018). This is exhibited through irritability, hypercritical thoughts, fear, and frustration.

One student was quoted by Chinyamurindi (2018) clarified their fears and xenophobic threats that exposes the obvious culture shock and keep reminding one that they are far from home. The student said,

*“I am from Nigeria, and when I saw the images of the xenophobic attacks, something inside me just changed. I had an intense dislike of this country, South Africa. Don’t get me wrong, it’s a nice place, but I realised it could be a dangerous place to be a foreigner. So, from that day, I decided to be closer to my brothers and sisters, not necessarily from Nigeria but from anywhere than South Africa”* (Chinyamurindi, 2018: 217).

This reflects the fear that confronts most international students as they face uncertain cultural encounters in South Africa. The quote above reflects how the unfamiliar daily life proves to be challenging on the part of the foreign student especially in the first year. This is in line with Tinto’s model of student integration which states that when students join a university or college, they come with pre-entry attributes from their levels of previous academic preparation (Tinto 1975). So, they must separate themselves from their previous life experiences and culture to integrate with the new culture, meaning in the event they fail then integration will not take place. Evidence from this research found the first years in South African universities having the challenge to easily integrate into the new system following their diversified backgrounds not like that of the host country.

#### **4.3.2. Discrimination and Racism**

The study findings also brought out the challenge of discrimination and racism levelled against foreign students. Ratshilaya (2017) confirms this stating that the university system was officially broken with the apartheid system of the past, but discrimination related to race, gender, and socio-economic standing have persisted. South Africa had put into place laws which were to do away with racism and discrimination since its gaining of independence, but it is evident enough that the past oppression keeps on pressing forward. From the results University of Cape Town registered less than 25% of blacks and its fee’s structure seen as disadvantaging black students, who already came from economically challenged backgrounds or countries. Though SA is about 80 per cent black, the study shows not much recognition is given to them. The study as shows that international students even refrain from travelling for leisure purposes for fear of discrimination and racism (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015).

This discrimination as shown from viewed research findings is observed in many current contexts, such as fingerprinting and profiling procedures, the long processes that international students must go through to get their study permits or visas approved (Khumalo 2017; Chinyamurindi 2018). One of the students shared his frustration on the Home Affairs experiences and lambasted:

*“I literally get sick when I have to do anything with Home Affairs. Last year I waited an entire year for an application of my study permit to be proved. You know that feeling when you know something is not right and you literally tread with caution. I just felt I don’t belong in the country just because of some of the delays in Home Affairs issues”* (Chinyamurindi, 2018:219)

#### **4.3.3. Coping with Independence**

The newly found independence and responsibility on the part of the first-year university students, was a great challenge as per the research findings. First year students had difficulty adapting to university life and handling their new-found freedom without adult supervision (Khumalo 2017). Some participants in Khumalo’s (2017) study indicated how it was challenging for them to cope as first years; one student shared the experience:

*“At first it was difficult simply because you in a new country you do not know anyone, and also you struggle to find your way around the university”*,

Another student noted that,

*“It was difficult to adapt in the first year, it got better as the years went by”*.

The Study shows that these made foreign students experience anxiety since they would have left behind the social support of family, friends, and familiar surroundings. According to the finding’s matters were escalated since in university, only a few directives are given and from there students are expected to assume responsibility for making decisions (Kraak 2013). The newfound freedom was seen impacting negatively on the foreign student.

#### **4.3.4. Harassment and Xenophobia**

The study findings also show that harassment from taxi drivers and assaults are frequent challenges that affect especially first year students residing off campus. This is further worsened by the long waiting hours to get transportation (Mbara and Celliers 2013). A per the

study findings this scenario may be due to the unfamiliarity to the way activities are carried out in South Africa thus foreign students fell prey to the locals not humane and accommodative.

These harassments and physical assaults have developed into xenophobia attacks in some cities hence endangering the foreign student residing in South Africa especially off campus as they became targets for attacks (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015). In a study by Khumalo (2017), one student shared the experiences of subtle discrimination and xenophobic practices,

*“No, discrimination is a broad term and it’s very invasive. Normally, it’s just been the comments here and there. But in terms of accessibility to resources, no I haven’t. I hear comments like the foreigners should leave campus because they are just here to use our resources. Even with some of the services providers here. When you greet them, they don’t respond or they made comments” the participant continued to say “you know when something becomes recurring, it does start to bother you. It does sound like face value comments but when you bring in everything together that I am away from home, its school pressure, I have to travel far to get to campus and I have to deal with his” (Khumalo, 2017: 32).*

In another study one of the participants bemoaned,

*“...the learning environment is not conducive, it makes us international students to lose focus, because of a lot of distraction like xenophobia which we experience here. I remember in 2015 when there was the xenophobia crisis at its peak, I have my fellow international students who reside in the downtown where the xenophobic activity you know was really active, most of them couldn’t do anything because learning is achieved in a peaceful and conducive environment but when there are uncertainties like xenophobia surrounding our lives here, as we are here to study, you see we won’t be able to focus on our study even to progress, the person will not be able to pay attention to anything” (Nwokedi and Khanare, 2020:55-56).*

From the findings it can be argued that these experiences by international students within and outside the university have less to do with their own adjustment but have more to do with the host institution and the host society’s shortcomings (Wu et al. 2015).

#### **4.3.5. Economic Disintegration**

South Africa faces pressing economic problems that have had an impact on the higher education system and its students (Dominguez-Whitehead 2015). This being the picture violence against immigrants and students from other African nations have become apparent and international students especially from African states have fallen victim as they were believed to be benefitting at the expense of South Africans. Findings from the study shows that anti-immigrant sentiments which became pronounced in the early 1990s when South Africa transitioned into a democracy facilitated this increase in immigration from other African countries, and South Africa's universities were without spare (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2019). Hence foreign students are sometimes compelled to live in fear and isolation uncertain of the course of action to be levelled against them by the locals.

#### **4.3.6. Language Barrier**

Literature research shows that poor language competence is at the root of most of the challenges foreign students in South Africa face and this results in feelings of loneliness, homesickness, sadness, and frustration (Gomes et al. 2014, Martinez-Callaghan and Gill-Lacruz 2017). The study shows that international students often complain having trouble understanding the professors and their expectations and the grading systems they use (Khumalo 2017). The language barrier limits the social interaction and social networking with other social groups, especially students from non-English speaking countries (Lin and Scherz, 2014). In another study, one of the participants lamented on the challenge of language barriers in social interactions,

*"...ehmm, the situation like going or leaving the campus here as I am resident in the campus, leaving the campus and going into the cities, simply the fact that you do not speak the language makes you feel a little bit insecure and scared to go out because you do not know who you might meet. So, not speaking the local language is what I see as a great challenge here"* (Nwokedi and Kharane, 2020: 56).

Language barrier presents various challenges amongst many international students. Homesickness is then the common feature which was identified in the study which caused delay in the adjustment process of students because their focus was on missing home (Yao 2016). The study brought out that, foreign students with language and cultural barriers tended to feel isolated and lonely (Wu et al. 2015).

#### **4.3.7. Financial Constraints**

Financial problems are one of the common challenges foreign students face in South African universities (Lewin and Mawoyo, 2014; Van Zyl, 2016). Findings discovered that there is a high cost of housing especially in places like Cape Town escalated by the inability of universities to accommodate all the foreign students following the ever-increase in their number (Bartram, 2013). To combat this challenge, foreign students were found to acquire accommodation where it is cheaper but unfortunately overcrowded and unsafe, hence worsening their situation (Van Heerden-Pieterse, 2015). The study also reviewed that the most common reason for dropping out of university by mainly Black African students is financial problems. One Zimbabwean student in Khumalo's study shared some of the financial constraints they suffer,

*"This year was particularly hard. As a Zimbabwean, I couldn't get my money from home because they had frozen access to it here in South Africa. I had to find other ways of accessing it. The international office wasn't much help"* (Khumalo, 2017:26).

Since the family is the one to offer financial support if one is not on scholarship, the findings indicate that upon them facing challenges it affected the foreign student also. As Forbush and Foucault-Welles (2016) notes, sometimes students had to work, while studying, as they needed the financial aid and to financially assist their families, thus an extra burden put on them which in turn affected their academic and social life.

#### **4.3.8. Assimilation or Adjustment**

Assimilating and adjusting to a new culture, environment and people of different ethnicities have its share of challenges for international students in South African institutions of higher learning. Ang and Van Dyne (2015) posit that before attending university, students spent much time with the same group of friends and peers at secondary school whom they develop strong support groups and friendship structures, thus a great deal of time is needed to develop intimacy which students often find they do not have, particularly in their first year. The study found that this adjustment to build intimacy with new people was challenging as some students reported cases of problematic relationships with roommates and significant others with no respect for their personal property and personal space (Ratshilaya 2017). In one study, a student said the following,

*“I haven’t really found the environment as a social learning environment in the sense that I haven’t been able to interact with the local people the way I used to like back home in my own country. I see that as a challenge, I mean it’s not all about studying, learning, academic, eh, reading the books and making use of the facilities I mean. You see I strongly believe that ehmm, social interaction is one of the key learning moments for me which is not promoted here for us, and this affects us in adjusting and integrating into the environment”* (Nwokedi and Khanare, 2020:57).

Foreign students were found to be sinking into depression and confusion upon the failure to offer solutions to these challenges.

#### **4.4. International Students and Coping Mechanisms**

The literature review presented makes it apparent that international students across the world encounter numerous challenges when arriving in a foreign country. It becomes a necessity to overcome these challenges to integrate in the new environment (Ghalayini 2014). The study revealed that international students in South Africa are faced with various challenges that include language barriers, unfamiliar teaching styles, unfamiliar culture, crime, loneliness, and homesickness. As per the argument of Tinto (1993) in his student integration theory unless the student separates him or herself from the past life and accepts the change, he or she is likely to drop out due to lack of coping in the new environment. The findings brought out the various mechanisms employed by international students to cope in South Africa.

##### **4.4.1. Use of Support Structure**

Association amongst fellow foreign students creates a sense of belonging and a unified entity which would sail any obstacle. Literature pointed out that foreign students have a tendency of consulting with other international students as a coping strategy as they felt they shared the same adjustment issues and plight so were like a family in a foreign land (Khumalo 2017; Mudhovozi 2011). In one of the research studies by Mudhovozi (2011), one Zimbabwean student revealed that the senior foreign students offered the necessary help especially to the first years for they had undergone the same struggles thus had a better understanding of the struggle and challenge presented thus made the burden lighter for the newcomers. From the findings it is also demonstrated that international students have more friendships with people from their country of origin who share the same language, culture, and problems hence they

aided each other out in any pressing matters, and this has been to some extent decreased homesickness and loneliness. One participant quoted in a study said,

*“Ja, because I know them from home so that’s why. And even if you go somewhere and you find someone from one country, you will automatically be a friend of that person, it’s that thing we don’t control, it’s natural when you find someone from your country somewhere, you just befriend him”* (Ratshilaya, 2017: 90)

The study also found that since South Africa had become the hub of many foreign students it had automatically created a big community of foreign students, who already shared the plight of being foreigners, hence maximised on that to cope (Khumalo 2017). Foreign students were reported to be already feeling a sense of being home since they mingled with students from the same country of origin and neighbouring country with whom they shared the same language. The findings also identified that the sharing of the same language of communication, that is English made it easier to adapt and assimilate for communication is key for progress to be witnessed (Robertson, 2010).

#### **4.4.2. Social Support**

Social support is another powerful tool used by foreign students in South African universities to deal with stressful life changes (Khumalo, 2017). The argument is that since the family form the biggest support system (Liamputtong, 2011) being closer to the host families or roommates in a campus residency facilitated adjustment. The study found that this provided the much-needed family not physically present. This seems to be in line with the student integration model argument that there is need for foreign students to socialise and communicate effectively with other students or hosts to ensure that there is successful integration into the new environment.

#### **4.4.3. Religion as a way of coping**

More so from the findings it was noted that religion formed the focal point of adjustment for many foreign students. The study found that many international students in South Africa found their solutions to their problems in aligning with religion and religious activities. According to Davies and Thate (2017) religion is a powerful force which can unite everyone under one course and its most people’s belief that religion instils self-control and offers fellowship. Mason (2017) clarifies that religion helps individuals to accept the situation and adjust the self

by exerting greater control over their own behaviours. Manning-Jones et al., (2015) notes that religion is one solution to the search of meaning much required by especially first year foreign students in the new environment and this assist in coping more effectively and in reducing any form of stress. The study found that religion provided the much-needed social network thereby compact the sense of loneliness and not belonging. From the findings it can be noted that religion has withstood the hands of time being a source of coping strategy for foreign students in South Africa and following South Africa's diversified religious beliefs this has been made easier.

#### **4.4.4. Social Media Support**

The research findings also point to the social media, a source of interaction and socialisation as a way used by some foreign students to cope in South Africa. The study findings prove that many foreign students use social networking as a mechanism to deal with personal loneliness and having a grip of the old life whilst getting accustomed to the new environment (Gomes et al., 2014). The findings show that constant communication with friends and relatives from home through Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and a variety of other social media tools helped many international students cope as it was a mechanism to kill boredom and loneliness and in turn this helped foreign students to persist academically (Gomes et al., 2014).

According to Tinto in his student integration model his of the same assertion claiming that the constant keeping in touch with family may provide the desired moral and company until a foreign student becomes accustomed to the new environment. Tinto (2014) is also of the notion that students draw strength from their family members and relatives especially those who have undergone the same experience in higher learning institutions in a foreign country. Thus, the constant interaction on social media enabled the chance for the foreign student to be schooled about the host country South Africa also quenching loneliness by being in touch with familiar people.

#### **4.4.5. Dealing with the language problem**

Language competence of non-native English speakers emerged as a major barrier to possible integration by international students in the host institution and country (Wu et al. 2015). Foreign students especially from Asian countries took English classes for a year to be accustomed to English hence becoming more participatory in the classroom environment. This

according to the study findings had been seen boosting the international students' self-worth and a sense of belonging. The findings also found that foreign students became friends with the South African locals to learn more about the country language and culture. As Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2014) notes the learning of local languages by international students made them more acceptable within the social circles, promoting social integration thereby impacting positively on their academic life. Findings from this study have confirmed Tinto's (2014) assertion that academic progress or achievement among international students is partly influenced by interaction between academics and students and the language competence. Tinto (1975) also notes that friends act as pillars to quick language development and getting one up to speed pertaining to the countries learning system, especially if they are locals.

This assertion also goes hand in hand with the study's findings pertaining friends being the road map to a quicker assimilation especially if they are locals. Thus, from the findings socialisation and English classes were the most common strategies employed by international students to cope in South African universities.

#### **4.4.6. Extracurricular activities**

The study found that foreign students strived to assimilate during the first year to avoid future foreseen and unforeseen challenges. Tinto (1975) posits the need for the international student to separate himself or herself from the past secondary life to integrate into the new environment thereby being compelled to stay and pursue his or her studies by this positive integration. Results from the findings show that foreign students got involved in different social or sporting activities to mingle and assimilate with the diversified culture in this cheerful environment where team-work spirit is entailed (Salami 2011). Apart from sporting activities the findings show that foreign students especially from western countries practised meditation, cognitive behavioural strategies and healthy living through exercise, nutrition, and sleep as relevant coping strategies (Cuddy 2015; McGonigal 2015). These were believed to release stress and pressure on the foreign student who went on to excel academically with no stressors present. As Tinto (1975) argue excelling academically influences student goal commitment and on the other hand socialisation influence institutional commitment. Thus, according to Tinto (1975), a student decision to continue or drop out of his study depends on how socially integrated he or she had become, hence the need for socialisation through different activities and embarking on non-stressors activities. Thus, universities should promote more social interaction policies and practices for international students.

#### **4.4.7. Academic Demand and Workload**

The study also found that when it comes to academic pressure some foreign students used positive methods of coping to deal with them. These included breaking down modules into sections to group relevant information together for future easy studying. The findings also show that some students formed study groups as a coping mechanism, and these usually comprised of diversified students to have a rich literature concerning a subject matter. From the study it was also noted that foreign students tried avoiding time-wasting activities to concentrate on their studies so that they would not be compelled to put much pressure on themselves when it came exam time. As McGonigal (2015) notes foreign students consulted lecturers in unclear academic matters and studied hard to cope with the challenge of facing different instructional methods. This was a common picture in the first years trying to separate themselves from their past academic life (Tinto 1975).

#### **4.4.8. Academic Benefit**

Coping in new environments on the part of the foreign student was also found to be contextual on how the students might uniquely weigh the benefits to acquiring the higher learning qualification in South Africa. From the findings it was identified that despite all the challenges like xenophobic attacks, harassment or discrimination students coped well as long they had seen the benefit of having the foreign qualification. As Kwaramba (2012) posits the motivation was to be associated with prestigious universities in South Africa that offer internationally acclaimed qualifications which would not be attained home especially for most African foreign students. According to Tinto (1993), his of the understanding that students assess their own higher education experience in terms of a cost benefit analysis. The students' view of their own higher education experience is obviously all important in their decision to drop out or persist in their studies (Tinto 1997). So, following the studies finding the dire background which existed for many international students especially from countries in the SADC region was motivation enough for them to cope in any adversity in anticipation to gain the foreign qualification from South Africa which they believed would change their background for the better.

#### **4.4.9. Maldaptive Strategies**

The study further found that foreign students in South African universities engaged in destructive behaviours to cope. As per the study findings the desire to have a sense of belonging

pushed some students to the edge to the extent that they found comfort in drug abuse (Kraak 2013). Foreign students were found involved in illegal drug use, alcohol abuse and promiscuous sexual behaviours (Thurber and Walton 2012) as a well to get rid of stress, academic pressure, and the new environment stressors. Though to some extent it did help foreign students to go by in the new culture the findings also identified negative effects like depression, withdrawal, negative attitudes, and avoidance of the real problems at hand. Khumalo (2017) argue that these types of avoidant coping methods are dysfunctional and can lead to deep depression.

Tinto (1993), in his student integration theory states that over-socialisation by students, for example partying and dating, may result in poor academic performance and may lead to academic dismissal though to some extent this promiscuous behaviour on the part of the foreign student may be the only coping strategy regardless of it being destructive. So, though depression has been found to be the result, some first-year foreign students argued these destructive practices for some time served the purpose of reducing stress until one undergoes what Tinto (1993) refers to as the rite of passage. According to Tinto this is the transitioning stage in the new environment, whereas a student successfully separates him or herself from the old life and finally incorporates successfully into the new environment (Tinto 1993).

#### **4.4.10. Student Faculty Interaction**

The findings from the research also found that in instances of educational, vocational, or personal problems, foreign students sought help from faculty members (Wang et al. 2015). This was identified as helpful to the foreign student as faculty members were the closest people and with expertise in the field when the problem encountered was academic in nature. Tinto's (1993) student integration model argues that successful integration into the new academic by a student is measured if there is positive academic performance and student- faculty or staff interaction (Ghalayini 2014). The study found that foreign students who had this interpersonal relationship with faculty members tend to progress a bit rapidly than those who did not.

### **4.5. Institutional Support**

The commitment of international students to an institution can be a result of feeling comfortable with the institution's academic policy as well as the student's academic progress

(Tinto, 2014). Intellectual development as well as good grades according to Tinto (1993) shows academic integration in higher learning.

The study found that the policies and facilities in South African universities which existed for foreign students assisted them with their integration process. The findings show that international students coped easier because of these institutional support systems put into place and tended to excel even academically. According to Tinto the progressing of an individual academically determines the grade performance and successful integration is then measured if there is positive academic performance (Ghalayini 2014). According to the findings this then led to students becoming attached to the intellectual life of the institution. As Tinto (1993), notes international students coping is then witnessed by the acceptance of the institutional life and policies by the foreign student.

The reviewed literature brought out that most institutions of higher education in South Africa have devoted resources to facilities, programmes and services aimed at assisting international students to integrate successfully in the new institutional culture (Hyams-Ssekasi et al. 2014; Gomes et al. 2014). South Africa just like in the UK and Australia just to mention a few, have seen the necessity to enact policies, facilities and services which assisted foreign students to keep retaining them and become a giant in the enrolment of foreign students in its institutions. As per the findings this has been found to instill a sense of self-worth in most international students enrolled in South Africa's universities.

#### **4.5.1. Student Orientation**

Most South African universities conducts orientation programmes to bring to speed the foreign students to the culture of the host University as well as South Africa at large. The findings noted that by conducting orientation programmes upon the arrival of the foreign student it quickly familiarised them with various support services and other campus activities, which assisted them to integrate and assimilate successfully (Gomes et al., 2014). According to Rushford (2016), the first weeks of studying in a foreign country can be difficult and if the first-year student is not given pointers loneliness and contemplating withdrawal can be the outcome.

The study found out that across South Africa's universities the orientation programme for the first-year foreign students provided useful information about the teaching and learning environment and the social and extra-curricular aspects of university life. Taking an example

of students at Cape Town university findings found out that all international students had to report first to the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) during their first week on campus.

At IAPO, they received information about topics such as how to register for classes, paying university fees, health insurance matters, getting to know South African culture, and information about life in Cape Town. Thus, as per the study findings foreign students reported having less difficulty in settling in as they received significant help from the various offices and orientation prepared them to what to expect and how to go about college life as well as South African cities.

#### **4.5.2. Welcome Parties**

The study further found that various South African universities throw parties for the international students as a way of welcoming them. As Pitts et. Al. (2017) notes it is during these cheerful events that friends can be made and a sense of homesickness and loneliness reduced. As per the study findings friendships are forged during these parties which in turn help the foreign student integrate successfully. Friends especially if they become locals facilitate the rate at which a foreign student becomes accustomed to the new culture and environment. As Tinto (1993), notes sometimes being socially involved outside the classroom may help a foreign student integrate into the new environment, thus in the case of throwing party's socialisation is facilitated even before the foreign student is exposed to the new academics. Findings found that foreign students at Cape Town, Nelson Mandela university and University of Johannesburg (UJ) because of the parties and open view braais done in their honour the first years commence their new academic life with already a positive attitude towards the institution and were able to sail most of the obstacles which came their way. According to Tinto (1997), students cope when they accept the new institutional life and have accepted to transact from their previous secondary life to an institution of higher learning life.

The study also found that foreign students were given a tour of the South African city and engaged in some social activities to let them become accustomed to the new environment, familiarising themselves with the new environment and places of interest. The findings brought out that it was during these tours or drives where friendship was forged with locals and other students aiding in coping. Taking an example of Nelson Mandela University upon arrival the students are taken for a Game Drive at Kragga Kamma Game Reserve, a hike on the

Sacramento hiking trail, and a mid-week South African Culture Day on campus. During these tours foreign students are encouraged to purchase locally made souvenirs as to have a touch of the South African culture.

The findings also brought out that Scavenger Hunt-themed Campus Tour were arranged for the foreign students at Nelson Mandela university to facilitate socialisation, which as per the findings seem to work as this killed the fear within some of the foreign students for being in a new environment.

#### **4.5.3. Support Offices**

The study more so found that in some universities in South Africa there exist International Students Offices which promote and facilitate all issues pertaining to internationalisation thereby lessening the unfamiliarity burden which might weigh down the foreign student. According to Winslow (2016), University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) which has an international student's office aims to be the first port of call for all international students and provide a wide range of services. These services include general enquiries from prospective students, immigration advice and advocacy, advice on safety, and general advice about the stay at Wits. From the study findings it was discovered that these offices were like a source of information were a foreign student got all the important information a first step to help them cope. The study also found that foreign students at Cape Town university had to report first to the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) in their first week on campus and like students at Wits were made knowledgeable of the university's policies, culture and how things were approached academically.

The study found that these international students' offices assisted foreign students with immigration procedures required by the South African government, so that no serious immigration and academic problems in the future may be encountered on the part of the foreign student. It was discovered from the findings that both university staff and experienced students worked in these centres, thus from the findings it became an opportunity to start meeting other students from one's country and from around the world fostering friendship and a sense of belonging.

#### **4.5.4. Crises Lines**

The study again brought out that student crises lines helped international students to ask and seek assistance in whatever crises they will be facing at any given time of the day. Taking the example of Wits Student Crisis Line, which supports students experiencing emotional and psychological distress. It has got a student crises line which operates 24 hours a day and they have toll free lines managed by professionals. From the findings it was also noted that students could also contact the Counselling and Careers Development Unit through this service. Hence it was no surprise when the finding found that it is through these crises lines that some international students found their solutions in many problems they faced at any time of the day, in the process being able to cope in these challenges they would be facing.

#### **4.5.5. Support Clubs or Associations**

The findings also brought out that most international students familiarised and sought comfort and advice from the different associations which existed at the different South African universities. It is these different associations or clubs that made foreign students feel at home or cope at a rapid pace (Chinyamurindi 2018). Foreign students were found to be feeling more at home by mingling and associating more with other students from the same country of origin or from just another foreign country. Wu et al. (2015) notes that the availability of services and organisations such as student associations and other recreational activities improved interaction amongst students. So, from the study findings it is these associations like the Tanzanian society, Nigerian student association, Mauritian Club at the University of Cape Town, and a Zimbabwean Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal which facilitated foreign student rapid assimilation. The study found that Mauritian students in KwaZulu-Natal were always a regular at the Zimbabwean Society functions since they felt they shared the same status of being foreigners, hence establishing friendship which aided in coping.

The findings are also in line with Tinto (1975) who argues that social integration is paramount for a foreign student to reach a conclusion that he or she is not dropping out of tertiary education. Social integration as it is the interaction between the student and the social environment, Tinto (2014) argue it is made possible through formal and informal interaction that is, in the classroom and after the classroom activities including clubs and associations (Ghalayini 2014). So positive social integration according to Tinto is when foreign students can join social groups or clubs, in the process making new friends. As brought out in the findings, friendship is established amongst foreign students due to the various clubs which

existed hence as Tinto (2014) state it is this friendship that even go on to influences the academic performance of international students in instances that the group is academically strong.

#### **4.5.6. Counselling Services**

The study found that international students used counselling services provided at the various South African universities to cope. From the findings it is noted that international students, especially those from the western countries made use of the counselling division more than the students from African countries. Foreign students from western countries found the counselling session helpful in compacting their fear of facing the new environment, especially for the first-year foreign students and talking what may be weighing them down so healthy to their academic and social life, hence empowering them to face the challenge well equipped. The findings brought out that Black African and Asian students did not frequently make use of the counselling services. Hyams-Ssekasi et al., (2014) reports that Black Africans and Asian students often associated counselling with mental weakness, hence, did not want to be labelled insane by visiting such facilities. This being the case findings from the study further review that the African and Asian students felt more comfortable sharing their frustrations or receiving advice from their elders or senior students from their own home country, some even turning to their parents (through social media), older friends and faculty members for help (Wang et al. 2015). Thus, from the findings it can be deduced that in as much as South African universities have counselling division in place for the foreign students it is not all of them that make use of it.

#### **4.5.7. Community Volunteering Schemes**

The study further found that various institutions of higher learning in South Africa have put into place community volunteering programs which help the foreign student to have an experience of the out of college life, mingling by the locals in the process developing ties to the locals as well as the culture of South Africa. From the findings it was discovered that such programs or schemes provided opportunities for the foreign student to get involved in the development of the local area, hence in the process making friends and confidence boosted as well as getting familiarised to the local's culture. The study findings also brought out that apart from the volunteering schemes there were also community outreach programmes that allowed

international students to visit and forge links with local schools. This as per the findings helped the students to quickly assimilate in the new culture.

#### **4.5.8. Remedial Classes**

The study found that some South African universities provides remedial classes to international students who had little competence in English. Students especially from the Asian countries were found to be the majority undertaking these classes. According to Maringe and Jenkins (2014), they note that the strategy of remedial classes was not only common in South Africa but even among international students in the UK, Australia, and other western countries with international students. Though the study also found that some South African universities were not providing enough support for international students who were struggling with the English language and some foreign students had to enrol in English remedial classes with private institutions to improve their English, it has also been discovered that these private institutions were affiliated to the university, or they would be referred to as good by the university. Thus, from the findings institutions by providing remedial classes to assist those with poor language proficiency, especially English it assisted many foreign students to excel academically as they were able to understand what was being taught. This also aided foreign students in making friends as they were able to have a common language to communicate through hence managed to cope perfectly.

#### **4.6. Governmental Support**

The study has found that governments globally participate in various international, continental, regional and domestic initiatives with the aim of reducing obstacles which might affect student mobility (UNESCO UIS 2012). According to the study findings many governments have realised the need to break the boundaries which restricted student mobility and to accommodate international students for the dawning of the technological age meant the need to have a diversified knowledge base and expertise only attainable by experiencing different cultures and backgrounds. It has become the prerogative of many governments to create an atmosphere to make the foreign student welcome and easily settle into the new culture with few or no challenges at all and from the findings, the South African government seems to have various initiatives up its sleeves for the international students.

#### **4.6.1. The SADC Protocols**

The study found that South Africa is part of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training (1997) which supports and facilitates migration within the region for purposes of research, study and any pursuits relating to education and training. From the findings it was noted that the South African government's major contribution to internationalisation of higher education was this protocol which reserved five per cent of its university's population to foreign students (UNESCO UIS 2012). This stance by the South African government of becoming a signatory to the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, from the study findings show that students from the SADC member states were afforded the same status as domestic students, hence with the same institutional rights (UNESCO UIS 2012), hence foreign students by this approach felt protected and enrolled in any SA university with a positive mind which facilitated coping. Though this was also a strategy of minimising brain drain, many experts being lost to western countries this protocol offered the security to some extent to foreign students that their place is already reserved with the same institutional rights locals have. The study also found that because of this initiative South Africa became the hub of many foreign students hence other SADC states losing their human resource to South Africa. However, it can be noted that the government existed to facilitate internationalisation policy, but it has been up to South African universities themselves to promote internationalisation (MacGregor 2014).

#### **4.6.2. Accra Declaration**

The study further found that South African higher education system, through the Council of Higher Education (CHE) participated in the Accra Declaration on General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa. According to Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2015), this was the stance by the African Union and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa to promote national and regional agreements about quality assurance, accreditation, and the recognition of qualifications (UNESCO UIS 2012). Thus, according to the study findings South Africa was able to reduce obstacles that limited student mobility and encouraging internalisation of education hence in the process erecting policies which aided foreigners to feel more at home and face fewer obstacles. Though this was an initiative for the whole of Africa, South Africa stood to benefit more hence was a participant.

#### **4.6.3. Government as a Force of Intervention**

The study revealed that the South African government played a significant role when it came to the welfare of foreign students to retain them and attract more. By aiding them in times of crises and disrupt that reduced the students stress level and feelings of being in an alien land. For example, looking at the year 2016 of South African history it was characterised by protests and xenophobic attacks which disrupted even the core of higher education (Khumalo 2017). From the findings this is seen to have led to the temporary closure of some universities with some foreign student visas no longer covering the delayed semesters hence stressed. Findings further review that some foreign students were now contemplating withdrawal and the SA government to compact this and retain its status and student base it took steps to address these problems. The inconvenience caused on the part of the foreign student was rectified by the government by issuing a blanket visa extension to those foreign students, whose documentation had been set to expire at the end of that year, that is, 2016, thereby setting a conditional date of 31 March 2017. This according to the findings came as a relief to many foreign students who had their studies disrupted and still in session. Hence the SA government role played a significant part in the sailing of this challenge which had faced the foreign student.

#### **4.6.4. SA Constitution Enshrining Rights for Foreigners**

This study found that the SA government to show its appreciation and support for foreign students enshrined in its constitution the right of foreigners going on to state that all citizens had the right to further education in South Africa with the full support of the various institutions the foreign students may choose and this becoming the obligation of every institution to enforce. This according to the findings also gave birth to various initiatives such as the Durban Statement on Transformation, from 2015, which focused on strengthening higher education in South Africa. This study found that this to some extent empowered the foreign student in the same manner as the local student even though sometimes levels of being discriminated against could be witnessed on the foreign students by locals or institutions. This as per the study findings made some international students feel more at home and made assimilation easier and faster.

#### **4.6.5. Support of Critical Skills**

This study found that the South African government had made provisions to offer permanent residency to those falling under the critical skills areas. This to some extents have been

witnessed to help the foreign student indirectly cope for as Tinto (1993) states, when a student perceives the need to stay more beneficial than to drop out, he or she would rather decide to pursue his or her studies. So according to the study findings this is security for the foreign student falling in the category of critical skills. This move by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) allowed foreign students in critical skills areas to apply for permanent residency immediately after completing their studies, with many of the usual requirements set aside. Students were to only submit a certificate from a Professional Body, Council or Board recognised by SAQA as other requirements had been waived like residency could now be attained in roughly a year against the 24 months for other residences, though submitting police clearance certificates and undergoing certain medical tests remained a requisite. Thus, according to the study foreign students in critical skill areas tend to whether any circumstances knowing there is benefit awaiting them soon

From the findings it is noted that changes in the immigration law in June 2014 brought South Africa into line with best international practice with the legislation now catering for the retention of high-quality foreign graduates, in this instance those pursuing their PhD studies. The study reviewed countries like the USA, Australia and Canada had retained certain foreign students for many years as they realised their significant value to their economies and South Africa now shared in the same vision. So, students attaining their PhD in SA universities according to the findings seemed to be more comfortable, assimilating easily, with a sense of being home knowing the legislation favour their stay, by being able to apply for the critical skill visa. The critical skill visa allows the student to work for the employer of their choosing for five years with temporary residence in which after those years an individual is then entitled to a permanent residency (DHA, n.d). Hence as noted from the study this move by the government favoured the foreign student and aided them into settling in South Africa.

#### **4.7. Summary**

This chapter presented and interpreted the research findings. The challenges encountered by international students in South African universities and the country at large were explored. Their coping strategies were also identified also taking note of the contribution of the various institutions and the government. Thus, the findings reflected on the coping strategies identified in literature, engaged the objectives, and consulted the key theory of the study, which is Tinto's student integration model, to comprehend the findings and analyse them. The following chapter will then provide recommendations for the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This research study explored the mechanisms put into play by international students to cope in South Africa's institutions of higher learning as well as the challenges they face. The research utilised a secondary data approach due to limited time to conduct a field work study. The study thus explored the literature available on international students from studies done in South Africa and internationally to have a comparative understanding of the subject. From the research it was found international students do face many challenges, but some manage to cope because of the different mechanisms they put into place sometimes with the contribution of the institutions they are enrolled in as well as the South African government. Therefore, this chapter summarises, concludes, and give recommendations of the research study.

### **5.2. Discussion**

The study made several major findings which were presented in four broad thematic categories which include factors that attract international students to South Africa, challenges faced by international students, coping mechanisms used by international students, institutional support offered to international students, and the government support offered to international students. This research study explored the various coping strategies employed by international students in South Africa. The objective was to identify the challenges faced by foreign students in South Africa's institutions of higher learning, strategies they employed to cope and the contribution of the various institutions and SA government in aiding foreign students to integrate in South Africa. Foreign students have been found to cope differently basing on their background or country of origin. Thus, the research found different coping strategies amongst foreign students in SA which include making friends with people from the same country of origin, joining social clubs, maladaptive behaviour like drug abuse, attending counselling and having part time jobs to compact financial constraints (Van Zyl 2016; Khumalo 2017). Institutions on their part were found offering orientation to help the foreign student settle in and the SA government enacting policies which supported foreign students' presence.

Challenges still existed as per the findings which hindered the foreign students from fully integrating in the new South African environment which included discrimination, racism,

xenophobic attacks, home sickness, language barrier, cultural change, and financial constraints (Lewin and Mawoyo, 2014; Martinez-Callaghan and Gill-Lacruz 2017). The following paragraphs presents the several conclusions and recommendations of each of these findings.

### **5.2.1. Recommendations on challenges Faced by International Students**

The study concludes that international students are highly affected by different challenges which include trying to adapt to the new culture, learning new language; dealing with discrimination, racism, and xenophobic attacks; and continuous efforts to cope with different financial constraints. To help address these identified issues, the following recommendations might be helpful and critical in addressing these challenges.

#### *Recommendations*

- It is a common feature to want to spend more than one can afford especially when in a foreign nation. Despite all the places of interest to visit in South Africa an international student should not overspend to later suffer financially because some of these financial constraints emanate from these overspendings. You better talk about the local situation than the UK scenario.
- The university should provide compulsory local language proficiency training for international students to encourage and ensure that they develop some basic knowledge and conversational skills to help them adapt quickly and integrate. Learning a new language helps one to adapt to the local culture and environment quickly (Farah and Barack 2019), thus it is essential to help international students integrate in their new local environments. This might also help them to assimilate and in some way, help eliminate some xenophobic threats and discriminations which are often made distinct by language barriers and lack of understanding of local cultures. Engaging in remedial classes even with private institutions enhances language development especially for non-English speaking foreign nationals.
- Universities should arrange funding for high performing international students. Looking at the case of foreign students at Columbia University in New York, in the US, the university offers 100 per cent aid to financially challenged students but who prove to be top of their class regardless of citizenship (Moody et al. 2019). If South African universities take the same stance to some extent, it helps the foreign student to be stress

free and concentrate more on his or her academics rather than stressing over fees shortage.

- Yale University offers on-campus part time work in the marketing and communications department or the university newspaper to its foreign students to help them close any financial gap they would be experiencing. South African institutions should also try to adopt this strategy making available part-time jobs to foreign students having financial constraints and it may prove to be fruitful as it is in the US. It is plausible if an office is to be set at each campus where such students can go and make known their financial status hence be easily identified and given aid. This would alleviate their financial burden, which would sometimes be impacting negatively on their academic and social integration.
- Universities should train faculty staff members to deal with the diverse student cultures they encounter in the classroom. Since South Africa's universities are now accommodating more international students, training then becomes essential especially for different support staff in faculties and residences to be more sensitive to the needs of international students academically and socially, thus improving student-faculty staff relationships.
- South African universities should also organise more and frequent social activities through existing structures such as the SRC and International Student Offices. This is a move to encourage socialisation between local and international students, in turn facilitating student togetherness and a better appreciation of each other's culture, language and background. Hence integration would also be achieved.

### **5.2.2. Coping mechanisms used by international students**

There different coping mechanism used by international students in South Africa. The ones that were identified in this study include: relying on other (senior) foreign students as support structure; making use of social support of host families or local neighbours and friends; joining religious organisations; use of social media to deal with loneliness; learning new languages; engaging in extracurricular activities; working in groups to help eliminate workload; and making use of different maladaptive strategies. Though this study identified different strategies that are being used by international students to cope with different challenges and pressure they come across, some of the strategies are not health to their psychological and mental wellbeing.

Therefore, the following recommendations are essential to help provide specific measures that can be used by the university institutions.

### *Recommendations*

- The international student has a paramount responsibility to himself or herself when embarking on a mission to be educated in a foreign nation. It must not be only all excitement but forgetting that every new environment has got its share of challenges.
- A foreign student should at least visit South Africa's universities websites to have a glimpse of what is on offer, also having an idea of how things are done or approached to avoid unforeseen surprises and then make an informed decision to which institution to join.
- Foreign students should also take the orientation week seriously to bond, ask questions, learn the main culture of South Africa to easily assimilate, rather than as a joy ride learning nothing from it.
- It is also an advisable gesture mainly for African foreign students in SA to make use of the counselling division made available by the different South African Universities rather than associate counselling with weakness and mental instability. Many people in different countries have been witnessed to have been helped through these counselling services.
- Some foreign students in SA have been seen to succumbing to drug abuse especially in their first year so making use of the rehabilitation centres after this maladaptive behaviour may help them get better instead of trying to go through the ordeal by themselves.
- International students should be encouraged to seek professional help for any psychological challenges due to different life stress and academic pressures.

### **5.2.3. Institutional support offered to international students**

South Africa has become an international hub of many international students and to maintain this position, retaining many foreign students there is need to take into consideration an ideas and stances. Institutions on their part were found offering different services with the orientation considered as the major help offered to foreign students to settle in. However, the study also realised that very limited efforts are being made outside the orientation to assist international students. The study also found that there are disparities in the way African foreign students and

other foreign students from Europe or Asia that is given by institutions. Thus, the study concludes that institutions have an important role to play in integrating and supporting all international students with the best services they can find. The following recommendations importantly reflect on the identified challenges.

### *Recommendations*

- The issue of offering remedial classes seems to be a great challenge for most universities in SA. It appears that universities are doing very little to assist international students to improve their poor English proficiency. Universities should assist international students who have poor English language skills by introducing English remedial classes for students who need assistance not that they should seek this service from private institutions. So, it should not be left to international students to improve their English language proficiency; South African universities do admit international students, such as those from Francophone countries, knowing full well that they do not have an English language background.
- All the South African institutions also need to come together and standardise admission procedures and requirements on foreign students. It does not really paint a bright picture that each institution has its own policies and procedures. Institutions should create financial support programs or fixed work programs to help foreign students in need to become financially stable.
- It is also recommended that South African institutions should make available the Career and Counselling Development Unit which should operate even on weekends if budgets permit to cater for the well-being of the international student at any time of the day. In Australia and New Zealand most Universities have the career and counselling division which works six days per week, 12 hours a day and this division seem to be a regular of many foreign students (Khawaja and Stallman 2011). Thus, SA on top of this division should also arrange support groups for international students with the aim of understanding some of their challenges and assisting them to adjust to the new environment.
- Institutions should effectively equip the international office so that they would be able to deal appropriately with the complains presented by the international students, offer excellent educational support services such as information dissemination, orientation, a help desk, and the platform to interact with fellow international students. Just like at the University of Canterbury the international offices cater for all the foreign student

needs, petitions and information and they operate 24 hours a day and constantly update any information they deem to be of importance.

- There is great need to make compulsory to the international student classes about South African history. This to some extent equips the international student about the culture and norms of South Africa and how they operate in their way of life hence may make assimilation easier.
- In a study of international students in US universities, Wu et al. (2015) explains that Universities should be prepared not to meet not only the academic needs of students but also their social needs. As identified in this study, most South African universities have orientation programs last for days or weeks. Thus, these universities should create long-term orientation programs that are run for at least 6 months to help students integrate and in the new environment and help them with different social experiences. Giving students different social assistance might help them in reducing their exposure to violent crimes.
- South African universities should put into place rehabilitation and healing centres for students who would have indulged in maladaptive behaviours. Universities should show their support that they have at heart foreign students despite their drinking or substance abuse problems and in a position to offer the appropriate help if these students do seek assistance.
- Universities should create and encourage societies or clubs which comprise both the locals and the foreign students to unify them and instil a sense of belonging to the foreign students.

#### **5.2.4. The government support offered to international students**

Foreign students have been considered to contribute dearly to South Africa's revenue as well as the economy. In realising this value, the SA government has been determined to absorb foreign students who have graduated from their universities. However, despite making such efforts, very little is being done to address the challenge of Xenophobia and discrimination against foreign students' integration at a government level (Khumalo, 2017). Therefore, this study concludes that though the South African has offered some disparities in awarding foreign students studying in the country to be absorbed as critical skills, very little is being done to ensure their security from discrimination and xenophobia. To recommend, the South African government is then compelled to strategize ways to stabilise the inflow of international students

and retain them. Thus, the South African government should put into play the following strategies to enhance the inflow of international students to make them feel protected.

### *Recommendations*

- In partnership with Universities, the SA government should put into place awareness campaigns against xenophobia and discrimination. They should also offer support services that ensures that Universities sustains initiatives and workshops that provide information on the nature of stress and teach practical coping skills to certain individuals or university employees who will transfer this knowledge to the foreign students.
- There is need to gazette the working hours a foreign student can work per week. The international student should be privileged enough just like the South African nationals to work the same number of hours without restrictions to compact any financial difficulty they would be facing from these earnings. This has proved to be effective looking at countries like the UK where international students from the EU are allowed to work as many hours as they like (Moody et al. 2019), hence they are able to make a living for themselves and even cover their tuition.
- The legislation should stress more on equality and drastic measures taken against xenophobic perpetrators and other individuals who would have exerted harassment towards international students.
- Canada, USA, and Australia are the most immigration friendly countries in the world. Singha (2020) notes that Canada has several immigration programs and one of these enables foreign students to easily acquire study visas, residency and work permits after completing their studies. Following this there is need for the South African government to improve the immigration process to make it more flexible and accommodating especially to foreign students.
- The SA government should be able to offer security to the foreign students who are to live in off campus residency if such an initiative is to come to fruition in the first place.

The conclusions and recommendations on each finding of presented in this section summarises the results of this study. They identify the limitations and loopholes and what need to be done to address the challenges and improve the standards of international students in South Africa's universities. The next section reflects on how the objectives of the study were realised.

### **5.3. Realisation of Objectives**

This study had four objectives that were critical in guiding its conduct. They were essential in summarising and pointing the key interests of this study. This section revisits these objectives to reflect how they were achieved in this study.

*Objective 1:* To explore various challenges faced by international students in South Africa's institutions of higher learning

This objective was realised, through a threefold process. Firstly, in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), the challenges faced by international students were identified as major problems which pushed the study to be carried out. Secondly, through the exploration and discussion of existing studies in the literature review chapter (Chapter 2). Thirdly, through the thematic presentation of findings whereby each identified challenge faced by the international students was presented, analysed, and discussed. Several challenges were thus identified, and recommendations were made. With these details in place, the objective was achieved.

*Objective 2:* To examine various coping mechanisms employed by international students in the host country

The second objective was achieved through reviewing of specific primary studies which were conducted through interviews with students and presented in Chapter 2. The identified strategies were thematically collated and presented in Chapter 4. The study was able to realise this objective by reflecting on some of the primary data reflections and comparative analysis of various experiences of students.

*Objective 3:* To evaluate the initiatives by the government in assisting international students in their challenges

The study firstly identified the policies, laws and initiatives that have been put in place by the South African government to assist international students. Secondly, it reviewed the perspectives shared in existing literature in relation to the awareness of international students of these laws and policies. Thirdly and finally, the study was able to present and discuss the key themes on the initiatives that have been put by the government to assist the international students. Upon the realisation of the objective, relevant recommendations were made.

*Objective 4:* To identify the initiative put in place by various institutions in assisting international students to cope

Through review of existing studies, the initiatives that are put in place by various institutions were identified and presented. A thematic presentation of these initiatives was clearly discussed in Chapter 4. The study was able to analyse and provide recommendations toward improving the interventions by institutions to facilitate supportive and effective measures to help international students to cope.

#### **5.4. Suggestions for Further Research**

This study focused on exploring the strategies employed by international students to cope in the institutions of the host country South Africa, using Tinto's student integration model. The findings brought out that international students face a plethora of challenges upon entering South Africa but however they employ various strategies to cope and assimilate. Since the study took a secondary analysis and qualitative stance there is still more room to study international students and their coping strategies in South African institutions of higher learning by collecting primary data. The challenges faced by international students in South Africa can also be approached in a quantitative way so that the results can be quantified, and this can be achieved by taking into consideration not part but all the universities in South Africa. Despite the research findings it seems little has been done to explore the coping mechanisms of international students in the South African context thus more research to focus on collecting primary data in South African institutions of higher learning and other models or theories in learning to be considered other than Tinto's student integration model.

#### **5.5. Conclusion**

South Africa has become a dream destination of many foreign students and continue to attract a significant number of international students from different countries. South Africa by the attainment of its independence has undergone a great deal of transformation earning the name the rainbow nation because of its diversified population now even presents in its universities thus like other countries South Africa continues to upgrade its standards to have a competitive advantage over other nations and continue to be internationally recognised in the globalised world. This study having made use of secondary data analysis, strategies international students employed to cope with challenges encountered in South Africa were investigated. Thus,

findings revealed that challenges encountered by international students at South African universities affected their integration in the new environment somewhat negatively, though the findings also revealed that many coping mechanisms have been employed by most foreign students in South African universities to assimilate and successfully integrate.

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