



**A critical exploration of student integration and attrition of Black African
undergraduate students from selected South African universities**

By

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DECLARATION

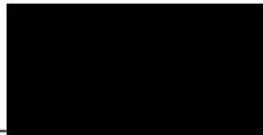
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STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this thesis.

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Dr Claire Gaillard (PhD)

DEDICATION

- This study is dedicated to my family. To me, family is just everything; hence, I dedicate this study to Lochenberg family (my mother's side) and also Cele family (my father's side). With this study, I acknowledge the upbringing of my parents (Dolly Lochenberg and Ntulo Cele) and their union which made the person that I am today. I thank you for raising a boy like me and a man that I am becoming. To my family (Lochenberg and Cele), this is a challenge for us all. Let us make education fashionable now for our children to look up to us and so that the upcoming generation will follow on our footsteps.
- To my unborn (yet to come) son/daughter, Hlelo, this is for you: My plan was to bring you on earth after the completion of my doctoral studies, and my intentions were to make your life experience better from that of a little child in me. This decision was worthwhile.

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ABSTRACT

Access to South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has significantly increased; however, success and graduation rates continue to decrease, especially amongst Black African students. Moreover, Black African youths entering university do so against the backdrop of extreme inequalities characterising their schooling backgrounds, class and economic resources. Such inequalities have had a large impact on these students' decision to drop out of university. Literature relating to Black African students' experiences of integration and attrition at South African universities is sorely missing. In addition to this, the institutions of higher learning are struggling to find a proper remedy to mitigate student dropout. Hence, it is this gap that the present study sought to fill by developing a new model that can be used by universities to retain Black African students in South Africa's HEIs.

The present study adopted the qualitative approach and the critical paradigm. Secondary data was obtained from a larger study of education and emancipation, documenting the university experiences of students from eight diverse universities in South Africa. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with 66 Black African students. In the present study, data were thematically analysed. The theoretical framework that informed data analysis is Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM).

The interviews that were conducted with the participants produced rich and thick data indicating that the success of Black African students in South African universities is impeded by such factors as language, poor economic background, unsupportive family background, racial discrimination, gender stereotypes, and discrimination. Most participants mentioned that the medium of instruction used at universities, such as English and Afrikaans hindered their success. The findings suggest that high school education inadequately prepares Black African students for university. Furthermore, financial challenges, gender discrimination, homophobia and racism were found to be significant obstacles hindering most participants from studying at university. Informed by these findings as well as the review of extent literature, this thesis proposes a model that will assist universities to minimise dropout rates amongst Black African students. This model obligates institutions of higher learning to put students' backgrounds at the forefront in every decision that they undertake to maximise the social and academic integration of students and consequently decrease attrition.

Key words: *Black; African; students; dropout; attrition; integration*

PREFACE

A rough road to my future

This research resonated with my personal experience as a student in a South African university, since I grew up in a small rural village called St Faiths in Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal Province. Growing up in such a background, I witnessed most community members sinking further into poverty due to a high level of unemployment. Motivated by this observation, I decided to pursue the teaching profession, so that I could go back and serve my community with proper education. My wish, thus, was to acquire a degree and return to my homeland to teach youngsters from this impoverished community. My primary school education was inferior, characterised by insufficient learning resources, so was my secondary school education, which I obtained from another school, situated approximately 10 kilometres away from my home where I matriculated. In the latter school, I went through the same struggle, learning in an environment with inadequate teaching and learning resources. With dedication and hard work, I would go an extra mile to find information, individually. Nevertheless, these experiences motivated me to choose teaching as a career and, as mentioned above, my intention was to empower my community after completing my Bachelor of Education degree.

My family and community backgrounds, however, hardly discouraged me from achieving my goals. My intention was to attain a university qualification one day. In 2011, my dream came true and I enrolled as a Bachelor of Education student at the university. That is when I started to notice how different I was from my university peers. My journey has been marked by a unique set of struggles and challenges that have shaped my experience in profound ways. These struggles reflect the broader context of historical and systemic inequalities that I continue to persist in higher education institutions (HEIs). One of the challenges I encountered was the feeling of cultural dissonance and marginalisation within predominantly White academic spaces as a young boy from a very disadvantaged background that had attended a Black-only rural school from Grade R to matric level. Among a plethora of challenges was language. I could not express myself in English as a language of communication at the university. This made me to reflect on my schooling experience prior to university entry, and how it failed me. I could tell from the first day of the Orientation week that I was of course in a 'foreign land'. I can still remember the speeches that were made in the Student Union Hall, I could not understand what was being communicated due to the language barrier. Although, my matric

results were good enough to be admitted to university language competency in English remained a huge challenge.

The following week, classes had to commence, and I had to face the reality. Considering that it was my first time to have a lecturer from another racial group, I knew it was going to be a struggle. Even though the majority of them (lecturers) were from non-black racial group, there was this one lecturer for Professional Studies 110 who was a Black African lady. Regardless of her ethnicity, this is university and the language of communication is English. Her kindness towards us as students calmed me and she was my favourite lecturer. One day I was asked to share my high school experience in front of the class as part of a discussion. Well, I knew what I wanted to say but my fear was that I did not have that “White accent” like many of the other students. However, I had no choice but to speak, regardless of the possible embarrassment. Even outside of the classroom, making friends was difficult given that the boys spoke English, and now I do not know who to associate with. With this experience, I suffered from lacking a sense of belonging. The best way was to isolate myself, which affected my institutional engagement and academic integration. Initially, I felt like giving up on a challenge I could possibly overcome, but then I realised that the bigger goal was to successfully graduate from the university in four years’ time. My favourite English lecturer was an Indian woman who marked my assignment and gave me 70 percent; I had high hopes that I will make it through.

Additionally, financial constraints have been a significant hurdle for me. Limited access to funding opportunities and scholarship programmes culminated in failure to meet the financial demands of buying lunch on campus, purchasing quality clothes like the other boys on campus, textbooks, and other educational expenses. The lack of adequate academic support structures compounded the challenges I faced. Limited access to mentorship programmes, academic advising, and resources tailored to my academic needs as a student hindered my academic progress and overall success. This is when I realised that there is huge gap between institutions of higher education and basic education because here “yikwampunz’edl’emini”, it’s the survival of the fittest! The struggles I faced at student residences were mostly associated with the unaffordability of basic needs such as food items and toiletries. I would take a bus to campus daily without breakfast, and attend classes until 16h00 on an empty stomach. I would eat once a day during supper to try and save the little I had in my cupboard. I needed so much financial and academic support, but no one could even notice because I pretended that everything was just fine. This lack of support exacerbated feelings of isolation, which contributed to the

development of imposter syndrome, where I doubted my abilities and felt that I did not belong to the academic environment.

During these struggles, I started to work even harder academically. I performed quite well. I received merit certificates in several modules that I was doing. Based on my excellent academic performance in 2013, I was recognised by the Golden Key International Honour Society, which is an international non-profit organisation that recognises students that are excelling academically in all the universities. I scooped this prestigious award for securing a position among the top 15% of students who were academically excelling at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. During the same year (2013), I was awarded a Dean's Commendation Certificate by the late Dean of the School of Education of the time, which is an acknowledgement of outstanding achievement. Further, what boosted my confidence the most in 2013 was a Certificate of Merit in my major module (Business Management). I am the first student to get 100% in the examination in the history of this module at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I vividly remember a comment from my Business Management lecturer on the cover page of my assignment where she wrote "You have good potential, do your Honours next year!" This comment made me to continue with my studies after completing my undergraduate degree. In 2014, I was a board executive member of Golden Key International Honour Society at the Edgewood Chapter where I served as a Historian Officer. Towards the end of 2014, I was also awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the remarkable work I did when I was serving as a Historian Officer in Golden Key International Honour Society Edgewood Chapter. These recognitions and achievements motivated me to continue with my studies. When I was doing Honours degree, I met this wonderful lecturer, who journeyed with me in my academic career.

However, despite the catalogue of struggles I had to endure, I am fuelled by a strong sense of resilience and determination. I refuse to be defined by the challenges I face. Hence, in my capacity as a lecturer now, I strive to create positive change within the university environment. I actively seek out supportive communities and networks that uplift and empower Black African young people. Through my struggles, I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of representation, cultural inclusivity, and the need for structural changes within higher education institutions. Hence, I have often asked myself whether I am the only Black (African) student who has ever felt alienated, inferior, less important, and doubtful to the extent of almost dropping out of university when I entered the institution as a first-year student due to the unwelcoming university environment. This is because these experiences seemed not to

be openly spoken about among Black African students. I hope that my experiences and the findings from this study can contribute to the broader conversation on addressing the systemic barriers faced by Black African students and inspire future generations to overcome obstacles and pursue their educational aspirations with confidence. In essence, I am aware that my personal experiences may have influenced my interpretation of the research findings. Through reflexivity, I strived to be neutral. Nonetheless, this research has given voice to other students and provided a platform for universities to understand Black African students.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

SIM	Student Integration Model
SA	South Africa
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
DOE	Department of Education
SAHEI	South African Higher Education Institutions
USA	United States of America
DHERST	Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
CAO	Central Applications Office
UK	United Kingdom
HIV	Human Immune Virus
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UJ	University of Johannesburg
DUT	Durban University of Technology
NWU	North-West University
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
UL	University of Limpopo
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UCP	University of Cape Town
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
SRC	Student Representative Committee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by presenting the background to the study. It then outlines the study's problem statement and briefly highlights the history of the South African Higher Education (SAHIE). This historical background of SAHIE will shed light on the Black African students' experiences of a South African university before and after apartheid. It then explains how the present study contributes to the body of knowledge on social justice scholarship; hence, this will serve as the significance of the study at large. This chapter also provides the objectives of this research project, and presents the main research question and the critical questions underpinning this study. Furthermore, this chapter briefly discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study and gives an overview of the methodology employed. The chapter then provides the definition of the key concepts used in the study. It presents an overview of the whole thesis, followed by a conclusion.

1.2 Background to the study

The collapse of apartheid in 1994 saw South African universities becoming more racially and culturally diverse (Chetty & Pather, 2016). Kessi and Cornell (2015) recognised that student cohorts entering South African universities have become more diverse - making the first-year experience more complex for them to understand. The diversity of student population has resulted in students' needs and expectations becoming increasingly heterogeneous (Nelson, 2011). Hence, there is an urgent need for higher education institutions (HEIs) to appreciate, and adjust to, such diversity among first-year students, considering that many South Africans

entering university do so from positions of extreme inequality in terms of schooling, race, class, and socio-economic resources (Chetty & Pather, 2016).

While access to South African HEIs has increased, success and graduation rates have continued to decrease, especially within the context of the Black (African) population (Blumenstock, 2016; Gupta & Antony, 2020; Silva & Chounta, 2022). Recent reports published by the Human Sciences Research Council have revealed that as many as 40 per cent of the students drop out of university in their first year of study (University World News, 2008). Literature detailing student dropout shows significant reasons for student dropout at higher learning institutions like universities (Berkhout et al., 2010; Bradbury & Miller, 2011; Hlatshwayo, 2020; Hlatshwayo & Shawa, 2022). Black African students still feel socially excluded, inferior and isolated at South African universities, and this affects their academic and social integration and increases the chances of attrition before they complete their courses (Chetty & Pather, 2016). It is with this in mind that the present study seeks to investigate how might Black African students be successfully socially and academically integrated in SAHEIs to avert dropout.

The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 ended apartheid, which was one of the greatest struggles of the second part of the 20th Century and brought a sense of hope for South Africans and for the rest of the world (Soudiuen, 2015). After 22 years of democracy in South Africa, academic and political freedom has not translated into decolonised intellectual traditions, rituals, and habitus in teaching and research (Hlatshwayo, 2022). The opposite is observable in the way that universities promote universalistic and uncompromisingly foreign cultures, populations, and predicaments for the sake of globalisation. Language and curriculum reviewed within South African HEIs with a view to renegotiate epistemologies that are informed by local knowledge, cosmologies, and worldviews does not seem to be the main agenda within the South African context (Hlatshwayo, 2021).

Before 1994, the South African educational system had an institutionalised inequality characterised by a large, degraded Black sector on the one hand, and an administratively and pedagogically privileged White sector on the other (Soudein, 2008). Thus, when the new ANC led government came into power in 1994, the higher education sector was barely functional, and it made significant strides to address the situation in this sector as change was the main agenda. Symbolically, the 17 odd, racialised education departments in the country were dissolved into a single national education department which assumed responsibility for the development of a set of signature policies of which the most important was the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Compulsory education was introduced and consequently, South Africa achieved its enrolment goals in terms of universal primary education; the higher education landscape was rationalised with the objective of raising quality and efficiency in the education system through the Higher Education Act of 1998. Black student enrolment at higher education institutions grew from 191000 in 1993 to 343000 in 1999 and as of 2019, 14.6 million Black Africans were attending classes at higher education institutions in South Africa, which represents over 34 per cent of South Africa's total Black population.

As a matter of supporting the previously marginalised population, such as Black African students from impoverished background who hardly afforded university fees, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) grew from R70 million in 1994 to close to a R1 billion in 2019 (Tumubweinee & Luescher, 2019). For purposes of this study, the previously marginalised and excluded students are the Black African students. To this end, the main task of universities is to enable previously marginalised and excluded students to become participants in and users of a shared disciplinary practice that is beyond their reach when they join the university community (Bradbury & Miller, 2011). This replicates the transformation agenda enshrined in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of

Higher Education. White Paper 3 explains that transformation requires that all the existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era. At the centre of the transformation agenda, in terms of ‘fitness’, is the White Paper’s vision of establishing a single national coordinated higher education system that is “democratic, non-racial and non-sexist” (Soudien, 2008, p. 35). Thus, as aforementioned, in order to understand the experiences of Black African students at a South African university, it is pivotal to be cognisant of the history of South African higher education at large.

Therefore, this study critically explores the experiences of Black African students at HEIs and critically analyses how these students’ experiences influenced their social and academic integration and attrition in these institutions. It also critically analyses the factors these students identified as influencing their experiences of social and academic integration in these institutions. This study largely drew on the conceptual framework of Tinto’s Student Integration Model (SIM) (Tinto, 1975; 1993; 1997) as a lens to view this phenomenon. Based on the findings from this research, this thesis has provided a new theoretical model that will assist South African HEIs to understand and minimise the dropout rate amongst Black African students. This proposed model (see Chapter Five of this study) will also assist researchers who are conducting studies with university students from a similar context.

1.3 Problem statement

The present study is mindful of the fact that even though the debate on the transformation of higher education in South Africa grows every day, there is still an increase in the dropout rate among the Black African students in this context. Observations and adequate supportive literature demonstrate that most Black African students drop out of university (Mtshweni, 2021). There is, however, limited research on the reasons why Black African students drop out of university before completing their studies. Yet, recent studies on higher education and

student success acknowledge the significance of the decolonisation of the curriculum and higher education for these institutions to be more inclusive and to cater for Black African students in particular and African epistemology in the curriculum (Hlatshwayo, 2018; Hlathswayo & Shawa, 2020; Kumalo, 2018). Although the Soudien report of 2008 located its investigation within the context of the educational transformation agenda designed to address issues of discrimination on the bases of race, gender, disability, culture etcetera in higher education, discrimination is still evident in South African universities (Swartz et al., 2018). Discrimination, as defined by the South African Constitution, includes race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Noted by Soudien (2007; 2008; 2015) and Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019), it is clear from the overall assessment of the state of transformation in higher education that discrimination based on racism and sexism is pervasive in South African HEIs. Through this motive, the present study sought to revisit the real university experiences of Black African students, which hinders their success, resulting in them dropping out of the university.

Existant literature reveals that the reasons for the lack of student success in HEIs include a lack of academic skills such as metacognitive and reading skills and study methods that promote retention of information; gaps in conceptual knowledge resulting from misconceptions derived from overreliance on common-sense knowledge; lack of critical thinking skills; poor language development; and affective factors and divergent cultural values and norms that hinder the integration and assimilation of students in the dominant culture within HEIs (Buthelezi, 2017). Congruent to this is Kumalo's (2018) argument that the current education system privileges certain contexts over others in order to sustain universities, consequently denying Black

African students' epistemological access. The current South African education system does not differ significantly from the apartheid education system (Kumalo, 2018). To address this problem, the present study has then developed a theoretical model that will assist HEIs to minimise student dropout rates in the context of South African universities.

1.4 Contribution to social justice scholarship

The significance of the study is encapsulated in how it will contribute to research traditions or foundational literature in a new way (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Lemmer (2019) avers that the significance of the study is basically the importance of your research. As noted from the above background and introduction, being “Black and African” is still problematic in South African universities. Hence, this study contributes to research on race, higher education and emancipation in South African universities. It significantly contributes to the local and international literature focusing on Black African students' experiences, which have often led to social and academic attrition and integration in South African universities. Considering that I am a Black African researcher undertaking a study on African students' experiences at a South African university, this study will also contribute largely to the literature on ‘Black African’ scholarship on race, education and emancipation in South African universities (e.g., Moletsane, 2018; Machika, 2015; Bazana, 2017; Adetutu, 2010; Hlatshwayo, 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022) among others.

In addition, while much of the existing literature provides significant insights into race, Black students' experiences in historically White universities, there is limited research on the experiences of Black African students, which is related to social and academic integration in the South African context. Although a recent study conducted by Swartz et al. (2018) on race, education and emancipation in South African universities responds to a gap in student

experiences in the South African context, their focus was generally on Black students' (African, Coloured, and Indian) experiences of university. Hence, this study will add to this body of knowledge by shifting its focus and only looking exclusively at Black African students' experiences of social and academic attrition and integration particularly at South African universities. Most importantly, this research was not based on assumptions, but it used context based interactions to develop themes and guide further research.

The formal end of apartheid was welcomed with great expectations by most South Africans, with the new government being expected to deliver a new, just and democratic social order and justice through education (Badat & Sayed, 2014; 2017). This social justice was expected to address and respond to the needs of all the citizens, and to the social and economic development of the new South Africa. There was great anticipation that the education system would be fundamentally transformed by dismantling the old apartheid order and creating a new system based on the Freedom Charter edict: "The doors of learning and culture shall be open to all" (Badat & Sayed, 2017, p. 128). To this end, higher education transformation was on the agenda since the advent of democracy in 1994. However, there seems to be insignificant change in the South African higher education landscape (Hlathswayo, 2022).

Even though the post-1994 education policy has been predicated on the principle of equality of opportunity in relation to provision, access, and outcomes, higher education, especially in historically White institutions, the transformation agenda is still on the margins (Kumalo, 2018). In their work on the challenges affecting social justice in the post-1994 era, Badat and Sayed (2014; 2017) argue that education in South Africa generally fails to enhance the 'freedom for all' mantra. They contend that with freedom comes the responsibility to respect and promote constitutional imperatives. Therefore, social justice in and through education has not received

the government's full and concerted attention. Yet, the Black African student population accessing higher education is increasing compared to the last two decades (Kumalo, 2020). Resultantly, the present study was conducted in the interest of social justice education and was undertaken with the aim to explore the experiences of integration and attrition among Black African students in these institutions.

The findings from this study contribute to the body of knowledge on scholarship on social justice, which seeks to unveil the pervasive experiences of Black African students, leading to retention or attrition of the students at a South African university. This has been achieved through the development of a new model that will be used to address the issue of student dropout at South African universities and other global universities operating in a similar context. Whilst noting that the notion of redress that drives educational policy today derives from Education White Paper 3 of 2008, which proclaims an intention "to provide a full spectrum of advanced educational opportunities for an expanding range of the population irrespective of race, gender, age, creed or class or other forms of discrimination" (DoE, 1997, 127). The present study and the new model that I developed are cognisant of the White Paper in question, which further states that:

The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. It implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and on the other a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals (1997, p.18).

1.5 Research objectives and questions

The main objective of this study is to understand the social and academic attrition and integration experiences and responses of Black African students in South African universities.

Hence, to address this main objective, the study focuses on four objectives:

1. Identify and critically analyse academic factors that influence 66 Black African students' individual institutional commitments.
2. Identify and critically analyse social factors that influence 66 Black African students' individual institutional commitments.
3. Establish and critically analyse why the identified factors influence these students' individual institutional commitments in the ways that they do.
4. Propose a new model that will assist in averting (social and academic) attrition and encouraging (social and academic) integration of Black African students in SAHEIs.

Based on these objectives, the key research question guiding this study to critically probe is as follows:

- To avert dropout rates among Black African students in South African higher education institutions (SAHEI), how might Black African students be successfully socially and academically integrated in SAHEI?

Drawing on selected students' narratives to address this question, the three critical research questions that inform the current study were crafted as follows:

1. What academic factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?

2. What social factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?
3. Why do these factors influence their individual goal and institutional commitments in the ways that they do?

1.6 Overview of the methodological approach

In this study, an analysis of secondary data from studies conducted on Education and Emancipation. Qualitative data were generated through in-depth interviews conducted by eight (n=8) researchers. Data were collected from a small cohort of students selected from eight (n=8) diverse universities across South Africa. The researchers traced the students' journeys through university, asking them about the nature of obstacles they encountered, what they along with their institutions were doing in response to the challenges they were facing at different institutions. Their sample initially consisted of a total of 80 students: 66 Black students (including three (n=3) from elsewhere on the African continent), six (n=6) White students, six (n=6) Coloured students, and two (n=2) Indian students. The study lasted for five years as it began in July 2013 and ended in March 2017. Since this study was exploring the Black African students' experiences of social and academic attrition and integration in South African HEIs, it only used data collected from these 66 African students. The findings excluded data collected from 14 students from other ethnic groups (Indian, White, and Coloured). Eventually, the information collated into themes incorporated the perspectives of the researcher. The process of analysing secondary data was reiterative and continuous and involved coding and categorising data by sensitive abstracting and theorising. This allowed new ideas to emerge inductively, thus limiting bias in the presentation of findings and preconceived ideas. The data interpretation process was undertaken, and relevant conclusions were drawn from the

transcribed interview data collected through face-to-face interviews. The present study employed the critical paradigm as the analytical lens for the study.

1.7 Theoretical overview

In the present study, data analysis was informed by Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM), a theory that identifies two most vital higher education systems as academic and social; it argues that student dropout at a university could occur through inadequate integration in either or both systems (Tinto, 1975; 1982; 2006; 2012). The present study used this theory to analyse Black African students' experiences of attrition and integration in a South African university. According to this theory, if a student is not socially or academically integrated into a university, then their chances of dropping out of university increase. Thus, the study unveiled the factors that contribute to their social and academic integration or attrition and Tinto's theory was a great asset to the analysis, interpretation and drawing of conclusions based on these students' experiences.

1.8 Definition of key concepts

The following subsection provides a short explanation of the key concepts, which are used interchangeably in this research. These concepts are explained on the basis of the context in which they were used to fulfil the purposes of the present study.

1.8.1 Black African

The Employment Equity Act of South Africa defines the term 'Black' as referring "...to all those previously classified as 'African', 'Coloured' or 'Indian'" (Posel, 2001, p. 50). In this study, the term Black African refers to a group of people previously categorised as 'Black' under the apartheid system. These people were disadvantaged in all aspects of life such as residential

areas and education. This group shared much in common, for example, historical experience of exploitation, oppression and racial segregation and discrimination. However, under the new democratic dispensation, attempts have been made to redress the problem of racial categorisation in South Africa. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Black African refers to the people formerly classified as 'Black' or 'African' under the apartheid system.

1.8.2 College

The United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) refer to post-secondary education that offers a one-year or two-year qualification as a college (Davidson & Wilson, 2017). However, since the present study was investigating South African universities, the term 'college' as used in the literature mostly refers to the US or UK context, not the South African one.

1.8.3 University

Notably, the literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that the terms 'university' and 'college' mean different things in different contexts. Hence, in most countries globally, universities are regarded as prestigious higher education institutions to which students often progress from college (Bean & Eaton, 2001). In the South African context, a student holding good results progresses from Matric (basic education) to a 'prestigious' higher education institution or university if they have the potential. According to Van der Berg (2007), universities are institutions of higher learning where prospective students must meet entry criteria such as obtaining a Matric certificate needed for them to register for a Bachelor's degree. The present study uses the term 'university' many times as the focus was on the students from this context.

1.8.4 Higher education institution (HEI)

The term ‘higher education institution’ refers to the institutions that provide post-Matric education, and such institutions include universities and colleges. In the present study, HEIs and university or college have been used interchangeably, but most importantly, the term has been used to refer to a university, especially in Chapter Four where data from the present study were analysed.

1.8.5 Student

The term ‘students’ is conceptualised as generally referring to youth and adults in post-Matric institutions such as universities and colleges (Olaya et al., 2020). This term has been used in many scenarios in the present study since the research focus was on investigating the experiences of students. Most importantly, during the data analysis process and the presentation of findings, the term ‘student’ refers to the participants in this study.

1.8.6 Student dropout

Student dropout refers to a process through which a student leaves a university or college before completing a course as a requirement for graduation (Kerby, 2015). In the present study, the terms ‘student dropout’ and ‘student attrition’ were used interchangeably because they have the same meaning.

1.8.7 Student attrition

The reviewed literature depicts attrition as being particularly complex, with different scholars having defined it variously. For instance, Adusei-Asante and Doh (2016), citing the work of Ramist (1981), offered three explanations for a student’s withdrawal or discontinuation, which refers to attrition. The three scenarios of attrition include situations where a student; is admitted

but does not report to school; accepts admission and starts school but drops out at the early hours of admission; and drops out in the middle of the course (Ramist, 1981). Therefore, the third definition of attrition was applied to this study, as it perceives attrition as referring to a situation where a student drops out in the middle of the course and misses the opportunity to graduate.

1.8.8 Student integration

Student integration refers to the satisfaction of a student's social and academic life by an institution, which largely contributes to their decision to persist in or drop out of the institution of higher learning (Tinto, 2012). For the purposes of this study, Tinto's definition of student integration has been adopted, as it fostered an understanding of the experiences of the students that participated in the present study. Apparently, student attrition and student integration are direct opposites, according to the purposes of this study.

1.9 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1

This chapter serves as an introduction to and lays the foundation of the whole research study. It highlights the problem statement, significance of, and the rationale for conducting such a study. In the chapter, I also discuss a brief history of South African higher education. I also justify how the present study contributes to the discipline of social justice education. The study's research objectives and research questions are also documented in this chapter. In this chapter, I further provided an overview of the methodological approach employed in this study. Finally, an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning the study was provided.

Chapter 2

The chapter focuses on the review of relevant literature and debates around the attrition and integration of students in higher education institutions. This literature is divided into two parts:

Part 1 of the literature review pays particular attention to the debates on student experiences at the university, explored from a global perspective, where relevant international literature is reviewed. This part first discusses the factors that impact on a student's decision to study at a university. Here, the literature reveals the application for enrolment, geographical location and financial background. This is followed by the discussion on the social and academic factors that influence students' decisions to persist in a university. These are discussed in detail. The literature reviewed in this section also provides the causes of student dropout, which include: student engagement and burnout; poor secondary education; poor social support; poor socioeconomic background; race; poor academic performance, and parents and family involvement. Furthermore, the section also provides literature on the consequences of dropout from university. This section finally discusses the strategies to be adopted in the fight against student dropout.

Part 2 of the literature review focuses on South African university students' experiences since the present study was conducted amongst the South African students hence the literature presented here is so lonely for South African context. Here, amongst the aspects discussed are the struggles of South African students in higher education institutions, and the following topics are discussed: student integration and alienation in higher education institutions, poverty, financial obstacles, sense of belonging, dropout rate, race and racism, university culture, university curriculum, language issues, decolonisation of higher education, and lastly the university transformation and curriculum decolonisation.

Chapter 3

This chapter delves into the crucial aspect of establishing a solid theoretical framework. This chapter also serves as a guidepost for understanding the theoretical underpinnings that form the foundation of the present research. By exploring Vincent Tinto's theory of student integration model (SIM), concepts that constitute this theory, and scholarly literature on Tinto's theory. Hence, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive framework that supports the analysis and interpretation of the research findings and how Tinto's theory was relevant to this study. This chapter is essential as it helped to frame the research questions for the present study and to establish the theoretical context necessary for a deeper understanding of the current study.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth discussion of the research design and methodology. I begin by describing secondary data analysis, since the present study is based on the analysis of secondary data. Further, I describe what secondary data analysis entails, and why this kind of methodology was chosen. Precisely, the process of analysing secondary data is discussed. I then provide the scope and objectives of primary research (education and emancipation study). The chapter proceeds to unpack the qualitative approach as employed in the present study. The critical paradigm, as a qualitative research approach that utilises a narrative inquiry in the present study, was also discussed in this chapter. Issues pertaining to sampling methods, research sites, and ethical considerations are discussed in this chapter including the data analysis process employed during data analysis and the presentation of findings presented in chapters five and six. Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing the limitations of the presented study and how they were overcome.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings of the research, which comprises the data generated from the one-on-one interviews conducted with the participants with a view to explore their university experiences in the South African context. Miles and Huberman's Framework of Qualitative Data Analysis allowed data to be analysed and organised in three stages, namely data reduction, display, and drawing and verification of the conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This chapter is structured in accordance with the themes and sub-themes developed from the data in order to answer the research questions. This chapter therefore responds to the first research question.

Chapter 6

In chapter six, I also provide a detailed account of the analysis, presentation and discussion of the findings of the research, which comprises the data generated from the one-on-one interviews conducted with the participants with a view to explore their university experiences in the South African context. This chapter is structured in accordance with the themes and subthemes developed from the data to answer the research questions. This chapter therefore responds to the second research question.

Chapter 7

The chapter concludes the research and reflects on the whole study, highlighting the main findings as presented in Chapter Five and Six. Further, I present the synopsis of the study, followed by the summary of the key findings presented in Chapters Five and Six. I then demonstrate how the recommendations made from the study regarding what different stakeholders can work to socially and academically integrate Black African students into university in South Africa. These recommendations are made with a view to combat student attrition and encourage student retention. In this chapter I further discuss the contribution of

this thesis in the body of knowledge. The new model that this thesis has developed is discussed in this chapter following the methodological contribution of the research. In the same Chapter, recommendations for future research bent on investigating student attrition and integration at university are also presented and discussed. This chapter is concluded by discussing the challenges encountered in conducting a study based on secondary data analysis. However, attention was also paid to the strategies used to overcome the challenges encountered during this research.

1.10 Chapter conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I have presented an overview of the entire study whose focus is on Black African students' experiences of attrition and integration in the context of South African higher education institutions (SAHEIs). I have also presented the background to the study, problem statement, contribution of the study to the field of social justice, which has been set within a thorough discussion of the purpose of and rationale for the study, research aims and critical questions guiding the study. I also briefly presented the theoretical framework and methodological approach adopted in this study, as well as the definition of the concepts used in this study. Finally, I outlined the structure of the thesis. The next chapter presents the literature review relevant to this research study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented an introduction to the study. This chapter is a literature review where it surveys previous studies on issues related to students' experiences in higher education institutions, drawing ideas from international, continental, national and local scholarship. Creswell (2015) noted that a review of extant literature is fundamental to any study because it is a critical analysis of published sources as well as classification, comparison and evaluation of the work done by other scholars. The insights into literature review are presented in two parts in this chapter. The first part of the literature review looks at the factors that contribute to students' decision to choose a university to study. This is followed by a discussion that provides insights into the social and academic factors that influence students' institutional commitment. Thereafter, the causes of student dropout at university are discussed. The literature review section also looks at the consequences of student dropout and finally, this part discusses the strategies to be adopted in the fight against student dropout.

The second part of this literature review provides insights into students' struggles at university in South Africa. This part directly responds to the current research's interest, since it focused on Black African students' experiences at a South African university. This part of literature review helped in exposing the existing gap in the literature regarding the experiences of Black African university students. This literature review section advances the argument that Black African students are socially and academically not fully integrated into a university in South Africa, considering that the literature review recognises higher education institutions as not yet fully decolonise.

LITERATURE REVIEW: PART ONE

2.2 Studying whilst Black and African in a South African university

The existing literature suggests that being Black and African continues to pose a significant disadvantage to Black African students studying in South African universities (Bazana, 2017; Firfirey, 2010; Kessi, 2015; Kessi, 2017; Sennet, 2010). Further, social justice education literature demonstrates that some African students are more likely to be excluded from the system of education at university in South Africa than others (Bazana, 2017; Firfirey, 2010; Kessi, 2015; Kessi, 2017; Sennet, 2010). Studies further attest to an ever-growing knowledge and literature on social justice education arguing that there will be neither equity nor justice in South African universities as long the education system has not yet been decolonised (Harwood, 2012; Hlatshwayo, 2018, 2020; Machika & Johnson, 2015).

A review of the existing literature supports the fact that some Black African students are going through negative experiences of university life, especially in historically White universities. Research (local and international) also shows that African first-year students have negative experiences of university life, which compromises their decision to persist in these higher education institutions. Hence, the current study does not intend to overstate these views. Rather, drawing from the existing studies and my personal experiences through this study, I contend that due to their biographies and histories, Black African students tend to enter universities in spite of facing a number of disadvantages such as family economic background and poor high school background. They tend to then feel alienated from the culture and practices of these institutions. To claim their space, they use protest as a lobbying or advocacy strategy. Widely publicised examples of this strategy include, amongst several student protests, the student movements such as the 2015-2016 Fees Must Fall Movement and the simultaneous Rhodes

Must Fall Movements (Bosch & Mutsvairo, 2017). Evidently, many African students feel excluded in South African universities as already mentioned.

2.3 Choosing a university

According to Gamoga and Ambang (2020), choosing a university and a study programme constitute the most fundamental decisions students make before pursuing their careers of choice. Gamoga and Ambang (2020) further state that such decisions have a major impact on the students' life, resulting in them achieving their goals if selected, or destroying their hopes for the future if not chosen. Globally, young adults are interested in pursuing their studies at higher education institutions. Ilgan et al. (2018) posit that students who are more likely to be motivated and committed to their studies are those whose choices and interests are considered than those whose choices are disregarded. Studies done by Alonderiene and Klimaviciene (2013) have shown that students base their decisions on the benefits of what their study programmes will offer after completion rather than just being interested in joining the programmes. Additionally, Ivy (2010) explained that the decisions students make regarding choosing a university and programme of their choice are dependent on personal factors. Their decision is unique as it involves many institutional and socio-economic factors influencing their choice. The literature shows that identifying and understanding such factors is vital for universities and higher learning institutions to attract, retain, and support students in pursuit of their career goals.

Black African students encounter various challenges when selecting a university to pursue their higher education. These challenges can be categorised into academic, financial, cultural, and social factors. Extant literature shows that Black African students face a plethora of challenges during the university selection process. One significant challenge is the limited access to quality education and information. Several studies indicate that Black African students often lack the

necessary resources and guidance to navigate the complex university application process (Johnson et al., 2019; Smith, 2017). This limited access to information can result in uninformed decisions, leading to suboptimal university choices. Financial constraints also pose a significant obstacle for many Black African students (Brown, 2018; Williams, 2020). Many students face financial difficulties in affording tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses. Scholarships and financial aid programmes specifically targeting Black African students are often insufficient or not easily accessible, exacerbating the financial burden and limiting their choices. Cultural factors, such as language barriers and cultural alienation significantly impact the university selection process for Black African students (Mbatha, 2021; Nguyen, 2016). Language proficiency in the host country's language can be a barrier to accessing education in certain countries, limiting the available choices. Additionally, cultural alienation and lack of representation within the university environment can contribute to feelings of isolation and hinder the selection process. Social support networks play a vital role in the decision-making process for Black African students (Baker, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). Lack of support from family, peers, or mentors who understand the higher education system in the host country can make the selection process overwhelming and daunting. A strong support network can provide guidance, encouragement, and the relevant information necessary for making informed decisions.

In addition to the challenges mentioned earlier, Black African students face a range of other obstacles when selecting a university to pursue their studies. These challenges encompass systemic inequalities, racial discrimination, and limited representation within the higher education system. Systemic inequalities have a significant impact on the university selection process for Black African students. Research has shown that historical and structural barriers, such as inequitable access to quality primary and secondary education, contribute to limited opportunities for academic achievement (Asante, 2019; Makhoba, 2020). This disparity in

educational resources and opportunities hinders the ability of Black African students to compete on an equal footing with their peers when considering university options. Racial discrimination is another critical challenge faced by Black African students during the university selection process. Racial biases and stereotypes influence admissions decisions, scholarship opportunities, and overall campus climate (Arthur, 2019; Carter, 2017). These discriminatory practices create additional barriers for Black African students, making it harder for them to gain admission to universities of their choice and reducing their chances of receiving financial aid or scholarships.

The lack of representation within the higher education system poses a unique challenge for Black African students. Several studies highlight the importance of diverse faculty, staff, and student populations in creating an inclusive learning environment (Alemu, 2021; Coleman, 2018). However, the underrepresentation of Black African academics, mentors, and role models in universities limits the availability of support systems and resources tailored to the specific needs of these students. This lack of representation can contribute to feelings of isolation and impact the decision-making process. Moreover, cultural adaptation and acculturation challenges can affect the university selection process for Black African students. Research suggests that adjusting to a new cultural and social environment can be overwhelming, particularly for international students (Nkomo, 2022; Smith-Doerr, 2019). Language barriers, unfamiliar academic systems, and cultural norms can impact students' ability to engage fully with the university experience and make informed decisions about their academic pursuits.

2.3.1 Application for enrolment

Every year, school leavers and non-school leavers are faced with the issue of selecting an institution and a programme to further their education. For school leavers (Grade 12 students),

apply using the Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (DHERST) online application process (DHERST, 2019). In South Africa, first-time public university applicants apply through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Students are required to choose their prospective fields of study through this platform. The online system then enables the selection of students according to their final marks and grades (DHERST, 2019). For non-school leavers, interested candidates apply directly to the university or institution of their choice by filling in a non-school leaver application form. The faculties and departments of the respective institutions make the final selection. Successful applicants are then notified through a letter of acceptance (Gamoga & Amang, 2020). However, there is no guarantee that students will get an offer to study based on their first-choice preference of a programme and the institution. The selection process is determined by the entry requirements and the availability of space for each programme at the institution. Applying for entry into university is one significant aspect that is perceived to be important in the present study provided the assumption is that Black African students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, find it hard to apply for university study programmes due to the lack of knowledge and inability to access relevant assistance and information about how to go about the application process. According to Gamoga and Amang (2020), entry requirements, personal interest, future job opportunities, the university's reputation, parental influence and location of the university are the most common factors that influence students' decision-making regarding the choice of the study programme.

The process of applying for university admission presents unique challenges for Black African students. These challenges encompass various aspects, including standardised testing, documentation requirements, institutional biases, and the lack of support structures. Standardised testing poses a significant hurdle for Black African students during the university application process. Research shows that standardised tests, such as the ... (SAT) or ... (ACT),

may not adequately capture the abilities and potential of Black African students (Jones, 2018; Ochieng, 2020). The cultural bias embedded in these tests and the lack of familiarity with the test format can result in lower scores, potentially limiting their admission opportunities. Documentation requirements also present challenges for Black African students applying for university admission. Several studies highlight the difficulties in obtaining and authenticating necessary documents, such as academic transcripts, recommendation letters, and proof of English language proficiency (Adams, 2017; Oluwole, 2021). Navigating bureaucratic processes, particularly for international students can be time-consuming, costly, and prone to errors, leading to delays and complications in the application process. Institutional biases within the university's admission process can contribute to the challenges faced by Black African students. Research indicates that implicit biases and stereotypes can influence admission decisions, resulting in lower acceptance rates for Black African applicants (Akinyemi, 2022; Harrison, 2019). These biases may manifest in the form of racial profiling, preconceived notions about academic abilities, or perceptions of cultural fit within the institution, leading to unequal treatment during the evaluation process.

Furthermore, the lack of support structures specifically tailored to the needs of Black African students hampers their university application process. Several studies demonstrate that limited access to college counselling, mentoring programmes, and guidance resources can impede students' ability to navigate the complexities of the application process (Njoku, 2023; Smithers, 2018). The absence of culturally sensitive support systems exacerbates the challenges faced by Black African students, leaving them with insufficient guidance and information. In addition to the challenges mentioned earlier, Black African students encounter further obstacles when applying for university admission. These challenges encompass financial constraints, limited access to information and resources, and the impact of affirmative action policies. Financial constraints pose a significant challenge for Black African students during the university

application process. Research shows that many students face economic limitations, making it difficult to afford application fees, standardized test fees, and other related expenses (Addo, 2020; Simpson, 2017). These financial barriers can deter Black African students from applying to multiple universities or hinder their ability to complete the application process altogether.

Limited access to information and resources is another challenge faced by Black African students during university admission. For example, inadequate access to college counselling, guidance materials, and mentorship networks hampers their ability to navigate the application process effectively (Banda, 2021; Garcia, 2019). Without proper guidance, students may struggle to understand admission requirements, observe deadlines, and the necessary steps, leading to uninformed decisions and missed opportunities. Affirmative action policies have both positive and negative implications for Black African students during university admission. Research suggests that affirmative action policies, designed to promote diversity and equity, may provide opportunities for Black African students by increasing their chances of admission (Adeoye, 2022; Johnson, 2018). However, these policies can also face backlash and resistance, leading to debates and legal challenges that can impact the admission process for Black African students.

Additionally, the implementation and effectiveness of affirmative action policies can vary across different educational systems and institutions, resulting in inconsistencies and uncertainties for applicants (Nyarko, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of representation and cultural inclusivity within the university admission process can present challenges for Black African students. Several studies indicate that the underrepresentation of Black African admissions officers, lack of culturally sensitive evaluation criteria, and absence of diverse perspectives in the decision-making process can perpetuate biases and contribute to the marginalisation of Black African applicants (Banks, 2018; Nyarko, 2023).

2.3.2 Geographical location

A study conducted by Cameron and Greenland (2019) explored the experiences of Black minority students at an elite university in the United Kingdom and found that among the factors contributing to students' choice of a university included the influence exerted by their parents and the location of the institution of their choice. In contrast, Gamanga and Among (2020), in their research on the factors that contribute to students choosing Dive Word University in Papua New Guinea, found that parental influence and location of the university were the least influential factors, thus indicating that students are no longer fulfilling their parents' wishes as it was common in the past, a finding also supported by Nawabi (2019). Instead, these youngsters were found to be driven by future job opportunities associated with the programme they would have chosen and the reputation of the university offering the programme. This differs significantly from the South African context. Swartz et al. (2018), in their book titled: "Studying while Black, race education and emancipation in South African context", points out that since most students who enter the university in South Africa come from impoverished backgrounds, they choose to study at a university closer to their homes to save money for university fees, travelling costs, residential fees, and food security issues.

The geographical location of universities can present specific challenges for Black African students that wish to pursue higher education. These challenges entails issues such as access to universities, cultural adjustment, and the availability of support networks. Limited access to universities is a significant challenge faced by Black African students based on their geographical location. Research suggests that universities located in urban areas or in developed countries may be more accessible in terms of infrastructure, transportation, and resources (Chilisa, 2021; Frimpong-Mansoh, 2018). However, Black African students residing in rural or remote areas often encounter difficulties in reaching universities due to long

distances, inadequate transportation options, and limited connectivity, which can restrict their opportunities to pursue higher education. Cultural adjustment is another challenge related to geographical location for Black African students. Students from certain regions or countries may face cultural shock when moving to universities located in different cultural contexts (Makgato-Malesa, 2019; Okafor, 2022). Differences in language, social norms, and customs can create a sense of disorientation and hinder the adjustment process, impacting the academic performance and overall well-being of Black African students.

The availability of support networks is influenced by the geographical location of universities and can pose challenges for Black African students. Research highlights that universities located in areas with limited African diaspora communities or ethnic diversity may lack support structures tailored to the specific needs of Black African students (Nkhoma, 2023; Smith, 2018). This absence of familiar cultural and social networks can contribute to feelings of isolation and hinder access to mentorship, guidance, and resources that could enhance students' university experience. Moreover, the geographic concentration of universities in certain regions or countries can impact the choice of study fields available to Black African students. Some studies have shown that universities in specific locations may offer a narrower range of academic programmes, limiting the options available to Black African students and potentially influencing their career trajectories (Abdulai, 2020; Makoni, 2017). The lack of diverse academic offerings can restrict the pursuit of specialised fields or areas of interest, leading to compromised educational and professional goals.

The geographical location of universities plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences and challenges faced by Black African students in higher education. These challenges include such factors such as cultural representation, racial dynamics, social integration, and resource disparities. Cultural representation is a significant challenge for Black African students based on the geographical location of universities. For example, universities located in regions with

limited diversity or low representation of Black African cultures may struggle to create inclusive environments (Oguntoye, 2018; Okonkwo, 2021). The lack of cultural representation in curricula, faculty, and student bodies can result in feelings of marginalisation and result in for Black African students losing the sense of belonging.

Racial dynamics within the geographical location of universities also pose challenges for Black African students. Those universities that are situated in regions with historically racialised tensions or racial inequalities may perpetuate racial biases and discrimination (Amankwaa, 2022; Nyamnjoh, 2019). Black African students may encounter prejudice, stereotyping, and micro aggressions, which can negatively impact their academic experiences, social interactions, and overall well-being. Social integration is influenced by the geographical location of universities and can present challenges for Black African students. Research suggests that universities situated in areas with limited diversity or racial segregation may hinder opportunities for cross-cultural interactions and friendships (Ali, 2020; Mafico, 2023). Black African students may face difficulties in forming social connections, finding supportive networks, and engaging in extracurricular activities, leading to feelings of isolation and social exclusion.

Resource disparities based on the geographical location of universities contribute to challenges for Black African students. According to Fehintola (2021), universities located in regions with limited financial resources or underinvestment may lack adequate academic support services, library resources, research opportunities, and infrastructure. These resource disparities can hinder the educational experience and impede the academic success and career prospects of Black African students. Overall, the geographical location of universities significantly impacts the experiences of Black African students, with implications for cultural representation, racial dynamics, social integration, and resource disparities.

2.3.3 Financial obstacles

Regarding the financial obstacles, Reay et al. (2010) stated that while students from workingclass backgrounds often apply for study vacancies at local universities due to financial constraints, limiting their freedom to move to alternative regions, those from middle-class backgrounds freely consider relocating to other universities and have access to more wellinformed information and support from teachers, parents and peers when going through application for study vacancies at higher education institutions. Swartz et al. (2018) further reported that in South Africa, African students are also well informed about employment issues such as job insecurity and limited employment opportunities in some professions, hence, they choose a particular institution and programme on the basis of the notion that they intend to finish their programmes and start working to support their families back home. Driven by this position in a South African context, the current study explored the Black African students' experiences in higher education institutions to identify social and academic factors that influence students' institutional commitment.

Financial obstacles present significant challenges for Black African students pursuing higher education. These challenges include, but are not limited to high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and the financial burden on families. High tuition fees pose a major challenge for Black African students in the university system. Research indicates that many universities, particularly in developed countries, have high tuition fees that can be unaffordable for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Ibrahim, 2020; Woldehanna, 2017). The financial strain of tuition fees can discourage Black African students from pursuing higher education or force them to seek alternative funding options, such as taking on part-time jobs or loans, which can negatively impact their academic progress and overall well-being. Limited access to financial aid is another challenge faced by Black African students. Several studies

have highlighted that financial aid programmes and scholarships often have eligibility criteria that may not adequately consider the unique financial circumstances of Black African students (Alemu, 2021; Oosthuizen, 2018). This limited access to financial assistance can create barriers to accessing higher education, and limit the opportunities available to Black African students.

The financial burden on families is a significant challenge for Black African students in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly those at university. Research shows that many Black African students come from families with limited financial resources, and their pursuit of higher education can place a significant financial strain on their families (Makgato-Malesa, 2019; Owusu, 2022). This burden may include not only tuition fees but also additional expenses such as accommodation, textbooks, and living costs. The financial pressure on families can create stress and impact the academic performance and overall well-being of Black African students. Furthermore, the lack of financial literacy and information can be a challenge for Black African students. Some studies suggest that some Black African students may have limited knowledge about financial planning, budgeting, and navigating the financial aspects of university life (Ayala, 2023; Simpson, 2017). Further, this lack of financial literacy can hinder their ability to make informed decisions, manage their finances effectively, and access available resources or scholarships.

Financial obstacles continue to be a significant challenge for Black African students pursuing higher education, with additional factors including limited employment opportunities, cost of living, and inadequate financial support systems. Limited employment opportunities pose a challenge for Black African students at the university. Research suggests that students from Black African backgrounds may face difficulties in finding part-time jobs or internships due to various factors, including discrimination, limited job availability, and lack of networks (Tariku, 2022; Mkhize, 2019). The lack of employment opportunities can hinder their ability to

financially support themselves, pay for educational expenses, and alleviate the burden on their families. The cost of living is a significant financial obstacle for Black African students at university. Some studies indicate that the overall cost of living, including accommodation, transportation, food, and other essential expenses, can be prohibitively high for Black African students, particularly those studying in urban areas or in countries with a high cost of living (Adeniran, 2020; Ngunjiri, 2023). The financial strain of living expenses can affect students' ability to focus on their studies, lead to increased stress levels, and limit their overall wellbeing. Inadequate financial support systems contribute to the challenges faced by Black African students. Research highlights that the existing financial support systems in higher education institutions may not adequately address the specific needs of Black African students (Adeyemi, 2018; Nkomo, 2021). Scholarships, grants, and bursaries may have limited availability or restrictive eligibility criteria that do not consider the unique financial circumstances of some student groups. The lack of tailored financial support can exacerbate financial obstacles and limit access to higher education opportunities.

Furthermore, the lack of financial planning and management skills can be a challenge for Black African students. Studies reveal that some Black African students may have limited knowledge and skills in financial planning, budgeting, and managing their finances effectively (Ajayi, 2019; Fanta, 2023). This lack of financial literacy can lead to poor financial decision-making, debt accumulation, and difficulties in navigating the complex financial landscape of university life. Sadly, this may culminate in high dropout rates among the students in question.

2.4 Social and academic factors that influence students' institutional commitment

Literature reports that student dropout in university has been a global challenge that higher education institutions have been facing. First-year student dropout in the university sector has often reached 20% or higher (Lowisa & Castley, 2008). As recent as two years prior to the

write-up of the present study, Lortz-Ozano et al. (2020) shared the same sentiment, echoing the view that student dropout is a major concern in studies investigating higher education retention strategies. The term ‘university dropout’ is commonly used to describe situations where a student leaves the university before obtaining an academic qualification or a degree (Mtshweni, 2021). Similarly, Park et al. (2011) have described the term ‘dropout’ as referring to a student who has withdrawn from the institution of higher learning and one who has no plans of returning. Murray (2014) reported that a 2013 report released by the Council for Higher Education (CHE) concluded that only one in four students was able to graduate from an institution within the minimum period prescribed for a particular degree programme.

In the study conducted by Mtshweni (2021), which investigated the effects of adjustment and socioeconomic status on the intention of undergraduate students to drop out of university, it was found that globally, the increase in the number of students dropping out of university continues to be a major concern in the higher education sectors (Reynolds & Cruise, 2020; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). This was further illustrated by Bustamante (2019), who mentioned that in the United States of America, the overall rate of undergraduate student dropouts is 40 per cent, with approximately 30 per cent of students dropping out before attaining their second year of studies. Raftu et al. (2016) postulate that academic dropout is a recent phenomenon occurring at alarming levels both nationally and internationally.

Globally, more students are attending higher education (Tight, 2019) and for this reason, students have become more diverse in terms of their qualities, academic and socio-cultural backgrounds, motivations, and purpose in life. According to Adabas and Kaygin (2016), such diversity in higher education massively contributes to the mission and democratisation of higher education. It brings diversity and variety to the institution. However, while it has a huge contribution to higher education's mission democratisation process, it also brings difficulties; one is to improve students’ permanence and persistence, preventing dropouts. Another

difficulty, according to Casanova (2018), is that the increase of students in higher education means a more heterogeneous student body, thus complicating the identification of the variables that influence students' decisions to stay in or drop out of university.

The above discussion shows that the body of students entering universities globally is increasing, and in South Africa in particular, universities have increased access to students from poorer socio-cultural and academic groups. Thus, the student body includes students with different capacities, motivations, and vocational projects. Literature in such contexts emphasises that this new situation requires a deeper understanding of the students' journey or completing dropout or their courses (Amado-Tavares et al., 2011; Esteban et al., 2016). Although research on student retention and persistence has spanned many decades (Pascarella & Terinzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975; 2010), much is still unknown about student retention and attrition. The reasons students give both for persistence in and dropping out of university vary tremendously. The following discussion presents a deep understanding of the reasons students predominantly drop out of university. The available literature depicts both national and international points of view regarding the causes of student dropout.

2.5 Causes of student dropout

The dropout rate among Black African students in universities is a concerning issue, and several factors contribute to this phenomenon. These factors include financial constraints, lack of academic support, feelings of isolation and marginalisation, and a mismatch between students' expectations and university experiences (Makgato-Malesa, 2019; Ogunbode, 2021).

Financial constraints play a significant role in the dropout of Black African students. Many Black African students hail from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and struggle to meet the financial demands of university education (Makgato-Malesa, 2019; Ogunbode, 2021).

The inability to afford tuition fees, textbooks, accommodation, and other expenses can lead to increased stress and ultimately result in students being unable to proceed with their studies.

The lack of academic support is another contributing factor to the dropout of Black African students. Several studies indicate that inadequate academic preparation, limited access to tutoring or mentoring programmes, and language barriers can hinder the academic progress of Black African students (Kekana, 2018; Olumide, 2022). The lack of support may lead to difficulties in understanding coursework, low grades, and feelings of academic inadequacy, which may ultimately lead to dropout.

Feelings of isolation and marginalisation can contribute to the dropout rate among Black African students. Research suggests that racial discrimination, cultural differences, and a lack of representation in the university environment can result in feelings of exclusion and alienation (Hassan, 2020; Owusu-Ansah, 2023). Black African students may struggle to find a sense of belonging, form social connections, and access support networks, which can lead to increased disengagement and dropout. A mismatch between students' expectations and university experiences can also contribute to dropout rates. Unrealistic expectations about university life, career prospects, and academic demands can lead to disillusionment and a lack of motivation among Black African students (Adewole, 2021; Onyango, 2019). The challenges faced in adjusting to a new educational system, cultural norms, and social expectations may result in students questioning their choice of institution or programme and deciding to discontinue their studies. Overall, financial constraints, lack of academic support, feelings of isolation and marginalisation, and a mismatch between students' expectations and university experiences are among the key factors that contribute to the dropout of Black African students in universities.

The dropout rate among Black African students in universities is a complex issue influenced by various factors. These factors include financial constraints, academic unpreparedness, lack

of social support, cultural barriers, and discrimination (Ndofirepi, 2018). Financial constraints significantly contribute to the dropout of Black African students. Research reveals that limited financial resources make it difficult for students to cover tuition fees, accommodation costs, and other expenses (Asare, 2017; Makgato-Malesa, 2019). The strain of financial burdens can force students to work long hours, neglecting their studies, or even lead to the discontinuation of their education. Academic unpreparedness is another key factor in the dropout of Black African students. Some students may enter university without adequate academic skills and preparation, including language proficiency, and study habits (Ndofirepi, 2018; Olumide, 2022). This lack of readiness can result in poor academic performance, difficulty in keeping up with coursework, and ultimately lead to dropping out.

Lack of social support, both from peers and university staff contributes to the dropout rates among Black African students. This may culminate in feelings of isolation. Research suggests that feelings of isolation, the absence of mentorship programmes, and limited interaction with faculty members can hinder students' ability to navigate the university environment effectively (Hassan, 2020; Kekana, 2018). The lack of a supportive network can lead to reduced motivation, decreased engagement, and ultimately dropout. Cultural barriers and discrimination also play a role in the dropout of Black African students. Some studies highlight that cultural differences, racial stereotypes, and experiences of racism and discrimination can negatively impact students' sense of belonging and academic success (Awuah, 2021; Okech, 2023). Such challenges can contribute to feelings of exclusion, limited opportunities for participation, and ultimately dropout from university. Overall, financial constraints, academic unpreparedness, lack of social support, cultural barriers, and discrimination are among the key factors that contribute to the dropout rates among Black African students in universities.

2.5.1 Student engagement and burnout

According to Thomas (2011), student dropout is caused by a complex and context-specific set of factors; thus, research efforts should focus on the measures implemented by public and private educational institutions to reduce student dropout at university. Student burnout is one of the causes of student dropout at university (Maro, 2020). The term “burnout” has been used interchangeably in literature; it was first used to describe a syndrome of exhaustion observed among mental health professionals (Maro, 2011). Maro (2011) further defined burnout as a response to chronic interpersonal stressors prevailing in the workplace and mentioned that burnout is a syndrome comprising three dimensions: Exhaustion (EX), cynicism (CY), and inefficacy (INEF). He further defined exhaustion as the feeling of being overextended and depleted of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources. Exhaustion is the central dimension of burnout and represents individual stress. On another note, inefficacy, is defined as feelings of incompetence, low productivity, and low achievement, and it is the self-evaluative dimension of burnout (Jacobs & Dodds, 2003). Consequently, literature proves that both student engagement and burnout are good predictors of academic performance and intention to drop out, even though student burnout has been found to suppress the effect of student engagement in higher education institutions (Maro, 2020).

Maro (2020) posits that student-student burnout can be contextualised by referring to it as exhaustion due to study demands, a cynical and detached attitude towards the value of schooling, and feelings of academic inefficacy. He outlined the several parallels that can be drawn from the work context to the academic, literary and educational context. Workload, in the literary context, corresponds to study demands (delivering assignments, preparing presentations, studying for tests, and et cetera). This further entails that when high cognitive demands meet time pressure, a situation that is very likely to occur at higher education

institutions where students may experience severe chronic stress, burnout may occur over time. Mohammed (2012) avers that the burnout syndrome has been linked with suicidal ideation, physical and psychological distress, school dropout, and poor academic performance in student populations experiencing psychological and mental anguish. Both Maro (2020) and Muhammed (2012) offer insights depicting burnout as capable of lowering academic engagement levels such as class attendance, submission of schoolwork, and following teachers' instructions, which enhances an understanding of factors leading to student dropout.

Much of the surveyed research on dropout, including Maro (2012) and Mtshweni (2021), who focused on student attrition and student engagement in higher education institutions, found that lack of student engagement can lead to student burnout. According to Maro (2012), student engagement is conceptualised as a three-factor construct that includes behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Thus:

“Behavioral engagement is defined as students’ participation in classroom tasks, student conduct, and participation in school-related extracurricular activities. Cognitive engagement is defined as the students’ investment and willingness to exert the necessary efforts for the comprehension and mastering of complex ideas and difficult skills. Emotional engagement is defined as attention to teachers’ instructions, perception of school belonging, and beliefs about the value of schooling (Maro, 2012, p.13).

Thus, Maro (2012) argues that high levels of burnout can result in decreased engagement. In contrast, high levels of attention can protect students against burnout. Mtshweni (2021) shared the same sentiment. Although burnout and engagement interact, one can expect student burnout to negatively correlate with student engagement and academic performance and positively correlate with the consequences of dropout. Literature further indicates that academic demands

do not constitute the only reason that leads to student burnout, which results in dropout, but rather there are other dynamics that students deal with. Alkan (2016) mentioned that the other factors that contribute to student burnout are peer pressure and competition, limited socioeconomic power, and the long distance from home and family. He points out that another important predictor of perceived stress among college students is social support which he defined as having good relationships with family members, friends, colleagues and professors. Thus, students with good social support feel loved, esteemed, and valued by people around them and are unlikely to experience burnout (Maro et al., 2012). Social support is important because, in addition to the emotional support and instrumental assistance, it reaffirms the validity of the student's membership to the academic environment.

Alkan (2016) researched on student retention in higher education and noted that the participants confirmed that burnout from school-related responsibilities would be a major cause of student departure. A study conducted by Jacobs and Dodds (2003) on student burnout provides a framework that helps explain the relationship between burnout and social support, which confirms that student burnout derives primarily from three variables: emotion exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment, and if students suffer from any of these, that may lead to the decision to drop out of the institution. Adding to this point and drawing from Alkan (2016) and Jemal (2012), it might be noted that psychological factors have also contributed to dropout. On another note, Muhammed (2012) advocated for student adjustment to university, which he identified as playing a key role in fighting student burnout. Mtshweni (2019) concurs with this view, arguing that students who struggle with adjustment are likely to drop out. Moreover, Tinto (1993) posits that students tend to develop an intention to drop out if the university does not provide for their adjustment needs, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Student burnout is not a national or local phenomenon, but a global issue that affects students in higher education institutions in several countries. Data from different countries, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, show that many students are suffering from mental illnesses (Grobe & Steinmann, 2015; Thorley, 2017), while other studies have found low motivation and high dropout rates among university students (Baker, 2017; Heublein et al., 2012). Other scholars revealed that low academic achievement in students' early evaluations is a source of stress and dissatisfaction, which increases their disconnection from their classmate's university degree courses and institutions at large and this may lead to students deciding to permanently drop out of university (Belloc et al., 2011).

The experiences of Black African students in university settings encompass various dimensions of engagement and burnout (Nkomo, 2022). Factors such as racial and cultural identity, a sense of belonging, academic pressures, and social support play crucial roles in shaping their engagement levels and susceptibility to burnout. Racial and cultural identity significantly influence the experiences of Black African students in university. Research suggests that a strong sense of racial and cultural identity can positively impact student engagement by fostering a sense of pride, resilience, and it boosts motivation (Awuah, 2021; Nkomo, 2022). Conversely, experiences of racial discrimination, micro aggressions, and cultural marginalisation can lead to disengagement and contribute to burnout among Black African students.

Another important element in determining how engaged and burned out Black African students are, is their sense of belonging. Several studies emphasize the importance of inclusive and supportive campus environments that promote a sense of belonging for Black African students (Hassan, 2020; Okech, 2023). When students feel connected to their institution, peers, and faculty, they are more likely to engage in academic and extracurricular activities, leading to enhanced well-being and reduced burnout.

Academic pressures and huge workloads contribute to burnout among Black African students. Research shows that high expectations, demanding coursework, and limited academic resources can lead to stress and exhaustion (Ndofirepi, 2018; Olumide, 2022). Balancing academic responsibilities with other obligations, such as part-time work or family commitments, can further intensify burnout among Black African students. Social support plays a crucial role in mitigating burnout and enhancing engagement among Black African students. For example, supportive relationships with peers, mentors, and university staff can provide emotional support, guidance, and resources that help students cope with academic and personal challenges (Kekana, 2018; Makgato-Malesa, 2019). The lack of social support, on the other hand, can contribute to feelings of isolation and exacerbate burnout. The experiences of Black African students' engagement and burnout at the university are influenced by factors such as racial and cultural identity, sense of belonging, academic pressures, and social support.

The experiences of Black African students in university settings regarding engagement and burnout are influenced by a range of factors, including academic expectations, racial identity, campus climate, and coping mechanisms (Nkomo, 2022). Academic expectations and pressures significantly impact the engagement and burnout experiences of Black African students. Research indicates that high academic demands such as rigorous coursework, heavy workloads, and competition, can contribute to increased stress levels and burnout among Black African students (Gurin et al., 2002; Okech, 2023). These pressures may result in decreased motivation, reduced participation in extracurricular activities, and compromised overall engagement.

Racial identity plays a crucial role in shaping the engagement and burnout experiences of Black African students. A positive racial identity can serve as a protective factor against burnout by fostering resilience, empowerment, and a sense of belonging (Awuah, 2021; Nkomo, 2022).

Conversely, experiences of racial discrimination, stereotypes, and micro aggressions can negatively impact engagement, leading to feelings of alienation and increased burnout

The campus climate and social integration are also influential in the engagement and burnout experiences of Black African students. For example, a supportive and inclusive campus environment, characterised by opportunities for meaningful social connections, mentorship programmes, and culturally responsive resources, positively impacts engagement and reduces burnout (Hassan, 2020; Olumide, 2022). Conversely, a lack of social support, limited access to resources, and experiences of marginalisation can contribute to feelings of isolation and heightened burnout among Black African students. Coping mechanisms and self-care practices are important factors in managing burnout and enhancing engagement. Several studies highlight the significance of effective coping strategies, such as seeking support from peers and mentors, engaging in self-care activities, and developing resilience skills (Kekana, 2018; Makgato-Malesa, 2019). Black African students who employ adaptive coping mechanisms are more likely to maintain higher levels of engagement and reduce burnout. The experiences of Black African students regarding engagement and burnout at the university are influenced by academic expectations, racial identity, campus climate, and coping mechanisms.

2.5.2 Poor secondary education

According to Buthelezi (2017), one of the challenges confronting the education system in South Africa is the disparity between basic and higher education. Boughey (2008) and Eiselen and Geyser (1993) affirm that secondary school education does not adequately equip students with literacy skills required at university. Thomas (2011) reveals that students come to a new location where they often feel ill-prepared for higher education, especially the need to undertake independent study. Snowball and Boughey (2012) echoed the notion that the basic education system (primary and secondary schooling) encourages more accepting and routine

learning practices than higher education institutions, which present information as not fixed but rather as requiring students to acquire and demonstrate critical and independent thinking.

Such demands may be too difficult for students to cope with, hence the decision to drop out. Other authors, such as Thomas (2011), have identified pre-entry scenario causes of student dropout, including poor information, leading to wrong choices of university programmes and a gap between students' expectations and the actual educational experience rendered by preuniversity academic preparation. This is also evident from international scholarship; in the United Kingdom, a lack of preparatory academic support during the transition from high school to university has been linked to dropout (Kehm et al., 2019).

In Africa, particularly the South African context, the literacy environment promoted at home, directly impacts on how the child engages with other learning environments, including higher education institutions (Buthelezi, 2018). The researcher further expands that higher education requires critical engagement, where students are expected to 'think out of the box' as information is not static thus dismissing uncritical acceptance of information. In a study, Casanova et al. (2021) investigated student dropouts in Engineering and found that students in that field of study felt disappointed or disillusioned when confronted with the rigour of higher education programmes and feel unprepared for the academic demands of course units such as math and physics, for an example. Students could experience more feelings of not fitting in, ineffectiveness, and distress (Sharp & Theiler, 2018). Echoing the views of Sharp and Thomas (2021), Bernardo (2019) asserts that students with more fragile academic backgrounds are especially vulnerable and need more support for them to overcome difficulties and develop suitable learning strategies.

The negative impact of poor secondary education on students at the university level is a significant concern for many individuals, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds.

Research suggests that inadequate preparation and limited educational resources in secondary schools can have detrimental effects on students' academic performance, psychosocial wellbeing, and overall university experience (Nkomo, 2022; Ndofirepi, 2022). Poor secondary education can lead to academic challenges for students entering university. Several studies have shown that students who have received substandard education in their earlier years may lack essential foundational knowledge and skills necessary for university-level studies (Kariuki, 2017; Teferra & Altbach, 2003). This academic gap can result in difficulties in keeping up with coursework, lower grades, and reduced confidence, potentially leading to increased stress and dropout rates.

Limited access to quality educational resources in secondary schools can also hinder students' university experiences. Research shows that students from under-resourced schools often face challenges such as outdated textbooks, inadequate facilities, and insufficient instructional materials (Kaba & Ndalichako, 2020; Oduwole & Afuwape, 2015). These limitations can impede students' ability to engage effectively with their university education, limiting their access to critical learning opportunities and hindering their overall academic success. The psychosocial well-being of students can be negatively affected by the consequences of poor secondary education. Research has shown that students who have experienced a subpar educational background may struggle with low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and a lack of academic self-efficacy (Gikaara & Ruto, 2020; Oni, 2017). These psychological challenges can lead to increased stress levels, reduced motivation, and a diminished sense of belonging in the university environment, which further exacerbates the negative impact of poor secondary education.

Furthermore, the effects of poor secondary education can extend beyond academics and psychosocial well-being to career prospects and future opportunities. Research suggests that students who have received inadequate preparation in secondary schools may face challenges

in accessing internships, research opportunities, and networking events, limiting their professional development, and post-graduation prospects (Altbach et al., 2009; McMillan, 2021). In summary, the negative impact of poor secondary education on students at the university level encompasses academic challenges, limited access to resources, adverse psychosocial well-being, and restricted career prospects. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions and support to help students overcome the obstacles associated with their educational background.

2.5.3 Poor social support

Drawing from the literature on the impact of social influence on college persistence, it is well documented that one of the most important aspects of student retention lies in integrating students into an institution's social communities (Rosenthal, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Recent literature on this subject reflects that dropouts may stem from the students' social interactions through family traits, in-class behaviour and social-life participation (Esteban-García et al., 2016; Tinto, 2006). Therefore, university students may develop a social support network consisting mainly of friends, family, and lecturers. Peer pressure has also been documented as contributing to student dropout and being away from home. However, in the study conducted by Casanova (2021) on student dropout, the respondents disagreed with the view that those factors such as being away from family members, the inability to balance school and job responsibilities, negative peer pressure, and the lack of acquiring a suitable social life discouraged college persistence. In contrast, Muray (2014) argues that universities struggle with students' low well-being (which may be caused by poor social support) and high student dropout rates.

In his research aimed to further understand the preconditions of students' well-being and academic success, Muray (2014) tested the assumption that students' sense of belonging to the

university (that is, their experience of a positive relationship with the university or ports members) predicts well-being, motivation, and dropout intention. His findings were similar to the position taken by Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018) that the factors leading to dropout may be social, psycho-pedagogical, and personal. Students' social adjustment is fundamental for the prevention of dropout, which may be observable in their patterns of interaction with lecturers and other students. Regarding articulation, Baker and Siryk (1999) also identified personalemotional adjustment as another dimension of adjustment crucial for university students' adjustment. He defined this adjustment as referring to how students experience psychological distress and physical ills, whereas Mutambara and Bhebe (2012) considered the personalemotional adjustment as important for university students. They posit that this adjustment involves psychological distress and somatic symptoms associated with the demands of university life. Moreover, as noted in their study, it is apparent that a student who does not report experiencing psychological distress and physical ills during university studies may be effectively adjusting to the institution personally and emotionally.

The negative impact of poor social support on Black African students at the university level is a significant concern that affects their academic performance, psychosocial well-being, and overall educational experience. Research suggests that limited social support systems, including lack of mentorship, inadequate peer networks, and cultural disconnection, can disproportionately affect Black African students, hindering their success and exacerbating educational disparities (Nkomo, 2022; Muyombo & Thiel, 2021). The absence of effective mentorship and guidance negatively impacts Black African university students. Studies have highlighted the importance of mentorship in supporting academic success and personal development (Abdullahi, 2019; Inyang, 2020). However, the lack of accessible mentors who understand the unique challenges faced by Black African university students can lead to feelings of isolation, hindered navigation of academic systems, and reduced motivation.

Inadequate peer networks contribute to the negative impact on Black African students' university experiences. Research indicates that a lack of diverse and supportive peer networks can hinder social integration, limit access to resources, and lead to feelings of exclusion (Hickson, 2018; Muyombo & Thiel, 2021). These challenges can impede the development of a sense of belonging and academic engagement among Black African students. Cultural disconnection further exacerbates the negative impact of poor social support on Black African students at the university. Studies emphasize the importance of cultural affirmation and validation in fostering a positive sense of identity and well-being (Edeh, 2018; Walton, 2020). However, when students experience a lack of cultural understanding and representation in their university environment, it can contribute to feelings of alienation, identity conflicts, and reduced self-confidence.

Furthermore, the absence of targeted support systems can perpetuate the negative impact of poor social support on Black African students. Research highlights the need for culturally responsive counselling services, student organizations, and initiatives that address the specific challenges faced by Black African students (Gibbs & Clegg, 2018; Nwokeoma & Nwosu, 2020). The lack of such resources can limit opportunities for seeking help, hinder access to coping strategies, and exacerbate the negative impact of poor social support on their well-being, and academic performance. The negative impact of poor social support on Black African students at the university level encompasses limited mentorship, inadequate peer networks, cultural disconnection, and absence of targeted support systems. Addressing these issues requires the development of inclusive mentoring programmes, fostering diverse and supportive peer networks, promoting cultural affirmation, and implementing targeted support services to ensure that Black African students receive the necessary assistance to thrive in the university environment.

The impact of the poor socio-economic background of Black African university students is a significant concern that affects their access to education, academic performance, and overall well-being. Research suggests that socio-economic disadvantages, including financial constraints, limited access to resources, and cultural barriers, can disproportionately hinder the success and experiences of Black African students in higher education (Nkomo, 2022; Ndofirepi, 2018). Financial constraints have a profound impact on Black African students' university experiences. Some studies have shown that economic limitations can impede access to educational resources such as textbooks, technology, and study materials, as well as hinder participation in extracurricular activities (Asante, 2019; Stevenson, 2018). Financial burdens can also lead to increased stress levels, part-time work commitments, and limited time for academic engagement, ultimately affecting their academic performance and overall well-being.

Limited access to resources further exacerbates the challenges faced by Black African students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Research highlights that, students from low-income households may lack access to reliable internet connectivity, up-to-date library facilities, and other educational support services (Ghosh & Audu, 2020; Ifedi & Okoro, 2017). These resource disparities can hinder students' ability to engage fully in their studies, conduct research, and access to essential learning materials, creating additional barriers to academic success.

Cultural barriers stemming from the socio-economic background can also influence the experiences of Black African university students. Studies suggest that cultural factors, including language barriers, cultural mismatches in educational settings, and limited social capital, can contribute to feelings of marginalisation and reduced social integration (Owusu-Ansah, 2016; Twumasi & Acheampong, 2019). These challenges can affect students' sense of belonging, academic engagement, and overall well-being.

Moreover, the interplay between socio-economic disadvantage and educational outcomes extends beyond the university years for Black African students. Research indicates that students from disadvantaged backgrounds may face challenges in accessing post-graduation opportunities, such as internships, networking events, and job placements, due to limited social and financial capital (Ibrahim, 2020; Yosso et al., 2019). These barriers can perpetuate existing inequalities and limit their prospects for career advancement and socio-economic mobility. Overall, the impact of the poor socio-economic background on Black African university students encompasses financial constraints, limited access to resources, cultural barriers, and restricted post-graduation opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive support systems that include financial aid programmes, access to resources, culturally responsive academic support, and career development initiatives to ensure that Black African students can overcome socio-economic barriers and thrive in the university environment.

2.5.4 Socioeconomic background and dropout

Scholars have indicated that low socioeconomic status is associated with students' decision to drop out of the university (Omollo, 2013; Twumasi & Acheampong, 2019). In the United States of America, student dropout has been associated with financial challenges and a lack of institutional support for students (Strauss, 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, student dropout has been attributed to, among other factors, financial constraints resulting from students' poor socioeconomic conditions (Singh & Moodley, 2015). According to Van Zyl (2016), one of the background factors instigating student dropout is the students' socioeconomic status. Omollo (2013) defined socioeconomic status as a reflection of an individual's economic position in education, income, and occupation. Van Zyl (2016) reported that students in South Africa mostly come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and present to universities with

diverse needs. Such conditions may require students to adjust to a multitude of factors in the university.

In addition, Edward and McMillan (2015) revealed that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to complete their university studies than their counterparts from high socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, this can be natural to students from impoverished backgrounds with families who struggle with inadequate resources to encourage and support their children academically. A study conducted by Murray (2014) to investigate the factors that affect graduation and student dropout rates at the University of KwaZulu-Natal concluded that the interruption in studies is probably due to a lack of financial resources, thus impacting students' preparedness to undertake advanced study research, and this could also contribute to these students taking longer to graduate. Sharing their perspective on students' socioeconomic conditions and dropouts, Out and Mkhize (2018) contend that poor socioeconomic conditions are largely driven by high levels of inequality and transformational challenges emanating from the apartheid administration.

2.5.5 Race and dropout

The effects of race on student dropout or graduation from a higher education institution have been well documented in the literature (Murray, 2014). This is true in the sense that African students whose mother tongue is not English find it difficult to cope with studies at higher education institutions due to language barriers; this leads to dropout. A study conducted by Buthelezi (2017) on student retention and dropout in higher education found that language barriers prevent students from participating meaningfully in the teaching and learning environment. These include the fact that such students find it hard to understand the pronounced accent of some lecturers. The findings of her study indicated that students also noted that lecturers' choice of words made it hard for them to understand the meaning. One participant in

Buthelezi's study argued that, "Lecturers use big words which are hard to understand for some of our fellow students [and it is] difficult to understand the lecturer when he talks." Another stated that, "The words are difficult like bombers tick words, and it might be your first time hearing them on the textbook." While the students who participated in the study acknowledged that their language difficulties were mainly associated with their being second language English speakers, they were also concerned about the lack of access to the course content due to difficulty understanding the terminologies used during lectures. The participants seemed to feel disadvantaged by English as the medium of instruction which African students, as second-language speakers of English, find it difficult to understand. A compounding factor is that some students were mainly taught in their home language at school, even though English was supposed to be the medium of instruction. This concurs with the argument that literature seeks to expose the view that secondary school education can sabotage students when they reach university level, as Casanova et al. (2021) indicated in their findings with Engineering students. However, Zewotiri (2015), in his study about student dropouts, found that race had no effects on those students who eventually dropped out of their studies. He further noted that there was evidence that in their study they found out that the time it took to graduate was shorter for African students than those of other races. This is in contrast with what Buthelezi (2017) and Parham (2009) found, as they posit that an individual student is enrolled into a college or university with their characteristics (including race), prior experiences, and personal commitments, which play a large role in student persistence and dropout. In 2018, in the South African context, when looking at race, the report stated that White students' completion rate was, on average, 50 per cent higher than that for non-White students (Swartz, 2018).

The impact of racism on Black African students at the university level is a critical issue that significantly affects their educational experiences, psychosocial well-being, and academic

outcomes (Solórzano et al., 2019). Research highlights that racism, including overt and covert forms of discrimination, racial stereotypes, and systemic inequalities, poses significant barriers to the success and overall well-being of Black African students in higher education (Nkomo, 2022). Overt and explicit racism manifest through discriminatory practices and behaviours directed towards Black African students. Studies have documented incidents of racial profiling, verbal harassment, and exclusionary practices experienced by Black African students on campus (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2019). Such overt forms of racism create hostile environments, contribute to feelings of marginalisation, and negatively impact students' sense of belonging, psychological well-being, and academic engagement.

Covert or subtle forms of racism also pose challenges for Black African students at the university. Research demonstrates that racial micro aggressions, such as insensitive comments, stereotypes, and tokenism, contribute to a hostile campus climate (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). These subtle acts of racism can undermine students' confidence, generate stress, and impact their academic performance and mental health. Racial stereotypes further perpetuate the negative impact of racism on Black African students. Studies have shown that stereotypes about Black intelligence, competence, and work ethic can create biases among peers, faculty, and administrators, leading to lower expectations and unequal treatment (Bennett, 2019; Cokley et al., 2019). These stereotypes can contribute to stereotype threat, selfdoubt, and reduced academic engagement among Black African students.

Systemic inequalities rooted in racism also hinder the experiences of Black African students at the university. Research underscores that institutional policies, practices, and structures perpetuate racial disparities in access to resources, academic opportunities, and support services (Dancy et al., 2018; Leonardo & Porter, 2018). Unequal access to funding, limited

representation of Black faculty, and curriculum that neglects diverse perspectives contribute to an unequal playing field, impeding the success and advancement of Black African students.

Moreover, the cumulative impact of racism extends beyond the university years for Black African students. For example, research suggests that experiences of racism can lead to longlasting psychological distress, lower self-esteem, and reduced career opportunities (Eagan et al., 2018; Nunez-Smith et al., 2021). Discrimination can also affect social networks, limit access to mentorship, and hinder professional development, further perpetuating systemic racial inequalities. The impact of racism on Black African students at the university encompasses overt and covert discrimination, racial stereotypes, and systemic inequalities. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive efforts, including anti-racist policies, culturally responsive pedagogy, diverse representation, support services, and creating inclusive campus environments that value and celebrate racial diversity. By challenging racism and fostering an equitable and inclusive higher education environment, Black African students can thrive academically, socially, and psychologically.

The Rhodes Must Fall movement has had a profound impact on Black African university students, sparking discussions and actions surrounding issues of colonialism, racism, and institutional transformation. The movement, which originated at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and spread to other institutions globally, aimed to challenge the legacy of Cecil John Rhodes and advocate for the decolonisation of the curriculum, institutional practices, and physical symbols of colonialism.

The Rhodes Must Fall movement provided a platform for Black African students to raise awareness about the historical injustices and ongoing systemic inequalities they face in higher education. Research indicates that the movement fostered a sense of empowerment, agency, and collective identity among Black African students, as it provided a space to voice their experiences and challenge the status quo (Alexander, 2016; Soudien, 2017). Through protests,

rallies, and public debates, the movement brought attention to the need for social and institutional transformation in higher education. The movement also shed light on the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum and the exclusion of African voices and perspectives. Studies highlight that Black African students, inspired by the Rhodes Must Fall movement, pushed for curriculum decolonisation efforts (Moletsane & Rabinowitz, 2020; Ndofirepi & Bozalek, 2018). They advocated for the inclusion of African scholarship, critical race theory, and postcolonial perspectives to challenge dominant knowledge paradigms and promote a more inclusive and diverse curriculum.

Furthermore, the Rhodes Must Fall movement contributed to broader discussions around institutional representation and diversity. The movement prompted universities to critically examine their recruitment and transformation policies, with a specific focus on increasing the representation of Black academics and administrators (Mkhize et al., 2018; Nene, 2019). By demanding greater diversity, the movement aimed to create a more inclusive and representative university environment that fosters equitable opportunities for Black African students.

However, the Rhodes Must Fall movement also faced challenges and encountered resistance. It faced backlash from conservative elements within the university community and broader society (Ojo-Ade, 2017; Ndzimande & Zondi, 2019). Critics argued that the movement was erasing history or engaging in "reverse racism." This resistance created tension and highlighted the need for ongoing dialogue and engagement to address the concerns and perceptions of various stakeholders. Thus, the Rhodes Must Fall movement has had a significant impact on Black African university students, providing a platform for them to challenge the legacies of colonialism, advocate for curriculum decolonisation, and promote institutional transformation (Ndzimande & Zondi, 2019). By raising awareness, fostering empowerment, and inspiring critical conversations, the movement has sparked changes in the university landscape, aiming to create more inclusive, representative, and equitable higher education environments.

2.5.6 Poor academic performance

The poor performance exhibited by students entering South Africa's higher education system has been well documented in the literature. A study by Letseka and Maile (2010) placed South Africa's overall graduation rate as the lowest in the world (15 per cent across all South African based universities). The report suggests that a lack of a significant articulation gap between secondary education and higher education was the main cause of such a high dropout rate. The report also revealed the fact that African students are generally under-represented at all universities, with nearly 70 per cent of these students indicating that they were the first of their generation to have the opportunity to attend university.

According to Swarts et al. (2018, p.1),

“Universities, historically set up for a minority elite (mostly white) under the apartheid system, have not adequately dealt with the multiple needs and challenges that confront students who were previously excluded, and who are often ill-prepared to enter universities due to different histories and prior education experiences, which influence their ability to settle into university.”

They further note that for these students who were previously excluded from such institutions (Black Africans), the major problem is coping with higher education's academic demands, a scenario which negatively impacts their academic performance. Such incompetency is directly related to having little experience in technology and limited access to computers. Having technological skills is now a required tool to trade. In their study of Black students' experiences in higher education, Swarts et al. (2018) found that academic success and completion rates continue to be racially skewed, with average White completion rates being 50 per cent higher than those of the (Black) African. Poor academic performance results in Black students giving up their studies and dropping out of university. However, in contrast to this, Tight (2019)

claimed that students can voluntarily withdraw from their studies even though the record of their academic standing is good. He differentiated between two different types of dropouts, which he named as *voluntary dropouts* and *involuntary dropouts*. According to Tight (2019, p. 22), “voluntary dropout is where a student with a good academic record has decided possibly to change universities, and an involuntary dropout is where the student has been excluded on academic grounds from further study because of poor performance”. Orio (2017) has indicated that academic achievement determines students’ decision to remain in their original university degree courses.

The impact of poor academic performance on the dropout rate of Black African students is a significant concern that affects their educational attainment and long-term success. Research indicates that academic difficulties, including low grades, academic probation, and challenges with coursework, can contribute to higher dropout rates among Black African students in higher education (Strayhorn, 2019). Poor academic performance can lead to a sense of academic disengagement and frustration among Black African students. Several studies suggest that when students consistently struggle academically, they may experience diminished selfconfidence, feelings of inadequacy, and a lack of motivation to pursue their studies (Tinto, 2012; Strayhorn, 2019). These negative emotions and perceptions can increase the likelihood of dropout as students may perceive leaving the institution as a more viable option than continuing to struggle academically.

Academic probation is another significant factor that contributes to the higher dropout rates among Black African students. Research shows that Black African students who are placed on academic probation due to their poor performance face additional challenges, including limited access to resources, increased financial burden, and decreased social support (Bullock & Williams, 2019; Ream & Rumberger, 2008). These factors can intensify the difficulties faced by students, making it even harder for them to regain their academic standing, thereby and

increasing the likelihood of dropping out. Coursework challenges, such as difficulty with specific subjects or a mismatch between students' academic abilities and the demands of the curriculum, can also impact Black African students' academic performance and dropout rates. The possibility of dropping out is increased by such factors as inadequate preparation, lack of academic support, and unfamiliarity with the academic expectations in higher education, which can hinder the academic progress of Black African students (Allen & Haniff, 2019; Yosso et al., 2009). The accumulation of academic struggles without appropriate interventions can ultimately lead to higher dropout rates among these students.

Moreover, the intersection of poor academic performance with other challenges faced by Black African students, such as financial constraints and the lack of social support, can compound the impact on dropout rates. Research has shown that the combination of academic difficulties with external pressures can create overwhelming circumstances that contribute to students' decisions to leave the institution (Gasman et al., 2018; Nunez-Smith et al., 2010). The lack of financial resources to cover tuition and living expenses, coupled with limited access to academic support networks, can make it even more challenging for Black African students to persist, and overcome academic hurdles. Challenges with academic engagement, academic probation, coursework difficulties, and the intersection with other external pressures contribute to the decision to discontinue their studies. To address these issues, interventions and support mechanisms that enhance academic preparedness, provide targeted academic support, and address the socio-economic challenges faced by Black African students are crucial for improving their academic performance and retention rates.

2.5.7 University culture

According to Adabas and Kaygin (2016), more students have attended higher education institutions (HEIs) and have become more diverse in their characteristics, academic and

sociocultural backgrounds, motivations, and goals. Tight (2019) adds that diversity has helped enrich higher education institutions through expansion of their mission and the democratisation process though this has brought considerable challenges. Students must be attached to the university and cope with the culture of the institution. Institutional attachment refers to how committed students are to the achievement of their academic goals, if they feel being part of the institution and their satisfaction with the university's services (Sommer, 2013). According to Sommer (2013), students may feel attached to the institution if they are satisfied with the institutional culture and policies. On the same note, Toheen (2012) believes that the most influential factors in students' decision to continue with their studies and achieve academic goals are their perception of the university environment and university support students decide regarding educational support and attachment to peers. He maintained that students need to adapt to the university culture for persistence so that they feel a sense of belonging, and that decreases chances of dropout. Toheen (2012) conceptualises changing one's behaviour to build a harmonious relationship with the university environment due to a transition.

In addition, adjustment reflects students' psychological fit or adaptation to the culture and customs of a new learning institution. As Mutambara and Bhebe (2012) state, students can become victims of distress if they do not adjust to the institutional culture. Heublein (2014) concurs with the notion that students need to recognise social adjustment at the university. According to Heublein (2014), social adjustment refers to the interpersonal-societal demands of the university environment. He illustrates that social adjustment denotes students becoming integrated into the university's social life, forming a support network and social life, and managing new social freedoms. Mutambara and Bhebe (2012) further argue that the transitional phase poses a threat to students' academic success in the sense that some students may find it difficult to establish friendships within the institution due to inability to identify with other students and the cultural norms of the institution.

According to Swarts et al. (2018), institutional culture is defined as the university inhabitants' lived experiences, including students, academic staff, management, support staff, workers and members of the public interacting with the institution. Similarly, Tabensky and Matthews (2015) point out that institutional culture is a broad term in South Africa, as it refers to how (Whiteness) is upheld in formerly White universities. They further aver that in South Africa, institutional culture assumes a narrow definition that is centred especially on race. Vincent (2015) postulates that most universities recognise the need to change institutional culture if the culture of inclusivity has to be attained. Thus, established university traditions and practices are an inherited legacy of apartheid practices which still disadvantage Black African students in many ways, including the language policy that reinforces English as a mode of instruction, thus disregarding other African official languages.

The university culture and its impact on the dropout rates of Black African students is a crucial area of investigation as it sheds light on the socio-cultural factors that influence their educational experiences and persistence in higher education. Research suggests that the university culture, encompassing the institutional climate, social environment, and cultural norms, play a significant role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of Black African students, including their decision to persist or drop out (Griffin et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2012). The institutional climate and sense of belonging within the university are key aspects of the university culture that affect Black African students' dropout rates. Some studies indicate that a negative institutional climate characterised by racial biases, discriminatory practices, and lack of inclusivity can contribute to a sense of marginalisation and alienation among Black African students (Griffin et al., 2017). When students feel disconnected or unwelcome, they are more likely to and consider dropping out, thus they disengage from the university.

The social environment within the university, including interactions with peers, faculty, and staff, also influences Black African students' dropout rates. Research suggests that positive social support networks, mentorship opportunities, and inclusive campus communities contribute to a sense of connectedness and well-being among Black African students (Museus et al., 2011; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2017). Conversely, experiences of isolation, limited social integration, and the lack of access to supportive networks can hinder students' ability to navigate the university environment successfully, potentially leading to higher dropout rates. Cultural norms and practices within the university can either facilitate or impede the retention of Black African students. For example, cultural validation, recognition of diverse perspectives, and the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogies positively impact the academic experiences and sense of belonging among Black African students (Harper, 2010; Solorzano et al., 2013). Conversely, when the university culture neglects or devalues the cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge of Black African students, it can contribute to a negative learning environment and hinder their engagement, potentially leading to dropout.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of race and other identity dimensions, such as gender and socio-economic background, within the university culture can compound the challenges faced by Black African students and impact their dropout rates. Research indicates that intersecting identities and the presence of multiple forms of marginalisation can exacerbate feelings of exclusion, limit access to resources, and contribute to a hostile campus climate for Black African students (Cuyjet, 2014; Lewis et al., 2018). These experiences of intersectional discrimination can heighten the likelihood of dropping out as students face increased barriers and challenges in navigating the university culture. The university culture, including the institutional climate, social environment, and cultural norms, significantly influence the dropout rates of Black African students in higher education. A positive institutional climate that fosters a sense of belonging, inclusive social environments, and culturally affirming practices

contributes to their retention, while a negative or exclusionary university culture can hinder their persistence. Thus, to improve retention rates, universities must cultivate an inclusive and supportive culture that values diversity, promotes cultural validation, and addresses the intersectional challenges faced by Black African students.

2.5.8 Parental and family involvement in student dropout

Socioeconomic variables have been discussed in detail by many scholars as the main cause of dropout at higher education institutions. However, Raftu and Caraiane (2016) articulate that a student whose parents have lower educational qualifications is more likely to drop out, especially when they are a first-generation student. Therefore, they compare first-generation students and thus clearly characterise students from families without a tradition of studying in higher education institutions. They posit that the impact of the mother's educational attainment may be greater as the mother is often more present in a child's cognitive development and academic life than the father. Hernandez et al. (2017) concurred with this position. However, Swarts et al. (2018) explicitly explain that in their study of Black African students' university experiences, they found that the support and pressure from family members who tried to influence choices, despite not having any knowledge of university life, left young people distressed, thus influencing the individual student's decision to drop out of university. Incongruent to this input, Raftu and Caraiane (2016) have reported that the necessity to reproduce the professional roles of the parents and continue at the head of the family business made parents to pressure their children to pursue specific programmes and then expect high academic performance. Consequently, when there is disagreement, and the students cannot live up to their parents' expectations, they give up their studies and drop out of university.

The lack of parent involvement has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the dropout rates of Black African students in higher education (Griffin, 2010). Research suggests

that parental involvement, including active participation in their children's educational journey, has a positive impact on students' academic achievement, engagement, and persistence. However, the limited involvement of parents in the educational process can negatively affect the educational outcomes and dropout rates of Black African students. Studies highlight the importance of parental support, guidance, and advocacy in facilitating the academic success of Black African students (Griffin, 2010; McNeal, 2012). When parents are actively engaged in their children's education, they can provide essential emotional, social, and academic support, creating a strong foundation for educational attainment. However, the lack of parental involvement can lead to a lack of accountability, decreased motivation, and diminished academic aspirations among Black African students, increasing the likelihood of dropout (McNeal, 2012).

The absence of parental involvement may result from various factors, including limited educational opportunities, language barriers, and socio-economic constraints. Research indicates that parents with limited educational backgrounds may face challenges in navigating the educational system, resulting in reduced involvement in their children's academic pursuits (Chavous et al., 2010; McNeal, 2012). Language barriers can also hinder effective communication between parents and schools, limiting the opportunities for collaboration and engagement. Additionally, socio-economic constraints may prevent parents from dedicating time and resources to support their children's education, further exacerbating the dropout risk among Black African students. Moreover, cultural factors and systemic barriers can influence parent involvement and impact dropout rates. There are studies that have shown that cultural norms and expectations may influence the level of parent engagement in education (Okonofua et al., 2016; Thompson, 2003). Cultural values emphasizing respect for authority, deference to educators, and limited direct involvement in school affairs can affect parents' willingness to actively participate in their children's education. Systemic barriers such as racial disparities in

educational resources and discriminatory practices within schools, can also create distrust and discourage parent involvement among Black African families, further perpetuating the dropout risk.

Interventions that aim to enhance parental involvement and address the barriers faced by Black African families are crucial in mitigating the dropout rates. Research suggests that establishing strong home-school partnerships, providing culturally sensitive and accessible communication channels, and offering parent education programmes can help foster meaningful engagement (Moore et al., 2017; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2009). These initiatives can empower parents, build their confidence in navigating the educational system, and strengthen their ability to support their children's educational journey, ultimately reducing the dropout rates among Black African students. Clearly, the lack of parental involvement significantly impacts the dropout rates of Black African students in higher education. The absence of parental support, guidance, and advocacy hinders academic achievement and engagement. Further, factors such as limited educational opportunities, language barriers, socio-economic constraints, cultural norms, and systemic barriers contribute to the limited involvement of parents. Strategies that promote meaningful home-school partnerships and address the barriers faced by Black African families are essential to improving parental involvement and reducing dropout rates among these students.

2.6 Consequences of dropout in universities

Extant literature reveals that dropout has negative consequences on the government, the economy and students. According to Latif et al. (2015), the government incurs financial loss when students drop out of university. Casanova et al. (2021) have concurred with the view that student dropout in higher education institutions is a concern for students, families, educational institutions, and society at large. Since tertiary education is an important empowerment

mechanism in the community, student dropout has contributed to the problem of skills shortage in the labour market, thus hampering economic growth (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Sharing the same sentiment are Meahlisen et al. (2018) who posit that student dropouts may contribute to unemployment, which may, in turn, contribute to psychological distress for students and their families. Sarker et al. (2019) added that student dropout is a concern because it contributes to high rates of unemployment and poverty.

Literature is cognisant of the fact that academic dropout is an international phenomenon that negatively impacts students, families, and society. Apparently, the dropout rate is highest in first-year students (Casanova et al., 2018; Tinto, 2010), which may be related to the difficulties students experience in transitioning and adapting to their new academic context (Naylor et al., 2017). This is evident even in international scholarship, as Naylor et al. (2017) revealed that in the European higher education context, student dropout has become a major challenge which is a complex phenomenon that has various negative impacts that can be noticed at the level of students, universities, the region and the society. Naylor et al. (2017) add that the significance of this challenge varies across countries. Notably, the bulk of national higher education research and scholarship on university policies has focused on attaining high completion and time-to-degree rates, whereas in other policy approaches, maintaining low dropout rates has been a priority (Casanova et al., 2021).

Universities have been responsive to this phenomenon (dropout) (Raftu & Caraiane, 2016). However, the phenomenon goes beyond the institution, as the education system has become a problem requiring joint policies to maintain systematic strategies needed to address the rates of student dropout. Muhammed (2012) has identified *university dropout* as an important topic in many countries since it wastes taxpayers' money. Still, it is one of the criteria used to evaluate higher education institutions. He further postulates that universities should aim to consider academic dropout as a problem that hurts society at individual, institutional, local, regional,

national and international levels. Raftuand Caraiane (2016) conclude that academic dropout has long been regarded as a serious social and educational problem because quitting studies determines serious educational deficits, thus severely limiting students' economic and social well-being throughout their adult life.

Student dropout at the university level has significant consequences that affect various aspects of individuals' lives. Research indicates that the consequences of student dropout encompass academic, social, and economic dimensions, highlighting the importance of understanding and addressing the underlying factors that contribute to dropout rates (Borghans et al., 2019). Academically, student dropout can culminate in failure to complete an educational programme, which may limit future employment and career prospects (Borghans et al., 2019; Rumberger, 2011). Without a degree, individuals may face barriers in accessing higher-paying jobs and experience reduced earning potential compared to their peers who successfully complete their studies (Cabrera et al., 2006; Oreopoulos et al., 2012). The lack of a degree may also hinder opportunities for further education or professional advancement, which further impacts longterm career trajectories.

Socially, student dropout can result in a sense of disconnection from peers, loss of social support networks, and reduced opportunities for personal development and networking (Kuh et al., 2008; Swail et al., 2003). Remaining outside the educational environment can lead to a loss of access to resources such as libraries, research facilities, and academic communities, which are essential for personal and intellectual growth (Kasworm, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Moreover, student dropout can contribute to feelings of stigma, self-doubt, and diminished self-esteem, potentially impacting individuals' overall well-being and sense of identity (Willms et al., 2009; Wolters et al., 2011). Economically, the consequences of student dropout extend beyond immediate employment prospects. Research suggests that dropout

individuals may face challenges in repaying student loans, leading to financial strain and potential long-term debt burdens (Bailey et al., 2015; Hossler et al., 2009). The economic repercussions can further exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities and contribute to cycles of poverty and limited social mobility (Cabrera et al., 2006; Roksa & Calcagno, 2010). Additionally, individuals who drop out may experience increased rates of unemployment and job instability compared to their peers with degrees (McMillan & Kaufman, 2007; Oreopoulos et al., 2012).

The consequences of student dropout extend beyond the individual level and impact society as a whole. Research shows that the economic costs associated with dropout, including lost productivity, reduced tax revenues, and increased public expenditures on social welfare programmes (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Perna, 2010). Additionally, the lack of a skilled workforce resulting from dropout rates can hinder economic growth and competitiveness on a broader scale (OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). Student dropout at the university level carries significant consequences that encompass academic, social, and economic dimensions. Failure to complete educational programmes can limit employment and career opportunities, while the loss of social connections and resources can impact personal growth and well-being. Economically, dropout individuals may face financial burdens, unemployment, and reduced socio-economic mobility. Addressing the underlying factors contributing to dropout rates and implementing targeted interventions to support student retention is crucial for mitigating these consequences and promoting individuals' educational and socio-economic success.

2.7 Strategies to mitigate student dropout

Ensuring that students easily adjust to university has become a major concern for the global higher education sectors due to the potentially negative impact that adjustment problems may have on student dropout (Mohamed, 2012). The literature presents several retention strategies

mostly focusing on social causes. These strategies aim to improve students' sense of engagement and belonging to the institution, which is a very important part of their lives. Many studies have indicated that when students feel that they are a part of the institution, retention rates and academic success improve (Thomas, 2012; Yorke, 2016; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Studies investigating the causes of student dropout basically found that student retention pose a significant challenge for universities (Thomas, 2011, 2012). Observation shows that studies investigating the efficiency of retention strategies remain scarce (Brooman & Darwent, 2014). However, several sociological models of explaining and predicting student 'persistence' have been developed (Tinto, 1987; 1988; 2010). Central to Tinto's model is students' level of academic and social integration into university life, factors which, Tinto claimed, can help in predicting students' propensity to drop out of university or continue with their studies. Tinto's theory, which is used as a lens in the present study, will be discussed further in the second part of this literature review.

2.7.1 Fight against burnout

The literature depicts student burnout as having a tremendous impact on student dropout. Hence, it is not enough to prevent student dropouts by promoting student engagement. Rather, important levels of student burnout must be kept low (Larose et al., 2011). He further advocates for the development of coping strategies that can help in the management of and fight against student burnout. These strategies have been defined as efforts to avoid or decrease threats and reduce associated stress on students. For example,

Coping strategies can be divided into two categories: active or positive coping (seeking information, seeking help, seeking social support, planning, and accepting or reframing problems with humour or faith) and passive or negative coping (disengagement, selfdistracton, denial, self-blame, substance abuse, venting, etc.), although other

divisions are possible, such as emotion-focused coping strategies and task-focused coping strategies (Larose et al., 2011, p.23).

Preventing student burnout at the university level is a critical concern for educational institutions as it impacts students' well-being, academic performance, and overall success. Extensive research has explored various strategies and interventions that can help prevent burnout among university students (Salmela-Aro et al., 2011). One effective approach to prevent student burnout is promoting a supportive and positive learning environment. Research suggests that creating a supportive campus culture that values student well-being, encourages work-life balance, and fosters positive relationships among students and faculty can contribute to lower levels of burnout (Dyrbye et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro et al., 2011). Implementing policies that support flexible scheduling, provide resources for stress management, and promote self-care can help students to navigate the demands of university life more effectively, thereby reducing the risk of burnout.

In addition, promoting effective time management and study skills can help students develop a sense of control over their academic workload and minimise stress level. Research shows that interventions focusing on time management training, goal-setting strategies, and study skill development can enhance students' ability to manage their time efficiently and prioritize their tasks, reducing the likelihood of burnout (Stoeber et al., 2011; Yorke & Knight, 2004). Providing students with resources and personalized guidance on effective study habits and time management techniques, and the opportunity to attend workshops, can empower them to better manage their academic responsibilities and prevent burnout. Another essential aspect of preventing student burnout is promoting student engagement and involvement in extracurricular activities. Research consistently demonstrates that students who are engaged in activities beyond their academic coursework, such as student organisations, sports, or volunteer

work tend to experience lower levels of burnout (Fredricks et al., 2011; Trowler, 2010). Encouraging students to explore their interests, pursue hobbies, and engage in meaningful social connections can help to create a sense of purpose, belonging, and balance, reducing the risk of burnout.

Furthermore, providing comprehensive and accessible support services is crucial to preventing burnout among university students. Counselling services, wellness programmes, and mental health resources play a vital role in addressing stressors and mental health concerns that can contribute to burnout (Stallman, 2010; World Health Organization, 2018). Universities should prioritise the availability of these services, ensure their visibility, and reduce barriers to access in order to support students' well-being and provide timely interventions. Lastly, raising awareness and providing education on stress management, self-care, and mental health is essential to preventing burnout. Incorporating stress reduction techniques, mindfulness practices, and promoting healthy coping strategies through workshops, seminars, and educational campaigns can equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively manage stress and maintain their well-being (Hawley et al., 2017; Shapiro et al., 2019). Empowering students with information and the relevant tools to recognise the signs of burnout and seek appropriate help can contribute to early intervention and prevention.

It is important to prevent student burnout at the university level, and this requires a multifaceted approach. Creating a supportive campus culture, promoting effective time management, encouraging student engagement, providing comprehensive support services, and raising awareness about stress management and mental health are key strategies to prevent burnout. By implementing these strategies, universities can foster a healthier and more productive learning environment that supports students' well-being and maximises their chances of academic success.

2.7.2 Academic support for first year students

According to Thomas (2012) who investigated strategies of preventing the negative results of student dropout, the first year is the most appropriate time to identify students facing the risk of dropout. The results showed that the first year is the specific moment for developing strategies of preventing student dropout. Among the discussed techniques suggested by Wilson et al. (2016) are tutoring, advising, and mentoring, which positively impact first-year student by preventing their withdrawal. Sharing similar sentiments are Brooman and Darwent (2014) who mentioned that the retention process combines individual academic follow-up programmes in the form of assessed assignments and exams given throughout a specific course with other student-centred actions, such as tutoring. They further illustrate that giving students individual feedback on their performance improves not only their cognitive skills but also their engagement because they have had time and information to develop higher self-efficacy and more independent learning during their transition period, and these strategies can prevent dropout simultaneously increasing academic success (Brooman & Darwent, 2014).

Academic support for first-year students at the university level plays a crucial role in facilitating their successful transition and promoting academic achievement (Brooman & Darwent, 2014)). Research has reiterated the importance of providing comprehensive academic support services to address the unique challenges faced by first-year students and enhance their overall learning experience (Wong, 2013). One key aspect of academic support is providing orientation programmes and resources that familiarise first-year students with the university's academic expectations, resources, and support systems (Inkelas et al., 2008; Upcraft et al., 2005). Orientation programmes that include information on study skills, time management, academic planning, and campus resources can help students develop the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate the academic environment effectively (Wong, 2013). Such programmes also

facilitate the establishment of connections with faculty, staff, and fellow students, which contributes to a sense of belonging and engagement.

Additionally, academic support services should focus on promoting effective study strategies and learning skills. Research suggests that interventions aimed at improving study habits, notetaking techniques, critical thinking, and information literacy can enhance students' academic performance and retention (Hilsdon et al., 2012; Wong, 2013). Providing workshops, tutorials, and online resources that teach students these essential skills can empower them to become independent learners and succeed in their academic pursuits. Personalised academic advising is another critical component of support for first-year students. Assigning dedicated advisors who can provide guidance on course selection, degree requirements, and academic planning help students make informed decisions and stay on track towards their educational goals (Drake et al., 2011; Reason et al., 2006). Advisors can also assist students in identifying additional academic support resources and provide mentorship throughout their first year, fostering a supportive relationship that promotes student success.

Peer mentoring programmes have been found to be particularly effective in supporting first year students' academic transition and integration. Pairing incoming students with more experienced peers can provide valuable guidance, support, and encouragement (Hughes et al., 2011; Kuh et al., 2006). Peer mentors can share their own experiences, offer academic advice, and help new students navigate the university environment, thus promoting a sense of belonging and easing the transition process. Furthermore, academic support should address the socio-emotional well-being of first-year students. Research suggests that programs that integrate social and emotional support alongside academic support led to improved academic outcomes and increased student retention (Credé et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Providing counselling services, workshops on stress management and resilience, and fostering a positive

campus climate can contribute to students' overall well-being and positively impact their academic success. Academic support for first-year students at the university level is crucial for their successful transition and academic achievement. Orientation programmes, study skills development, personalised advising, peer mentoring, and socio-emotional support are essential components of effective academic support. By implementing comprehensive academic support strategies, universities can enhance the overall learning experience of first-year students and increase their chances of long-term success.

2.7.3 Pastoral care

Research has discovered that family encouragement, positive relationships with professors, and positive course experiences are the mostly agreed social factors that encourage student persistence at university (Bonne, 2012). In his study on student retention, Bonne (2012) concludes by discussing the role and importance of universities in investing in the required effort to ensure that students experience academic success and social congruence. The need to understand and improve college persistence is critical. Tinto (2010, p.73) states that, "students are more likely to succeed and continue within the institution when they find themselves in settings that provide needed academic and social support". According to Bonne (2012), in the context of the increased competition to retain students, it is advisable that university personnel actively strive for consideration of input from students to ensure that their social needs are being attained. Among university personnel, the academic staff and administrators should ensure that students are taken care of. During their first year, students desire more contact time with tutors and more re-assurances than they receive in their final year of study (Chen, 2012). This assertion confirms the observation made by Tinto (1982) that students need feedback from tutors as confirmation that they are coping at the required academic level. If students do not cooperate with the system during their first academic term, the university risk losing them.

Hence, higher education institutions need to address this issue if they have a genuine desire to reduce their student drop-out rates.

Lecturers play a significant role in mitigating student dropout at the university level through their instructional practices, mentorship, and support (Tinto, 2012). Research highlights the importance of the lecturer-student relationship, effective teaching strategies, and engagement in fostering student success and reducing dropout rates (Mudhovozi 2012). Firstly, the lecturer-student relationship has a considerable impact on student engagement and persistence. For example, positive interactions, approachable lecturers, and supportive relationships with faculty members contribute to students' sense of belonging and academic motivation (Inkelas et al., 2007; Robbins et al., 2004). Lecturers who demonstrate genuine interest in their students' progress, provide timely feedback, and offer guidance and mentorship can create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to persist and overcome challenges.

Furthermore, effective teaching strategies employed by lecturers can enhance student learning and reduce dropout rates. Research suggests that engaging and interactive teaching methods, such as active learning, group activities, and problem-solving exercises, promote student involvement and foster deeper understanding of course material (Freeman et al., 2014; Prince, 2004). Lecturers who employ these strategies can increase student motivation, develop critical thinking skills, and enhance students' confidence in their abilities, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropout. Lecturers can also contribute to mitigating student dropout by promoting a sense of relevance and applicability in their teaching. Connecting course content to real-world examples, professional contexts, and students' career aspirations can help students see the value and relevance of their studies, enhancing their motivation and commitment to completing their degree (Grossman et al., 2018; Mariani et al., 2019). By providing practical applications and

highlighting the potential benefits of academic knowledge, lecturers can inspire students to persist in their studies and envision the long-term value of their education.

Additionally, proactive support and early intervention from lecturers can play a crucial role in preventing student dropout. Recognising the warning signs of struggling students, such as poor attendance, declining performance, or disengagement, lecturers can offer additional support, refer students to relevant resources, or provide guidance on study strategies (Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 2012). Timely intervention and personalised attention can help students to overcome challenges, address academic concerns, and stay on track to achieve their educational goals.

Lecturers have a vital role to play in preventing student dropout at the university level. Establishing positive lecturer-student relationships, employing effective teaching strategies, connecting course content to real-world applications, and providing proactive support are key elements in reducing dropout rates. By fostering engagement, motivation, and a supportive learning environment, lecturers can contribute to student success and help students persist in their studies.

2.7.4 Professors

Some studies indicate that students' positive relationships with professors and positive experiences within major courses are some of the social factors that encourage student persistence (Casanova et al., 2018). Ferrao and Almeida (2018) discovered that all students, regardless of ethnicity or race, experience more satisfaction and persistence with their university when they have academic and formal and informal social connections with faculty, staff, and peers. Mudhovozi (2012) highlights that students often deal with transitional challenges differently, with some dealing with adjustment constructively, while others feeling overwhelmed and failing to cope with university life; hence academic staff should consider closing this gap because, without institutional support, many students exhibit lower

achievement, which is a strong predictor of dropout (Rodríguez-Muñiz et al., 2019). The implications for academic staff include the need to adopt appropriate aspects of teaching and learning such as collaborative learning, adopting a wide range of assessment assessments, and communication of high expectations; this is so because the more effort institutions put into the education, not merely schooling, of their students, the more they will retain them (Tinto, 1982). Based on the findings of Tinto (1982), it is recommended that university faculty members make conscious efforts to develop positive relationships through engaging students.

2.7.5 University leaders

According to Chen (2012), for university leaders and policymakers to improve graduation rates through student retention, they must commit the required efforts towards ensuring that students are experiencing academic success and social integration. He further maintains that to bridge this gap, Tinto (2010) developed an approach that models student dropout behaviour through focusing on the quality of interaction to systematically model behaviour between a student and the higher education institution at which they have enrolled. More specifically, the individual attributes of each student (such as their underlying ability, race and gender), together with some family background characteristics (such as their parents' level of education) and pre-university schooling experiences (such as the grades that they have achieved), help to form initial motivation that then fosters interaction with a set of institutional experiences within the university. When examining the institution's role in the student's decision to drop out, Thomas (2002; 2009) attributes a lot of responsibility to the faculty, as well as to the teaching methods and evaluation models used, citing the distant relationships teachers establish with their students at a time when they need a more personalised treatment.

LITERATURE REVIEW PART TWO

BLACK AFRICAN STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

2.8 South African students and their struggles in higher education institutions

Higher education in South Africa contends with multiple problems (Swartz et al., 2018). The key challenges include high failure rates among students (55 per cent), low on-time completion rates, and lack of equity in enrolment and completion rates between Black and White students (CHE, 2016). While the number of Black students enrolled at universities has been increasing since 1995, having increased nearly four times, as many White youths (aged between 18 and 24) are enrolled at university than their Black counterparts (15 per cent for Black students and 54 per cent for White students in 2014). Furthermore, the completion rate for White students is 50 per cent higher than that of their Black counterparts (Swartz et al., 2018). Hence, Adetutu (2010) suggests that if there is no freedom in education, then the word emancipation lacks its full meaning since emancipation involves abolishing all forms of restriction on the educated. Therefore, any form of education that does not foster emancipation is unjust.

Safstrom (2011) posits that emancipation is simply based on the assumption of the equality of intelligence and also notes that schooling explicitly explains reality as a hierarchical status quo for nothing to happen that can disturb the social order of inequality. As recent as 10 years ago, Adetutu (2010) found that education in Africa maintains White superiority and neglects the needs of Black African students. Hence, the question remains, whether or not higher education in Africa is ostensibly or truly emancipated. Much research has been conducted on higher education and emancipation across various universities in South Africa. The scope of

this study also provides a comprehensive review of this literature. Therefore, the following discussion examines the experiences of Black African students at South African universities.

2.9 Students' integration and alienation in higher education institutions

The challenges faced by Black African students in university communities have become the focus of research in South Africa. Machika (2015) found evidence of prejudice and

discrimination against Black African students in South African university campuses. Cornell and Kessi (2017) found the South African university environment to be unwelcoming and hostile toward Black African students. Breire (2010) reported that Black African students have negative experiences within the South African university environment, with Carolissen and Firfirey (2010) supporting similar findings. These negative experiences include differential treatment of African students by lecturers on the bases of race, racial stereotypes, and the racialised nature of access to resources, student housing allocation, and financial security in terms of paying fees (Swartz et al., 2018). Since the present study focuses on students from a South African university, the following discussion considers the different factors that contribute to the high student dropout rate in South African universities.

2.9.1 Poverty

Higher education institutions need to understand the impact of the conditions characterising the economic background (poverty) under which students live while studying for qualifications and how these conditions could affect their academic success at university (Machika & Johnson, 2015). Previous studies found that African students are stigmatised on the basis of their impoverished economic backgrounds, a scenario which affects their self-esteem and academic performance at universities (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). Similarly,

Bojuwaye (2012) found that the financial difficulties experienced by African students at university leave them with anxiety and stress, which negatively affects their academic performance. Breire (2010) echoed the above findings, stressing that poverty is a major challenge that students of colour experience at university in South Africa and that leaves them with no choice but to drop out of university.

Furthermore, Sennett and Finchilescu (2013) note that Black African students in South African universities are challenged by financial constraints, transport problems, housing-related difficulties, and the obstacle of living huge distances from their homes. Similarly, Machika and Johnson (2015) expose Black post-graduate students' experiences of poverty and a lack of academic success at a university of technology in South Africa. Findings indicate that all of them were from socio-economic backgrounds, which negatively impacted university attendance. There is a link between the lack of financial resources and becoming a university student. Nevertheless, Cameron and Greenland (2019), in their study which aimed to attain a better understanding of the experiences of a small number of students (who are identified as 'black or minority') in higher education found that the picture gets very complicated when other demographic information is considered: students from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to drop out than those from more privileged ones.

Poverty has been identified as a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities (Nkomo & Schoole, 2017). Extensive research has examined the relationship between poverty and student dropout, highlighting the various ways in which economic disadvantage influences students' ability to persist in higher education (Wanangwa, 2019). Firstly, financial constraints pose a significant barrier to Black African students in South African universities. Many students from low-income backgrounds

struggle to meet the costs of tuition fees, textbooks, accommodation, and other essential expenses (Nkomo & Schoole, 2017; Schoole & Kapp, 2016). The inability to afford these costs often leads to financial stress and may force students to work long hours or take on additional responsibilities, detracting from their ability to focus on their studies and increasing the risk of dropout.

Furthermore, poverty can limit access to necessary academic resources and support services. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may fail to access reliable internet connections, computers, libraries, and other resources that are vital for academic success (Sayed & Jansen, 2015; Singh, 2018). Limited access to academic support services, such as tutoring, counselling, and mentorship programmes can further hinder students' progress and leave them feeling isolated and unsupported. Poverty also intersects with other social and environmental factors that contribute to student dropout. For example, students from impoverished backgrounds may face such challenges as inadequate housing conditions, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare, which can negatively impact their physical and mental well-being (Reddy et al., 2020; Seedat et al., 2019). These challenges, combined with the financial pressures, create a challenging and stressful environment that can overwhelm students and increase their likelihood of dropping out.

Moreover, the intergenerational cycle of poverty plays a role in student dropout rates (Firfirey & Carolissen 2010). Many Black African students hail from families with limited educational attainment and financial resources (Tikly, 2018; Wanangwa, 2019). The lack of familial support and role models in higher education can contribute to feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and a sense of not belonging, making it more difficult for students to persist in their studies. Poverty is a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities (Wanangwa, 2019). Financial constraints, limited access to academic resources and support services, intersecting social and environmental challenges, and the

intergenerational cycle of poverty all contribute to the vulnerability of these students. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive interventions that prioritise financial assistance, improve access to resources, enhance support services, and create an inclusive and supportive campus environment for economically disadvantaged students.

2.9.2 Financial obstacles

Machika and Johnson (2015) found that when African students commence their studies, they seem to have an insufficient understanding of what is required while studying at higher education institutions. This is further asserted by Cornell and Kessi (2017), who recognise Black African students as experiencing a tremendous financial struggle at university, including raising tuition fees, meeting transport costs, buying food, and etcetera. Hence, Machika and Johnson (2015) depict some Black students from low-economic households as being unable to afford food, a reality that hurts their academic development and performance. This finding corroborates that of Cele (2018), who postulates that students from poverty-stricken families experience a decreased academic achievement potential. In his study, which explored classism and the experiences of children in South African schools, he found that “most of the African learners from township schools do not afford to pay school fees, which results in low self-confidence, self-doubt, fear and anxiety in schools because of their socio-economic background” (Cele, 2018, p.61).

Interestingly, higher education in South Africa exudes a different story since the South African Government provided the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to assist students from impoverished family backgrounds with a family income of less than R350 000 per annum (DHE, 2016). However, Breire (2010) contends that despite the establishment of NSFAS, students are still being excluded from South African universities on financial grounds. In their study, Machika and Johnson (2015) found that students experience

harassment if they are unable to settle their fees and are subsequently placed on the credit bureau list by the universities. They added that 10 per cent of the students who participated in their research terminated their studies as they failed to receive funds from the NSFAS in good time. In their study, Swartz et al. (2018) also found that financial obstacles were the largest obstacle to the success of Black students at university.

Financial obstacles have been identified as significant contributors to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities (Nkomo & Schoole, 2017). Extensive research has examined the relationship between financial challenges and student dropout, shedding light on the specific ways in which economic barriers hinder students' ability to persist in higher education (Wanangwa, 2019). Firstly, the cost of tuition fees is a primary financial obstacle for Black African students in South African universities. Many students from low-income backgrounds struggle to afford the high costs associated with tuition, particularly as government funding and scholarships may not fully cover their expenses (Nkomo & Schoole, 2017; Schoole & Kapp, 2016). The inability to meet these financial obligations can lead to immense stress and may force students to consider withdrawing from their studies.

In addition to tuition fees, the cost of living and related expenses pose significant challenges to financially disadvantaged students. Accommodation costs, transportation, textbooks, and other essential resources further strain students' limited financial resources (Reddy et al., 2020; Singh, 2018). Students may face difficulties in finding affordable housing close to campus, leading to long commutes that impact their study time and well-being. Insufficient funds for textbooks and educational materials can hinder their ability to fully engage with their coursework. Financial constraints can also limit students' ability to access the necessary

academic resources and support services. Internet access, computers, libraries, and other essential resources may be inaccessible due to financial limitations (Sayed & Jansen, 2015; Singh, 2018). This lack of access to academic resources can impede students' ability to complete assignments, conduct research, and access course materials, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their financially privileged peers.

Moreover, financial challenges often force students to undertake part-time or full-time employment to support themselves or their families. Consequently, balancing work and academic responsibilities can be overwhelming, leading to increased stress and fatigue, and limiting the time available for studying and participating in campus activities (Nkomo & Schoole, 2017; Schoole & Kapp, 2016). This juggling act often leaves students feeling overwhelmed and may undermine their academic performance, increasing the risk of dropout. Financial obstacles are significant contributors to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. The high costs of tuition fees, the challenges of affording living expenses and necessary resources, and the need to balance employment and academic responsibilities all present substantial barriers to student persistence (Cele, 2018; Cornell & Kessi, 2017). Addressing these financial challenges requires comprehensive strategies, including increasing access to financial aid, providing affordable housing options, reducing textbook costs, and offering targeted support services to financially disadvantaged students.

2.9.3 Unpreparedness for university

When poor African students enter higher education institutions do not only face an economic struggle, but also exhibit inadequate preparedness in terms of coping with the demands of higher education pedagogy (Machika & Johnson, 2015). This finding is further supported by Cornell and Kessi (2017) who reported that African students are often portrayed as greatly challenged academically and unprepared for academic work at university and

commonly cite apartheid as an excuse for underachievement. Additionally, Sennet and Finchiscu (2013) postulate that the poor quality of primary and secondary education that Black African students previously attended was found to be the main motive behind the underachievement of these students. The above findings indicate that some African students are not well prepared for university life, resulting in negative experiences with university life in general. For example,

“They are lacking in independent writing and learning skills, and although they found ways of studying skills, that enabled them to pass Grade 12, they have not developed the necessary critical and reflective skills required for tertiary study” (Machika & Johnson, 2015, p. 170).

The lack of preparedness for university has been identified as a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. For example, research has explored various aspects of students' unpreparedness, including inadequate academic skills, lack of guidance and support, and cultural and social challenges that hinder their ability to adapt to the university environment (Wanangwa, 2019). Firstly, many Black African students enter university without the necessary academic skills and knowledge to succeed in higher education. Inadequate preparation in key subjects such as Mathematics, English Language, where proficiency is key, and critical thinking skills can hinder students' ability to keep up with the demands of university coursework (Kapp, 2018; Yorke & Longden, 2007). Without a solid academic foundation, students may struggle to comprehend course content, complete assignments, and perform well in examinations, leading to frustration and a higher likelihood of dropping out.

The lack of guidance and support during the transition from secondary school to university is another factor contributing to unpreparedness and subsequent dropout (Reddy et al., 2020).

Many Black African students come from schools with limited resources, inadequate career guidance, and insufficient exposure to the university environment (Reddy et al., 2020; Tikly, 2018). As a result, students may struggle to navigate the complexities of university life, including understanding academic expectations, accessing support services, and adjusting to the new social and cultural environment. The absence of comprehensive support mechanisms during this critical transition period can leave students feeling overwhelmed and disconnected, increasing their vulnerability to dropout.

Cultural and social challenges also impact the preparedness of Black African students for university (Tikly, 2018). The cultural mismatch between students' home backgrounds and the university environment can create feelings of alienation and exclusion (Tikly, 2018; Wanangwa, 2019). Differences in language, values, and social norms can make it difficult for students to integrate into the university community and form social connections, further exacerbating their sense of unpreparedness and isolation. The lack of representation and cultural relevance in the curriculum and teaching approaches can also hinder students' engagement and motivation, making it difficult for them to pursue their studies.

Unpreparedness for university is a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. Inadequate academic skills, lack of guidance and support during the transition, and cultural and social challenges hinder students' ability to adapt to the university environment. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive interventions that enhance academic preparation, provide effective guidance and support systems, and promote an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment for Black African students.

2.9.4 Sense of belonging

Most rural, poor African students cannot afford to spend holidays at home (Machika & Johnson, 2015). This adds to their emotional pain and feeling of alienation and isolation. This replicates the findings of Cornell and Kessi (2017) in their study on Black students' transformation experiences at a previously White-only South African university. Black African students are commonly stereotyped as unintelligent and lazy. This description of African students suggests that they do not belong at the University of Cape Town, leaving them with the feeling of self-doubt and alienation and consequently, they isolate themselves from their privileged peers or counterparts. They further reported that where stereotypes of Blackness are pervasive at university, those marginalised individuals, African students in this case, may internalise these stereotypes, resulting in them experiencing feelings of inferiority. Such experiences may also result in feelings of insecurity and demotivation (Breire, 2010). Prior studies have demonstrated that undergraduate students from under-represented backgrounds, such as Black students, often find it difficult to fit in, and experience a sense of not belonging in university settings (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Finnegen & Merrill, 2017). The sensation of being 'out of place' can detrimentally affect undergraduate students' well-being and social and academic experiences, partly because it can make them question their capabilities (Finnegen & Merrill, 2017; Mallman, 2017; Perez-Adamson & Mercer, 2016). Henceforth, creating a sense of belonging is closely linked to developing identity. Research on retention has, in recent years, increasingly drawn on identity as a framework used to explore the relationship between the student and the institution (Ulriksen et al., 2010).

The lack of a sense of belonging has been identified as a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. Extensive research has examined the relationship between students' sense of belonging and their

persistence in higher education, shedding light on the specific ways in which the lack of belonging hinders Black African students' ability to thrive and succeed in the university environment. Foremost, a lack of a sense of belonging can lead to feelings of isolation and marginalisation among Black African students. The university environment, often characterised by its size, diversity, and competitive nature, can be overwhelming and intimidating for students, particularly those from minority backgrounds (Garriott, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Without a strong sense of belonging and connection to the university community, students may struggle to form meaningful relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, resulting in feelings of alienation and a lack of support. These feelings of isolation can impact students' motivation, engagement, and overall well-being, increasing their vulnerability to dropout.

Moreover, the lack of representation and inclusivity in the university environment can contribute to a diminished sense of belonging among Black African students. The limited representation of Black African students in the curriculum, faculty, and leadership positions can reinforce feelings of marginalisation and exclusion (Vakil, 2021; Wanangwa, 2019). The absence of role models and mentors who share their racial and cultural background can further exacerbate students' sense of disconnection and hinder their ability to navigate the university system successfully. In this context, the lack of a sense of belonging can be a barrier to academic and social integration, leading to higher dropout rates among Black African students. Additionally, the discriminatory practices and microaggressions experienced by Black African students can undermine their sense of belonging and negatively impact their academic experiences. Racial bias, stereotypes, and unequal treatment within the university can create hostile environments that hinder students' ability to feel included and valued (Hurtado et al., 2012; Solomon, 2016). These negative experiences can erode students' confidence, self-esteem, and motivation, ultimately contributing to a higher likelihood of dropout.

The lack of a sense of belonging is a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. Feelings of isolation and marginalisation, limited representation and inclusivity, and discriminatory practices within the university environment can all hinder students' sense of belonging. Addressing these issues requires proactive efforts to create inclusive and welcoming campus environments, promote diversity and representation, foster supportive relationships, and provide targeted support services that validate and empower Black African students.

2.9.5 Dropout rate

Research indicates that the greatest challenge experienced by Black African students in South African universities is high drop-out rates. Findings from a study conducted by Machika and Johnson (2015) indicate that students' inability to pay university fees or study fees results in students dropping out of university. In contrast, Firfirey and Carolissen (2010) emphasise the point that poverty is a significant contributor to drop-out rates among Black African students in South African universities. This assertion is further illustrated by Cornell and Kessi (2017), who posit that the inadequate availability of student accommodation is a significant factor contributing to the high student dropout rates at universities. "At the University of Western Cape, it has been a matter of concern that many African students leave the institution without completing their qualifications, a trend often attributed to the institution's admission and financial policies" (Breire, 2010, p. 661).

According to Firfirey and Carolissen (2010), feelings of hopelessness amongst Black African students at South African universities aggravate student dropout rates. This is corroborated by the findings of a study conducted by Firfirey and Carolissen (2010) on students' experiences of poverty in higher education in South Africa. Students' hopelessness also made them feel like giving up their studies. In addition to this view, Sennett and Firfirey

(2013), in their research on the adjustment of African students at a historically White South African university, found that the least academically successful Black African students also experienced the least sense of belonging at the University of Cape Town, which increased the chances of these students dropping out of the university.

Nevertheless, HIV and AIDS further contributed to Black students dropping out of university (Breire, 2010). He further illustrated this finding by asserting that students leave university because their parents would have died of HIV and AIDS and their siblings needed their support or they were HIV positive themselves and had lost interest in their studies. Therefore, considering my perspective of the ongoing arguments about student dropout in higher education, this study argues that there is a need to listen to Black African students to put their views and what made them quit their studies.

2.9.6 Race and racism in South African higher education institutions

The end of apartheid in 1994 in South Africa saw most Black African students being enrolled at historically Whites-only universities. Bazana and Magotsi (2017) postulate that Black African students find the environment in historically White universities not so welcoming and further illustrate that these students' sense of social identity, including culture, heritage, language and traditions, consequently self-esteem and self-concept, is altered in these higher education institutions. Hartwood et al. (2012) further mentioned that students of colour often view the university climate more negatively than their White peers do. Hence, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) conclude that Black African students have no choice but to assimilate into the institution's culture for them to succeed in historically White universities.

Bazana and Mogotsi's (2017) study on social identities and racial integration in historically White universities noted that Black African students would feel inferior to White students. This *inferiority theme* was further supported by Harwood et al. (2012) in their study on the

experiences of students of colour at predominantly White universities; their study found that students get racist comments from their fellow White students as they often experience racially offensive words and jokes. For example, “Students also reported experiences with roommates and another peer who continued to make racist jokes and comments despite being told that the comments were offensive” (Harwood et al., 2012, p.167). It is also apparent from the study conducted by Cornell and Kessi (2015) that at the University of Cape Town, Black African students found this institution unwelcoming, with racist White students making them feel inferior and unworthy. Nevertheless, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) conclude that if the institutional culture in historically White universities is unwelcoming to Black African students’ culture, then it continuously reproduces the discourse of an inferior Black student at university. Cornell and Kessi (2015) concur with this conclusion, as they stated that feeling black led Black students to internalise negative comments about them, resulting in them questioning their abilities. Pilkington (2013), however, recommends that those educators, policymakers, students and researchers should equally be wary of supporting the lack of urgent action on institutional racism.

In South African universities, racial interaction, in general, is unresolved anxiety and that affects social interactions in historically White universities (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). According to Cornell and Kessi (2015), racial inequalities in traditionally White universities lead to self-isolation among African students. This is evident from their study on Black students, transformation and discourses of race at the University of Cape Town. It has been noted that “being in an environment where racial identity is silent leads to a sense of isolation, a lack of belonging and low self-esteem amongst Black African students who are grappling often for the first time, with the reality of what it means to be Black in South Africa today” (Cornell & Kessi, 2017, p.7).

2.9.7 South African university culture

Matthews (2015), as cited by Bazana and Mogotsi (2017), communicated an important point around the inequalities characterising historically White universities. According to Matthews (2015), some imbalances are perpetuated by cultural superiority sentiments, which have shaped the current South African society, with the White culture having become ethnocentric. Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) reveal that historically White universities were created for the White student population, resulting in the White culture dominating Black African students' social identity. Consequently, these institutions alter the social identities of Black African students, which include culture, heritage, language and traditions and their self-esteem and self-concept (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). Cornell and Kessi (2015) also add that the University of Cape Town student-testimonials revealed that their institution praised Whiteness, and the cultural practice of the institution privileges the experiences of White students over those of Black African students. The findings from the current study will contribute to an evidence-based understanding of how students perceive themselves in South African university environments, as well as ways in which higher educational institutions can mobilise towards becoming more socially (racially) and academically inclusive of Black African students.

2.9.8 South African university curriculum

Although the South African Schools Act of 1996 removed discriminatory practices regarding access to schools on the basis of race, the situation in Black township and rural

African schools is reflective of equity (Chetty, 2014). The history of Black education in South Africa remains one of the most glaring substantive inequalities maintained through the township and rural public schools. Literature proves that the greater part of the enrolment at historically White universities today is constituted by Black, African, poor township or

rural youths who have received an inferior primary and secondary school education that does not prepare them adequately for higher education. This means that what Black African students are exposed to at university is foreign, hence unfamiliar with them. Kessi (2015) argues that the poor Black African youth from working-class backgrounds are direct victims of the poor-quality public education system that has inadequately prepared them for tertiary education. Whereas Chetty (2014) concurs with the notion that this segregation of secondary schools on the basis of socio-economic backgrounds, where middle-class youth attend private schools dominated by White learners, with public schools or race-related schools being dominated by African learners, is more class-related than it is race-related. These rural or township schools, are characterised by poor buildings, lack of basic amenities such as toilets, and suffer greatly due to low teacher morale and education levels, and insufficient textbooks. Even though Apartheid has been formally abolished, education in South Africa is used in an unfamiliar way when Black African students enter historically White universities (Chetty, 2014). These sentiments embody the ideas that, even though apartheid has been formally abolished, education in South Africa is a tool used to propagate and maintain the socially unequal status quo between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

Additionally, Mnguni (2016), as cited by Bazana and Mogotsi (2017), maintained that universities culturally alienate outsiders from the type of activities done in residences to the content of the curriculum being taught. Bazana and Mogotsi (2017), in their study based on social identities and racial integration in historically White universities, found that the curriculum dehumanises African students in that it requires them to use Western epistemology as a standard way of thinking and perceiving the world. Hlela (2016), as cited by Bazana and Mogotsi (2017), adds that higher education is based on Eurocentric epistemology and is also reported to be colonial. He further describes a Eurocentric curriculum as that which patronises African views, simultaneously enforcing Western ideas.

For example, “The content of students’ curriculum is important as students’ ability to relate to the material is a significant factor in facilitating their learning experiences and promoting their knowledge and capabilities” (Nhlapho, 2011, p.24). In their study, Cornell and Kessi (2015) found that Black students raised related issues such as the Whiteness of the curriculum and the subsequent lack of Black representation in academia.

The university curriculum has been identified as a contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. Extensive research has explored how the curriculum itself can pose challenges and barriers that disproportionately affect Black African students, hindering their academic success and persistence in higher education. Firstly, the Eurocentric nature of the university curriculum can marginalise and exclude Black African students. The curriculum often reflects a Western or Eurocentric perspective, with limited inclusion of African knowledge, history, and contributions (Baxen & Hlophe, 2019; Ndofirepi, 2018). This lack of representation and relevance can lead to a disconnection between the curriculum and the lived experiences and cultural identities of Black African students. Consequently, students may feel alienated, disengaged, and unable to see the value and applicability of their studies, contributing to higher dropout rates.

Moreover, the curriculum may perpetuate inequalities and reinforce existing power dynamics. It may not adequately address the socio-economic realities and challenges faced by Black African students, including issues of poverty, discrimination, and limited access to resources (Baxen & Hlophe, 2019; Ndofirepi, 2018). The curriculum's failure to provide a contextually relevant and inclusive learning experience can exacerbate the barriers faced by these students, hindering their academic progress and increasing the likelihood of dropout.

Additionally, the language of instruction in the curriculum can be a barrier to accessing tertiary education, particularly among for Black African students. As mentioned earlier, many South African universities primarily use English as the medium of instruction, which may pose challenges for students whose first language is not English (Le Roux & Naude, 2017; Slembrouck, 2011). Limited proficiency in the language of instruction can impede students' understanding of course content, hinder their ability to fully engage in classroom discussions, and impact their overall academic performance, potentially leading to dropout. The university curriculum plays a significant role in the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. The Eurocentric nature of the curriculum, its lack of relevance and inclusion of African perspectives, and the language barrier can all contribute to students' disengagement, alienation, and academic challenges (Chetty, 2014). Addressing these issues requires curriculum transformation efforts that prioritise inclusivity, relevance, and cultural responsiveness, ensuring that the curriculum reflects the diversity of the student body and promotes equitable educational experiences.

2.9.9 Language as a medium of instruction

Harwood et al. (2012) reported that different university policies, including the language policy that reinforces English utilisation as a medium of instruction, do marginalise Black African students in historically White universities. This marginalisation is said to enforce an assimilationist perspective where Black African students are assimilated into the existing culture that involves the use of the English language as the medium of communication and Westernised concepts. Moreover, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) indicate that language has been identified as a potential barrier to the academic performance of Black African students at previously White-dominated universities. This is evident from Moodley's (2013) study, which indicated that English is not the first language for African students; hence, being

taught by a native English-speaking lecturer could be a challenge, adding that African accents were associated with a stupidity which led to reluctance to participate in class discussions by Black African students, thus compromising academic performance. Therefore, failure to speak or use English contributes to the alienation of Black African students. On the other hand, Rafealy (2014), as cited by Bazana and Mogotsi (2017), noted that students who are more proficient in the use of the English language are said to be better able to express themselves and actively participate in educational activities. Barros' (2015) study pointed out that because of language barriers, some African students would avoid participating in class even if it meant losing marks. Swartz et al. (2018) mentioned that marginalised Black African students are not only disadvantaged but also feel ashamed and marginalised by their inability to use English as the dominant language of education. They posit that, "Language is used as a tool of discrimination and frequently heightens racial tension, especially when academic staff members engage with Black students who do not speak the dominant language (Swartz et al., 2018, p.9).

Language incompetency has been identified as a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. Research has explored the challenges faced by students who are not proficient in the language of instruction, highlighting the detrimental impact on their academic performance, social integration, and overall success in higher education (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Swartz et al., 2018). The language barrier can severely hinder Black African students' ability to comprehend course content and actively participate in academic activities. Many South African universities predominantly use English as the medium of instruction, which can pose challenges for students whose first language is not English (Mashau & Mojapelo-Batka, 2018; Slembrouck, 2011). Limited proficiency in the language of instruction can lead to difficulties in understanding lectures, reading academic texts, and expressing ideas coherently in written assignments.

Consequently, students may struggle academically, experience frustration, and become at risk of dropping out. Moreover, language incompetency can impede effective communication and social integration within the university community. Students who are not fluent in the language of instruction may face difficulties in forming relationships with peers, engaging in class discussions, and seeking assistance from faculty and support services (Le Roux & Naude, 2017; Slembrouck, 2011). The inability to effectively communicate and connect with others can contribute to feelings of isolation and exclusion, further impacting students' sense of belonging and increasing the likelihood of dropout.

Furthermore, language incompetency can intersect with cultural and identity factors, exacerbating the challenges faced by Black African students. The dominant English language used in universities may not adequately reflect the cultural diversity and linguistic richness of the students (Mashau & Mojapelo-Batka, 2018; Slembrouck, 2011). This can result in a devaluation of students' native languages and cultures, leading to a sense of marginalisation and loss of identity. The lack of recognition and validation of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds can undermine their motivation, engagement, and overall well-being, contributing to higher dropout rates. Language incompetency is of course a significant contributing factor to the high dropout rates among Black African students in South African universities. Difficulties in understanding course content, limited communication and social integration, and the intersection with cultural and identity factors all impact students' academic performance, sense of belonging, and overall success. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive language support programmes, including English language proficiency development, multilingual resources and support services, and a recognition of students' linguistic and cultural diversity.

2.10 Decolonisation of higher education

The transformation of academic staff in historically White universities remains a challenge because the number of Black professors and mixed-race professors is still insignificant (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). In support of the above statement, Cornell and Kessi (2015) further indicate that lack of Black academic staff can reinforce the Black African student's sense of exclusion. Sennet (2013) adds that at the University of Cape Town, a lack of Black academic staff continues to be a significant factor, thus validating the public perception of the racial identity of the institution as being White.

Higher education must be decolonised for it to acknowledge diversity and inclusivity in the provision of higher education (Chetty, 2014). For example, "Decolonisation should be accepted as it means the unmasking of the colonial without denying the existence of other race and cultural groups" (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017, p.18). According to Swartz et al. (2018), African students have long maintained that their call for free education is an indirect call for the decolonisation of education. Tebensky and Methew (2015) stated that South African higher education must change to avoid reflecting the values promoted by apartheid. Rather, the education system should reflect the values embodied in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996.

Approaches to disabling the former values of apartheid include thinking and changing oppressive higher education financial schemes, an institutional culture that favours White experiences, language practices that do not support individuals, partiality in student assessment, lack of promotion of Black academics, problematic residence/living experiences, a curriculum that does little to uphold Black African cultural experiences and university sites that do not foster a sense of belonging for all students (Swartz et al., 2018, p.9).

2.10.1 University transformation and curriculum decolonisation

Universities in the global South and beyond are engaged in struggles for the transformation and decolonisation of higher education, which is taking long to happen (Hlatshwayo, 2022; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These authors insist that the university curricula and assessment practices have not been given a de-colonial critique thus far. Debates on curriculum transformation and decolonisation have been taking place in countries such as South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Turkey, India, Latin America, and Caribbean countries (Hlatshwayo et al., 2022). In their book titled: “Decolonising knowledge and knowers, struggles for university transformation in South Africa”, Hlatshwayo et al. (2022) have significantly pointed out that in the South African context, the 2015–2016 student movements proved the call for the decolonisation of South African higher education. According to Hlatshwayo et al. (2022), the decolonisation of higher education includes, among the other things, not being limited to Western epistemologies in the higher education curriculum and the need for the transformation of teaching and learning in these institutions.

These authors contend that scholarly writings on the decolonisation of education in South Africa since 2015 have focused almost exclusively on definitions and meanings of the concept and they have not been emphatic on African-centred epistemologies in higher education. Garuba (2015) revealed that failing to address the question of the curriculum, decolonisation will remain located at the symbolic level. He further stipulates that university decolonisation will struggle to impact the institutional curriculum of universities. Hlatshwayo et al. (2022), citing the work of Garuba (2015), called for such a development when the decolonisation content would place greater significances on the curriculum itself. According to Hapazari and

Mkhize (2021, p. 109), “most African universities have not substantially transformed; hence, they continue to be grounded in colonial and Western epistemological traditions. By so doing, the colonialists have effectively instilled an inferiority complex in the Africans, and this complex is currently ingrained in their minds”.

Drawing from the literature it is evident that for the transformation of the higher education curriculum in a manner that accommodates Black African students; such an exercise will open spaces for these students to get full access to the curriculum and increase academic and social integration at South African universities (Hlatswayo et al., 2022). Writing about pursuing decolonial knowledge-building in South African higher education, Fataar (2022, p.11) postulates that, “since the official end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has struggled to shift from an exclusionary colonial social structure to one that has become formally, if not substantively, inclusive”. The writer further argues that while South African schools and universities have experienced limited demographic integration, more inclusive demographics have not meant a more inclusive curriculum. Fataar’s (2022) argument is premised on the fact that South Africa has been a significant place for debates about the nature of the curriculum decolonisation process, especially as its curriculum was developed from Dutch and British colonial period into apartheid and post-apartheid times.

Fataar (2022) reveals that through the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests of 2015-2016, news on the decolonisation of education has been circulating in universities and social media platforms. This call for curriculum decolonisation is an approach seeking to challenge the Western canon, emphasising an ‘all-inclusive’ approach to knowledge and accommodates every individual student at South African universities. I argue that, even though there have been calls for the transformation or decolonisation of education, we have not yet seen any largescale curriculum changes at our universities or schools, despite having evidence of supportive

documents developed by the national Department of Basic Education and the Centre on Higher Education (Fataar, 2022). Scholars such as Mbembe (2016) and NdlovuGatsheni (2013) argue for a type of curriculum that is Africa-centred orientated. On the other hand, African scholars, such as Heleta (2016), have also made a significant contribution to this debate of curriculum decolonisation emphasising Afrocentrism.

Fataar (2022) argues that decoloniality offers three curriculum knowledge claims. Santos (2014) concurs with this view, contending that the first claim is based on the centring of an allinclusive ecology of knowledge approach that challenges the hegemony of Eurocentric theories, concepts, canons, and perspectives. The second claim relates to the knowledge and identity claim, which is based on the productive recognition and restoration of the full dignity of subjugated peoples and the need to unearth their full human potential (Zipin, 2017). The last claim, which is the third claim, is pivoted on the relevance and contextualisation of knowledge (Cooper & Morrell, 2014). They further illustrate that this is the idea that curriculum knowledge ought to make epistemological connections with people's knowledge, contextual life circumstances, indigenous knowledge systems, literacies, languages, and ways of knowing. This claim emphasises the dynamism embedded in the connections made to the contexts and knowledge of African people's centred life worlds.

In her article titled "Building a de-colonial knower contestation in the humanities", Karthy (2022), citing Chatterjee (2011), argues that in a post-colonial context, South Africa is still burdened with a legacy of education based on 'colonial difference', hence the call to decolonise knowledge, the curriculum, and pedagogy at South African universities. She suggested that the recent student protests of 2015-2016 can be collectively understood as an event in the constitution of the modern, post-colonial or historically White South African universities that seek to unveil the pervasive systems of oppression still dominant at universities in South Africa

today. In her study conducted at the University of Cape Town, which involved many students who were part of these protests, Karthy (2022) revealed the importance of the decolonisation of higher education.

The findings of Karthy's (2022) study indicate that the decolonisation of buildings and public spaces is inseparable from the democratisation of access; creating the conditions that will allow Black staff and students to say of the university, "This is my home". Sharing the same sentiment is Mbembe (2016, p.30) who posits that when Black African students feel socially and academically integrated into a university, they will have the confidence to say, "I am not an outsider here. I do not have to beg or apologise to be here. I belong here".

The need for the decolonisation of university education was derived from the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests, as demonstrated in Karthy (2022) study, where data revealed that Black African students expressed a sense of misrecognition and exclusion by the hegemonic White culture at the University of Cape Town (UCT) that required them to assimilate to become 'legitimate' knowers. In her findings, she stressed that students were swimming in self-doubt, and low self-esteem, as some would not participate during class discussions fearing that lack of proficiency in English appeared to be a measure of intelligence at the time. Black students feel that their only hope of survival is assimilation (Chikane, 2018).

According to Hlatshwayo (2022), the university system in the global south is under intense critique for its lack of transformation and a very slow pace of decolonisation (Heleta, 2018; Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This claim is premised on a belief that the academy has been accused of resisting transformation by undertaking various reform processes, change and adjustments designed to give the sense that transformation is being enacted, which allows its structures of power to remain intact (Hlatshwayo & Shawa, 2020, p.13).

Sharing the same sentiment is Kumalo (2018) who holds an assumption that universities continue to produce and reinforce the epistemic and cognitive violence of the colonial project (Kamanzi, 2016; Keet, 2014). Hlatshwayo (2022), citing the work of Booyesen (2016) and Mbembe (2016), posits that the contemporary transformation struggles in South African higher education have often foregrounded three key aspects that attempt to respond to the calls for university transformation and decolonisation agenda. According to these authors, amongst other things that need decolonisation is the purpose of university, university curriculum, and teaching and learning. According to Hlatshwayo and Shawa (2020), Mbebe (2016) and NdlovuGatsheni (2013), one of the most significant contributions of the *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* movements was to force everyone to reflect on their understanding of what constitutes the public university in South Africa. These authors contended that universities in South Africa are still rooted on the colonial and apartheid syllabus and agenda.

Hence, Hlatshwayo (2022) argues for the decolonisation of the university. He alludes to the fact that decolonisation of the curriculum, or rather the decolonisation of university, must critique the role of the English language as a medium of instruction in most of these institutions. In addition to the above-cited views, Le Grange (2019) and Hlatshwayo and Shawa (2020) recently reconstructed Ubuntu curriculum to advance a democratic and social justice conception of the academy, where an organised curriculum builds upon student experiences in the university. This transformation seeks to put students' needs at the centre of the curriculum and build the content into their context so that they participate meaningfully in their learning. I contend that, if the curriculum is built on the students' lived experiences, this will increase their social and academic integration at a university and thus eliminate the chances of student dropout at university.

According to Hlatshwayo (2022), institutional mechanisms and structures, such as the institutional culture(s), space and spatial justice, university practices and ceremonies, buildings and statues, are experienced by many Black students as daily reminders that they are not recognised by and do not belong in the university. Hlatshwayo (2015) and Mahabeer (2018) share the same sentiment that Black African students do not only experience exclusion in historically White universities in academic spaces only, but also the university culture does remind them that they do not belong in these institutions. Notably, scholars such as Nzimande (2017) believe that Black academics have had to negotiate institutional racism, sexism, harassment, discrimination and epistemic violence in being forced to prove their legitimacy, competence and belonging at university, which increases the reasons for these institutions to be decolonised so as to socially and academically integrate Black African students. Hlatshwayo (2022), citing the work of Vincent and Hlatshwayo (2018) and Hlatshwayo (2015), echoed that Black working class students who are the first in their family to come to university are especially side-lined by the contextualising logics of the curriculum.

Literature complements what Hlatshwayo (2022, p.56) revealed when he mentioned that the marginalisation of Black African people “is particularly confronting in historically White universities as they tend to attract, train and retain Black academics from middle class backgrounds who more likely conform to the dominant institutional culture, and thereby leave the distributive logics unchallenged”. Hlatshwayo (2022, p.57) further argues that this allows these universities to achieve two things:

First, they are able to claim, through affirmative action classifications, that their institution and its departments are demographically transforming in light of the postapartheid democratic order’s rainbow nation logic. Second, these universities are

able to maintain their dominant distributive logics without being challenged or forced to reconsider or dismantle them.

Hlengwa (2019) shares the same sentiments, referring to this act as the university employing ‘safe bets’, that is, employing Black academics who meet affirmative action categories but who subscribe to everything without challenging the system at these higher education institutions and, in this way, the curriculum remains the same and not decolonised in any way. According to Hlatshwayo (2022, p.58), “decolonising the curriculum is an inherently existential and structural process that includes considering what is being taught, who is teaching, what power relations are embedded in the curriculum, and the often-unequal power relationships between students and academics”. Hence, this study contends that South African institutions of higher learning do employ Black academics hailing from lower class backgrounds, but with a better understanding of how it feels like for Black African students to study at a university in South Africa because these academics can play a significant role in transforming the university and decolonising its curriculum so as to eliminate student dropout and eventually achieve student integration.

2.11 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature relevant to this study. In this chapter, the discussion focussed on two different but significant parts of the literature as highlighted in the introductory part of the chapter. Subsequently, the factors that contribute to students’ decision to choose a university, which include complexities in the application process, location, and financial constraints. Scholars argue that before students choose a university to further their studies, they consider the above-mentioned factors in their decisions (Gamoga & Ambang, 2020; Ilgan et al., 2018). The first part of this chapter reflected on social and academic factors that influence students’ institutional commitment (Lortz-Ozano et al., 2020; Mtsweni, 2021).

The causes of student dropout were also discussed, with literature revealing that poor secondary education, student burnout, poor social support, racism, poor academic performance, university culture amongst the other things, being the main causes of student dropout at university (Buthelezi, 2017; Casanova et al., 2021; Maro, 2020; Sharp & Thomas, 2021). This part of the literature review section also focussed on the consequences of this diversity of adverse factors as well as the strategies adopted in the fight against student dropout at the university level.

The second part of this literature review provided insight into students' struggles at university in the South African context. This section of the literature review revealed a knowledge gap, reflected in the paucity of research done on the struggles of Black African university students. Research largely draws on the experiences of university students in general, thus paying little particular attention to Black African students, a gap the present study seeks to address. As mentioned in the introductory section of this literature review, I argue that Black African students are socially and academically not fully integrated into the university system in South Africa. Other topics covered in this part of the literature review are the factors that contribute to student dropout in the South African university context and the literature has revealed poverty, alienation, financial obstacles, a sense of not belonging, unpreparedness for university, racial background and racism, university culture, the language barrier, and colonial curriculum as factors that contribute to student dropout at HEIs (Swarts et al., 2018; Tight, 2019; Van Zyl, 2016; Zewotiri, 2015). The next chapter is the Theoretical Framework.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature on Black African students' experiences at university in a global, and local context (South African university context). This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the theoretical framework for Tinto's theory of student departure known as the Student Integration Model (SIM) as a theoretical framework for the present study. Tinto's theory has been widely influential in the field of higher education as it offers valuable insights into the factors that influence student persistence and success. By examining the key components and interrelationships within Tinto's theory, this chapter seeks to enhance understanding in terms of the theoretical underpinnings of student departure and retention in South African higher education institutions (HEIs). The significance of Tinto's theory lies in its emphasis on social integration, academic integration, and goal commitment as essential factors in shaping student experiences and outcomes (Tinto, 1975).

3.2 Student Integration Model (SIM)

As aforementioned, this study is framed by Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model (SIM) of attrition, a post-positivist theory. Vincent Tinto is a distinguished University Professor at Syracuse University of Sociology. He is a noted theorist in higher education, and is particularly concerned about student retention and learning communities. Tinto (1975; 1993; 1997) developed a model of student attrition, which illustrates student retention and successful behaviour in the university setting. Back then in the early 1970s, Tinto (1975) argued that, despite the very extensive literature on student dropouts at higher education institutions, much

remained unknown about the nature of the dropout process in these institutions; hence, he formulated a theoretical model that explains the functions of interaction between the individual and the institution, leading to different individuals dropping out of institutions of higher education, and that also distinguishes between those processes that result in indefinitely different forms of dropout behaviour.

According to Tinto's theory of student departure, student retention and persistence in higher education are influenced by a complex interplay of social and academic factors (Tinto, 1975). Tinto proposed that students' integration into the academic and social aspects of college life is crucial for their continued enrollment and success. He emphasized the significance of social integration, including forming meaningful relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, as well as participation in extracurricular activities. Additionally, Tinto highlighted the importance of academic integration, which involves students' engagement with their coursework, effective study habits, and academic support systems (Tinto, 1993).

This chapter explores Tinto's (1975) SIM of attrition, which is a student retention theory (Tinto, 2006; 2012), while justifying its use in the study. Tinto's retention theories are the most explored theories in retention research (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Neuville et al., 2007). Having used Tinto's theory in the present study, the outcomes should empower and benefit students, faculty, administrators, and stakeholders in South African universities and other institutions of higher learning that enrol Black African students.

3.2.1 Foundations of Tinto's SIM Theory

Tinto's theory of student departure is grounded in several foundational concepts that shape his understanding of student retention in higher education. Central to Tinto's theory is the notion of integration, which encompasses both social and academic aspects of college life (Tinto,

1975). Integration refers to students' active participation and engagement in the academic and social communities of their institution. Tinto argues that students who feel connected and integrated into these communities are more likely to persist and succeed in their educational pursuits.

Another foundational concept in Tinto's theory is the role of expectations and goals. Tinto suggests that students' pre-entry characteristics such as their academic preparedness and motivations for attending college, influence their integration and subsequent persistence (Tinto, 1993). Students who have clear and realistic goals, and who align their expectations with the demands and opportunities of college, are more likely to remain enrolled and engaged. Furthermore, Tinto emphasizes the importance of support systems and resources within the college environment. He argues that effective academic and social support structures such as advising, tutoring, and mentoring programmes, contribute to students' integration and ultimately impact their retention (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's theoretical model is derived from Emile Durkheim's (1961) Theory of Suicide, as it was modified in Social Psychology regarding individual suicide. Although Durkheim's theory of suicide and Tinto's theory of student departure belong to different domains of social science, there are some parallels that can be drawn between the two. Durkheim's theory focuses on understanding the social causes of suicide, while Tinto's theory examines factors influencing student retention in higher education. One parallel between the two theories lies in the significance of social integration. Durkheim argues that individuals with weak social ties are more susceptible to suicide, as they lack the support and social bonds necessary for psychological well-being. Similarly, Tinto's theory emphasizes the importance of social integration in college, suggesting that students who feel connected and integrated into the academic and social communities are more likely to persist and succeed.

Another common aspect is the role of goal commitment. Durkheim suggests that individuals with low levels of social integration and weak attachments to societal goals are at higher risk of suicide. In Tinto's theory, goal commitment is also a key factor influencing student retention. Students who have clear goals and align their expectations with the demands of college are more likely to persist. Furthermore, both theories recognise the importance of support systems. Durkheim discusses the role of social integration as a protective factor against suicide, highlighting the support provided by strong social networks. In Tinto's theory, support systems within the college environment, such as academic advising and mentoring programmes, are identified as crucial factors in enhancing student integration and persistence.

According to Durkheim (1961), as cited in (Tinto, 1975, p.91), “suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are insufficiently integrated into the fabric of society. Specifically, the likelihood of suicide in society increases when two types of integration are lacking namely, insufficient moral (value) integration and insufficient collective affiliation”. Citing Durkheim’s (1961) work, Tinto (1975) reveals that when one sees the college as a social system with its values and social structures, one can treat dropouts from that colonial or social system like suicide in a comprehensive society. Durkheim defined three types of suicide, which are: an egotistical suicide, cultural suicide and lastly, educational suicide (Tinto, 1975).

Durkheim (1953, as cited in Tinto, 1975) defined egotistical suicide as the students’ inability to establish membership in their community or college campus environment (Rendón et al., 2000). At the same time, cultural suicide occurs when students conform to the university’s campus’ dominant culture, which is not their own culture, by denying their cultural identity (O’Keeffe, 2013). Nevertheless, educational suicide derives when students’ social interactions are not made favourable on campus. These lead students to drop out of campus

when their social interactions are not favourable on campus. This is referred to as educational suicide. Significantly, Durkheim (1961) argued that if individuals have enough social support networks and good moral integration, their chances of committing suicide decrease.

Tinto (1975) postulated that committing suicide was significantly an individual's wilful withdrawal from existence and was therefore like dropping out of a higher education institution, which is the deliberate withdrawal of a student from college (university in the South African context). Data presented in Chapter five and six of this study demonstrates the factors that contributed to the participants dropping out of university. Durkheim's model of suicide postulates that the individual commits suicide because they are insufficiently integrated into society. Similarly, Tinto (1975) asserts that dropout occurs because an individual student is insufficiently integrated into the different aspects of university life. Tinto (1975) further identified the two most vital higher education systems as academic and social, and argued that dropout could occur through an inadequate integration in either or both of these systems. The following diagram has been presented with an intention to demonstrate how suicide occurs in an organisation, that is, according to Durkheim's theory prior to the presentation of Tinto's SIM theory.

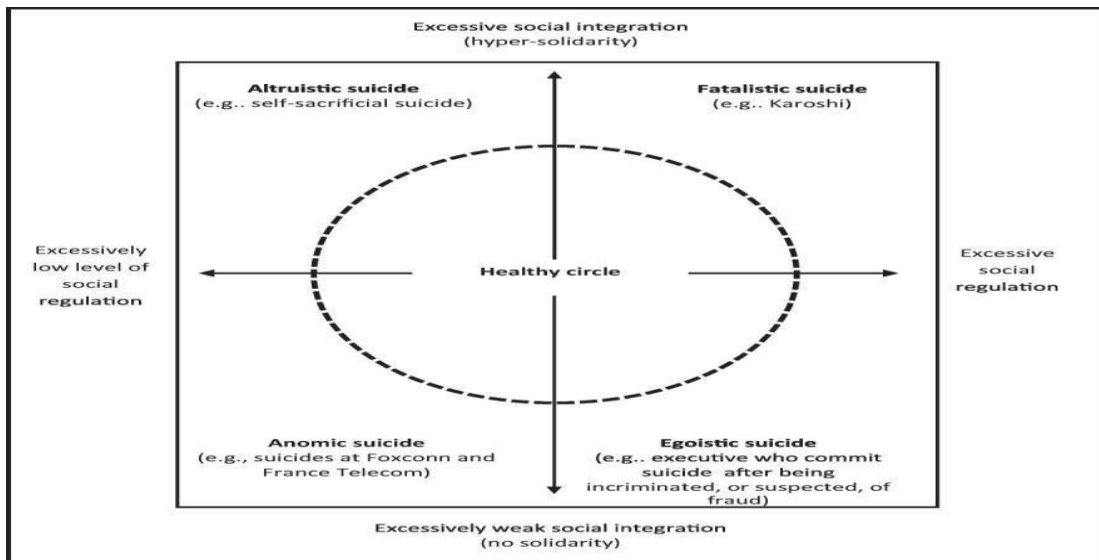


Figure 2.1: Explaining suicide in an organisation- The Durkheim Theory

3.2.2 Tinto's theory of Student Integration Model

Barker and Avery (2012) perceive the SIM theory as considering formal and informal academic and social connections in assessing college students' level of engagement in college life. The students' college engagement activities assist in strengthening their socialisation skills, while building up social capital. According to Tinto, the connected academic and social experiences form a student's level of commitment to the college (Min & Chau, 2012). These scholars agree on the significance of engagement in the student's college experience. These student academic and social engagement experiences determine the student's desire to pursue their goal of completing a degree programme (Tinto, 2006; 2012). In support of these claims, Farmer and Hope (2015) communicated a vital point, asserting that if students are isolated socially without any sense of belonging, they are more likely to drop out of college.

In addition, central to Tinto's SIM is the level of academic and social integration of students into university life and factors that Tinto claimed can help predict students' propensity to drop out or continue with their studies. According to Tinto, such factors can include other students' actual and perceived performance, enjoyment of the subjects, identification with the student

role, personal contact with academics and many friends. He further suggests that such factors can lead to the re-shaping of several services across an institution, including academic advisers and support, student services, and estates (Tinto, 1982). The literature confirms that students come to a new location and are often ill-prepared for higher education requirements, especially the need for undertaking independent study. Tinto further outlines that due to adjustment, students need confirmation, through tutor feedback, that they are coping at the required academic level due to adjustment.

Moreover, Tinto (2010) stated that in the United States of America, 70 per cent of the graduates of big schools enrol in post-secondary school institutions every year; hence, America's colleges and universities must continue developing ways of reinstating the State. Though access to bigger education has increased, and the gap in access between various races and ethnic groups has decreased; much still needs to be done to translate access to college into success in college (Tinto, 2010). This is also evident in the South African context, as literature notes that student population has been growing since the collapse of apartheid in 1994 (Hlatshwayo, 2021; Hlatshwayo & Shona, 2020; Kumalo, 2018; Swartz et al., 2018). Still, the biggest challenge that higher education institutions face is student dropout, with the majority of those dropping out being found to be Black African students.

A study conducted by Buthelezi (2017) also found that the majority (in terms of numbers) of students who enter HEIs in South Africa are considered the minority due to several significant factors that make them culturally different from what is commonly known as traditional students. Much of the research on student dropout that I have surveyed and published before embarking on the current study, which focuses on student dropouts, has done so successfully. However, there is still a gap that this study wishes to close, which precisely implies that there is still more to be unveiled regarding the causes and consequences of Black African students dropping out of South African universities. Even though African-American scholars have

criticised Tinto's SIM for not being flexible enough to apply to the African-American student in higher education (Barker & Avery, 2012), this study uses the theory to view Black African students' attrition and retention experiences in the South African context.

Nevertheless, Tinto (2010, p.73) states that, "students are more likely to succeed and continue within the institution when they find themselves in settings that provide needed academic and social support". According to Tinto's Student Integration Model, students are connected to various social factors in the university setting. Students are more likely to matriculate through an institution when they find themselves in supportive social communities (Tinto, 2010). Tinto (1975; 1993) postulates that adjustment to university influences students' decision to persist academically. Furthermore, Tinto (1975; 1993) highlights that student adjustment contributes to goal and institutional commitment. On the contrary, Tinto (1975) contends that the incongruence existing between the student and the learning environment contributes to adjustment challenges. Tinto (1993) further claims that students are likely to face the risk of dropping out if they do not adjust to the institution. This indicates that adjustment-related challenges may predispose students to thoughts of dropping out of university.

Tinto (2010) divided students' institutional experiences into two distinct components: the academic component, which comprises the student's academic or educational performance and their interaction with faculty or staff members within the university, and a social component comprising their extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. Considering the extent to which these forces can successfully integrate helps determine whether students persist with their studies or leave the university or drop out.

Myers (2009) observed that achieving cultural congruence involves being grounded in the African experience and staying true or authentic to it. It is difficult to ignore the existing contextual factors that dominate higher education institutions; hence, based on extant literature,

it seems that several aspects should inform theories and models that speak to the experiences of people of African descent (Jamison, 2008; Nobles, 1980; 1990; Swartz et al., 2018; Kumalo, 2018; Hltshwayo, 2022); hence, this shapes the interest of this study. Nsamenang (2011) asserts that imported theories and models not authentic to African people's experiences should be subjected to critical review. Buthelezi (2017) noted that it is essential to establish the criteria for this critical review of mainstream models and theories, including those that seek to explain students' experiences and academic performance in higher education. Illustrating this view, Kumalo (2018) posits that many of the theories and models on student retention, progression, and dropout were conceptualised on the basis of Euro-American student experiences.

According to Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory, there is need to acknowledge the importance of the level of integration between individuals and the broader society. Jones (1986) asserts that Tinto (1975) used Durkheim's (1897) Suicide Theory to explain the level of integration between individuals and the broader society, for instance, individuals who commit suicide, students who drop out of college, students who lack the collective and moral integration which binds them to society. However, the unit of analysis is the individual who lacks essential skills and psychological assets to overcome the adversities they face in higher education. Tinto (2006) further acknowledges the need for continuous connections with the community of origin for students' success in higher education. Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory presents the different aspects of the individual in distinct phases; the first phase begins with separation from the individual's family of origin and the familiar context, while the second phase is the transitional phase, which calls for students' assimilation, alignment, and adaptation to the dominant culture, ideologies, and practices of the higher education system. The final stage is competence, which is measured by social and academic integration. Students in higher education are still labelled on the basis of their perceived deficits, such as 'underprepared

students' (Bradbury & Miller, 2011), 'disadvantaged students' (Boughey, 2005), or 'low-income students' (Tinto, 2006).

Dewyer (2017) criticises Tinto's SIM framework for not being applicable to community college students. The criticism stems from the following notions: (a) most community college students live off-campus, (b) work off-campus (Dwyer, 2017). Researchers such as Jaggars and Stacey (2014) have found this theory to be incorrect. As a result of the students' persistence in the second year of community college, community college students make attachments to both the social and academic spectrums (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). The student forms friendships by affiliating with organisations and participating in joint educational projects. The student's engagement in academic and social activities builds a support network and a circle of friends from college.

Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model remains the most influential model for dropouts from tertiary education institutions. Focusing on college students, Tinto argued that the process of dropping out of college could be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experience in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitment in ways which lead to persistence and varying forms of dropout (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's theoretical model views the education institution as a social system encompassing its value and social structure. Tinto posited that when students feel socially integrated into the institution's life, their academic integration is enhanced, and their performance is improved (see also Karp et al., 2010). Conversely, Tinto stipulates that when students do not feel academically integrated into the system, their social integration is threatened, and they eventually drop out. From this perspective, dropping out of college results from insufficient

interaction with others in the college and inadequate compliance with the values and patterns of the college. According to Tinto (1975; 1993), the level of student integration into the institution is determined by the individual student's institutional commitment and goal to persist in both the social and academic domains of the institution. Within the institution, students get engaged in interactions with the environment during which they become academically and socially integrated into the system. Similarly, Karp et al. (2010) noted that social and academic integration is integrative and inseparable. Students' classroom experiences and interactions with people in the college environment influence how they feel integrated into that system.

Tinto's model maintains that students' integration into the institution is enhanced through two components, which are; the social and academic domains of the institution. To be integrated into the institution's academic domain, such a student must become attached to the intellectual life of the college (Tinto, 1975). Accordingly, Tinto (1993, p.118) defined academic integration as "the full range of individual experiences which occur in the formal and informal domains of the academic systems of the university". According to Tinto (1993), students' social and academic integration into the higher education institution is enhanced through reciprocal interaction between the external factors (past school experience, ability, socioeconomic background, race and individual, institutional commitment) and the internal factors (interaction with peers, teachers, academic and social life on the ground in the school and participation in extracurricular activities). Students' interactions in these systems lead to social and academic integration into both systems. This, in turn, results in students' persistence and success in school (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto (1975), dropping out of a higher education institution results from insufficient integration into both the social and academic domains of the college.

As noted in Pather and Chetty (2016), in their conceptual framework developed to understand first-year students' social and academic integration into the university, first-year students' integration into the university can be influenced by their socioeconomic status and past school experience, abilities and skills. These factors, according to Tinto (1975), determine how well a student integrates socially and academically into the school system.

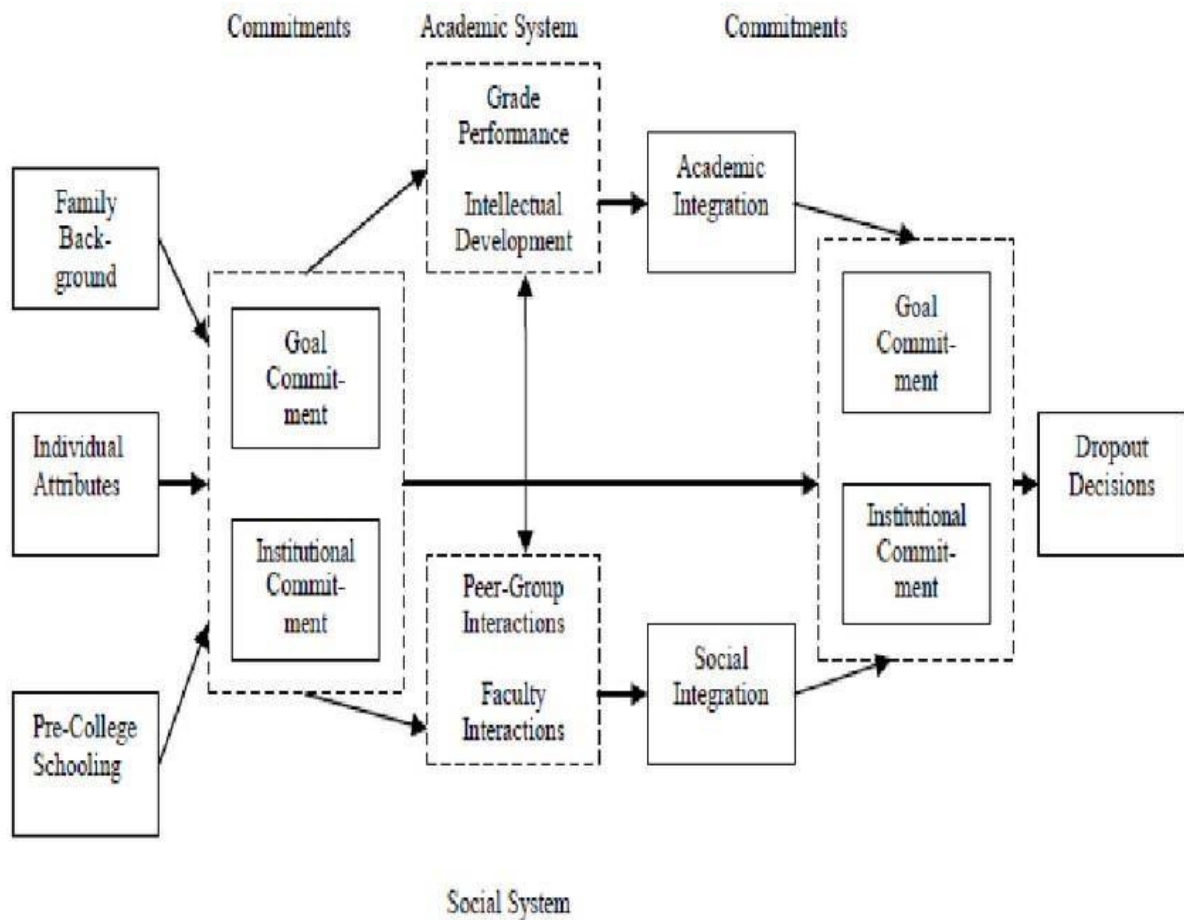


Figure 2.2: Conceptual schema for dropout (CSD) in college by Tinto (1973)

3.2.3 Criticisms of Tinto's SIM theory

Tinto's theory of student departure has received significant attention in the literature. While it has been widely influential, it has also faced criticism and scrutiny. Several studies have examined the limitations and critiques of Tinto's theory, shedding light on areas that require further exploration and refinement. One critical review by Seidman (2005) highlighted several

limitations of Tinto's theory. The author argued that Tinto's focus on social and academic integration overlooks other important factors, such as individual characteristics and institutional contexts. Seidman suggested that a more comprehensive theoretical framework should consider a broader range of influences on student persistence, including psychological factors, student goals, and the impact of institutional policies and practices.

Another study by Spady (1971) provided a critique of Tinto's theory, specifically focusing on the conceptualisation of integration. Spady argued that Tinto's theory does not adequately differentiate between assimilation and integration, and suggested that a more nuanced understanding of these concepts is necessary for a comprehensive theory of student persistence. Additionally, some researchers have questioned the generalisability of Tinto's theory across different student populations and institutional contexts. Braxton and Hirschy (2005) argued that Tinto's theory may not fully capture the experiences and challenges faced by nontraditional and marginalised student populations. They suggested the need for more inclusive frameworks that consider the unique needs and circumstances of diverse student groups. While Tinto's theory has contributed significantly to the understanding of student persistence, these critiques highlight the importance of continued research and refinement of the theory. Further exploration of additional factors, contextual influences, and the experiences of diverse student populations can help enhance the theoretical framework.

Tinto also responded to criticisms of his theory, asserting that academic integration is not an essential predictor of student attrition. As Tinto improved his academic and social engagement theory, he made concessions. He considered the role of finance in a student's decision to drop out of college. Tinto also alludes to other factors that affect student retention, such as the causes of transfer and dropout and the various educational experiences and social variables that result from the student's gender, race, and socio-economic status.

This study is cognisant of the fact that while Tinto's Student Integration Model has informed many studies conducted on retention and dropout in higher education institutions in local and international contexts, the theory has been subjected to several criticisms. Amongst the several criticisms are that; firstly, SIM inadequately models student attrition; secondly, the model is only applicable to 'traditional' students; and lastly, academic integration is not an important predictor of student attrition in the traditional student population (McCubbin, 2003).

In the 1990s, Tinto continued to improve on the SIM by focusing on the following components: (a) the importance of the classroom, (b) the relationship of learning, (c) persistence, (d) involvement, and (e) quality of effort in the student and the part played by faculty. "Individuals enter institutions of higher education with a variety of attributes (e.g., sex, race, ability), precollege experiences (e.g., grade-point averages, academic and social attainments), and family backgrounds (e.g., social status attributes, value climates, expectation climates), each of which has direct and indirect impacts upon performance in college" (Tinto, 1976, p.94).

More importantly, these background characteristics and individual attributes also influence the development of the individual's educational expectations and commitments within the college environment. As this study draws on Black African students' experiences in university, Tinto's theory is of great significance because these goals and institutional commitments are both important predictors and reflections of students' experiences, disappointments, and satisfaction in that collegiate environment. Similarly, this study opens doors of expression for these Black African students to share their experiences in the university setup. The study then seeks to understand and unpack the factors that trigger their attrition or retention based on these experiences.

Tinto (1976) implies that given individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitments, the model implies that the individual student's integration into the academic and social systems of the

college most directly relates to their continuance within that setup. Adding on to this point, Tinto posits that those characteristics of individuals that are found to be associated with dropping out more importantly pertain to the parts of an individual's family, their characteristics, their educational experiences before entry into college, and their expectations of future educational attainments. To summarise Tinto's findings, it appears that those students who remain enrolled are more likely to come from families with more educated parents.

3.3 The relevance of Tinto's theory to the South African higher education context

Tinto's theory of student departure has been widely applied and explored in various higher education contexts, including South African universities. Researchers have recognised the relevance of Tinto's theory in understanding student persistence and retention within the specific social, cultural, and educational context of South Africa. For example, a study by Visser et al. (2013) examined the applicability of Tinto's theory in the South African university context. The researchers found that the key components of Tinto's theory, such as social integration, academic integration, and goal commitment, were indeed relevant factors influencing student retention. They highlighted the importance of building supportive social networks, providing academic support services, and promoting a sense of belonging among South African students to enhance their integration and persistence.

Another study by Mokgalong and Louw (2017) explored the applicability of Tinto's theory to the experiences of Black African students at a South African university. The findings indicated that social integration, academic integration, and goal commitment were significant predictors of student retention and success among this student population. The study underscored the importance of addressing socio-cultural factors and promoting inclusive practices to foster the integration and persistence of Black African students in South African universities.

Furthermore, a study by Khumalo (2019) examined the factors influencing student persistence in a South African university, drawing on Tinto's theory as the theoretical framework. The findings highlighted the significance of social and academic integration, as well as institutional support and financial resources, in shaping student retention. The study emphasized the need for comprehensive support programs and policies that address the unique challenges faced by South African students. These studies demonstrate the relevance and utility of Tinto's theory in understanding student persistence within the South African university context. They highlight the importance of addressing socio-cultural factors, providing targeted support services, and fostering a sense of belonging to enhance student integration and success.

This study acknowledges the availability of too little information regarding the relationship between races, particularly Black African students, and dropping out of higher education institutions in the South African context. Hence, the study argues that there is a dearth of extant literature on the processes of interaction that compel Black African students to drop out of higher education institutions; there is neither adequate literature on the factors that contribute to student retention and attrition in South African HEIs. Nevertheless, since this study seeks to critically explore Black African students' experiences of social and academic attrition and integration in South African higher education institutions, Tinto's SIM will assist in determining how these experiences may result in Black African students, specifically participants in the present study, drop out of their respective universities.

3.4 Chapter conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the theoretical framework employed in the current study, which is Tinto's theory of student departure. The exploration of Tinto's theory has revealed its significance in seeking to understand the factors that influence student persistence and success in higher education.

Through an in-depth examination of Tinto's theory, it has become evident that social integration, academic integration, and goal commitment are the key components of the framework. Social integration emphasizes the importance of creating supportive social networks and fostering a sense of belonging among students. Academic integration focuses on students' engagement with their coursework and utilisation of academic support services. Goal commitment highlights the significance of students' commitment to their educational goals and aspirations. The next chapter presents the methodological approach used in the present study.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter has presented the theoretical framework guiding the current study. Considering that this qualitative study analyses secondary data from an existing (education and emancipation) project, this chapter commences by defining secondary research, and examines what it entails and its implications for the present study. This will be done by summarising the data collection methodologies used in this study. This chapter will then discuss the steps taken to analyse secondary data as outlined by Johnson (2014). The chapter further outlines the methodology used to sort and interpret the data collected for the present study. That discussion outlines my choice for employing the critical paradigm as the main methodological framework guiding the study. The chapter then presents the research design that formed the structure of the present study. It further describes the narrative inquiry approach adopted in this study. Issues related to data generation methods, sampling, secondary data analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness are addressed in this chapter. The chapter concludes by discussing the limitations of this study, bearing in mind the reality that this research used secondary data.

4.2 Research approach

4.2.1 Secondary analysis

The current study is based on an analysis of secondary data accessed from the Education and

Emancipation project¹, hence, it is worthwhile to begin by detailing what secondary analysis entails. When vast amounts of data are being collected and archived by researchers worldwide, the practicality of utilising existing data for research is becoming more prevalent (Andrews et al., 2012). The present study is a culmination of such data.

Secondary analysis refers to the practice of analysing existing data that has been collected by other researchers for a different purpose (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). It involves reexamining and reinterpreting data to address new research questions or explore alternative perspectives. Secondary analysis is a valuable research method that enables researchers to maximise the use of existing data and generate new insights without the need for additional data collection (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Researchers often resort to secondary analysis for several reasons. First, it allows access to large datasets that may be otherwise impractical or costly to collect independently (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). This is particularly useful when studying rare phenomena or conducting longitudinal studies that require data over an extended period. Second, secondary analysis facilitates the replication and verification of previous findings, contributing to the robustness and credibility of scientific knowledge (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Third, it offers the opportunity to explore new research questions or test alternative hypotheses based on existing data (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). Finally, secondary analysis allows for cross-validation and comparison of findings across different studies or contexts, enhancing the generalisability and transferability of research findings (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016)

According to Johnston (2014), secondary data analysis involves the analyses of data collected by someone else for another primary purpose. He postulates that secondary analysis is an

¹ The Education and Emancipation Project was a study which analysed the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Soudien report; media representations of students and higher education

empirical exercise that applies the same basic research principles as studies utilising primary institutions; and identities and competencies of students entering universities in South Africa. After selecting a small cohort of students from eight diverse universities across South Africa, education and emancipation study tracked students' journeys through university asking about the obstacles the students encountered and what they were doing in response to their obstacles at university. data and there are steps that are followed just as any other research method. In his writings about secondary analysis, Johnston (2014) contends that secondary data analysis is a viable method to be utilised in the process of inquiry when a systematic approach is followed. His study contributed significantly to the discussion of secondary data analysis as a research method applied in the United States of America. Johnston (2014) asserts that secondary data analysis remains an under-used research technique.

According to Kumar (2014), secondary data is the type of data that has already been collected by someone else or that which already exists as a part of the routine record keeping done by an organisation. He further states that researchers need to extract the required information for their study. Similarly, Bryman and Bell (2011) posit that secondary analysis occurs when a researcher analyses existing quantitative or qualitative datasets collected by another researcher. Miller and Brewer (2015) add and maintain that a researcher usually utilises secondary data for a different research question during secondary data analysis. Drawing from Kumar (2014), it is stipulated that all qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research studies can use secondary sources as a data collection method. Kumar (2014) further reports that, “[i]n qualitative research, you usually extract descriptive and narrative information (such as information from historical accounts of an event, descriptions of a situation, stories about beliefs and superstitions, or descriptions of a site)” (Kumar, 2014, p.271). Quantitative studies

usually extract the information in a numerical or categorical form. In mixed methods approaches, it depends upon the methods used (Miller & Brewer, 2015).

In all the situations where a researcher uses secondary sources of data, the researcher first decides on the nature of information they need, where it is available and how to extract it (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In compliance with these implications, the present study deliberated on the type of information needed (that is, the attrition and integration experiences of Black African students in South African universities). After having engaged with literature, the researcher realised that the present study forms part of a larger research project on Education and Emancipation - which analyses the progress made in the implementation of the Soudien Report, media presentations of students and higher education institutions, and the identities and competencies of students entering universities in South Africa. The broader project selected a cohort of students from eight diverse universities across South Africa. It traced the students' academic journey and experiences through university (and sometimes out of it), asking the students to outline the obstacles they encountered (academic and social), and what they, along with their institutions, did in response to the obstacles. This confirmed the availability of the data the researcher needed for the present study. This, therefore, kick-started the journey towards the extraction of this information, as further explained in subsequent sections.

Table 4.1 presents a comparison of primary and secondary research, as used in the present study. It was imperative to display or paste a picture of how the present study differs from the larger primary study.

4.2.2 Comparison between primary and secondary data

Table 4.1 Comparison between primary and secondary data

Comparison basis	Primary research	Secondary research
Definition	Involves collecting factual, first-hand data at the time of the research project	Involves the use of data that was collected by somebody else in the past
Type of data	Real-time data	Past data
Conducted by	The researcher, researching on the specific needs of the research	Somebody else conducted the study.
Needs	Addresses specific the researcher.	May not directly address researcher's needs.
Involvement	The researcher is very involved.	The researcher is less involved.
Completion time	Long	Short
Cost	High	Low

Source: Kumar (2014)

4.2.3 Why use secondary data?

Researchers conduct secondary analysis for several reasons. First and foremost, it allows access to existing datasets that have already been collected for other purposes, eliminating the need for costly and time-consuming data collection (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). This is particularly beneficial when studying rare events or conducting longitudinal studies that require data spanning a long period. Secondary analysis enables researchers to maximize the utility of

existing data and make new discoveries. Secondly, secondary analysis facilitates the replication and verification of previous findings (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016). By reanalyzing existing data, researchers can confirm or challenge prior results, contributing to the robustness and credibility of scientific knowledge. This replication ensures the reliability and validity of research findings, enhancing confidence in the conclusions drawn.

Another advantage of secondary analysis is the opportunity to explore new research questions or test alternative hypotheses based on existing data (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). Researchers can utilize previously collected data to address different research inquiries or perspectives, expanding the breadth and depth of scientific investigations. This allows for the efficient utilization of available resources while generating new insights. Furthermore, secondary analysis enables cross-validation and comparison of findings across different studies or contexts (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Researchers can examine whether similar patterns or relationships exist in diverse datasets, enhancing the generalizability and transferability of research findings. This strengthens the external validity of the results and provides a broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Bryman and Bell (2011) reveal that the primary motive researchers use secondary data analysis should be considered as an alternative to collecting new data since this data is readily available. Miller and Brewer (2003) acknowledge that secondary data are important when new data cannot be obtained using primary data collection procedures (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Bryman and Bell (2011) posit that some researchers do not necessarily need to collect secondary data. For instance, secondary data may be collected by a company or another type of organisation for its purposes. Amongst other things that motivated me to pursue this study using secondary data is the notion by Chivaka (2018), who posits that while acknowledging that secondary data analysis has inherent weaknesses like any other method, its merits overwhelm its shortcomings. Correspondingly, for the present study I too used secondary data.

Like any further research, secondary data has its pros and cons, which will be discussed below.

4.2.4 Advantages of using secondary data

Secondary analysis offers several advantages to researchers. Firstly, it provides access to preexisting datasets, eliminating the need for time-consuming and costly data collection (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). This is particularly advantageous when studying large populations or rare phenomena where primary data collection may be impractical or infeasible. Researchers can utilize existing data to address new research questions or explore alternative perspectives, saving resources and time. Secondly, secondary analysis enables the replication and verification of previous findings (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016). By reanalyzing existing data, researchers can assess the consistency and robustness of earlier results, contributing to the credibility and reliability of scientific knowledge. Replication is a fundamental aspect of the scientific process and enhances confidence in the validity of research findings.

Another advantage of secondary analysis is the ability to explore new research questions or test alternative hypotheses (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). Researchers can use existing data to investigate additional aspects of the phenomenon under study or examine different variables or relationships. This flexibility allows for the generation of new insights and the exploration of unexplored avenues without the need for new data collection. Furthermore, secondary analysis facilitates the comparison and cross-validation of findings across different studies or contexts (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Researchers can examine whether similar patterns or relationships exist in diverse datasets, enhancing the generalisability and external validity of their findings. This comparative approach strengthens the robustness of research conclusions and provides a broader understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Additionally, secondary analysis allows for the efficient use of available resources (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). By utilising existing data, researchers can make the most of prior

investments in data collection and infrastructure. This is particularly beneficial in resourceconstrained research environments where conducting primary data collection may be challenging or costly. However, it is essential for researchers to carefully evaluate the quality and suitability of the original data for their research objectives (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). Factors such as data reliability, validity, and relevance should be critically assessed to ensure the integrity of the secondary analysis. Ethical considerations regarding the original data collection, such as informed consent and confidentiality, should also be considered (Aarts, 2018; Bryman, 2016).

4.2.4.1 Cost reduction

Secondary analysis provides researchers with a cost-effective approach to conducting research by utilising existing data, thereby saving valuable resources. Several studies have highlighted the cost-saving advantages of secondary analysis in research (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). One significant cost-saving benefit of secondary analysis is the elimination of expenses related to data collection. Primary data collection can be a time-consuming and expensive process involving various activities such as designing and implementing surveys, recruiting participants, and conducting interviews or experiments. By utilising existing datasets, researchers can bypass these costly procedures and gain immediate access to a wealth of data (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). This is particularly beneficial when studying large populations or rare phenomena where primary data collection would be impractical or costprohibitive.

Secondary analysis allows researchers to leverage investments made in prior data collection efforts. Many datasets are generated through extensive research projects or national surveys that involve substantial financial resources. By utilising these existing datasets, researchers can make efficient use of the funds already allocated for data collection (Hammersley, 2019; Khan,

2017). This reduces the financial burden on individual researchers or research institutions. Further, it enables the allocation of resources to other critical aspects of the research process, such as data analysis or dissemination. Secondary analysis also saves costs associated with time and personnel. Conducting primary data collection often requires a significant investment of time, including planning, data collection, and data cleaning. By utilising existing datasets, researchers can expedite their research process by skipping the time-consuming steps involved in primary data collection (Cheung, 2020; Khan, 2017). Additionally, secondary analysis allows researchers to work with data that has already been cleaned and prepared by other researchers or institutions, further reducing the time and effort required for data processing. According to Smith (2008), the major advantages of secondary data analysis include its cost effectiveness and convenience. He further outlines the fact that, since someone else has already collected the data, the researcher does not have to allocate financial resources to the collection of data. Chivaka (2018) stated that the reasons why researchers opt for secondary data analysis, as a data collection technique, may be economically related. Data collection is very expensive in primary research, and funding is difficult to attain. Given the high cost and much effort involved in gathering primary data, several researchers opt for a cheaper and less time-consuming method of collecting data (Punch, 2005). Seale (2004) argued that during the time of economic hardships, secondary data analysis is the most attractive data collection method since it is less expensive and less time-consuming. Similarly, Schensul (1999), argued that, as primary data collection requires effort, time, money and resources, any method that reduces the cost of the process and saves resources will appeal to most researchers. For example, it has been noted that, "One of the most obvious advantages is that, compared to primary research, secondary research is inexpensive, primary research usually requires spending a lot of money, for example, members of the research team should be paid salaries, there are often travel and transportation costs, at times one may need to pay for office space and equipment, and

compensate your participants for taking part” (Chivak, 2018, p.4). Likewise, in the present study, the researcher did not need budgetary allocation for data collection.

4.2.4.2 High-quality

Secondary analysis offers researchers access to high-quality data for their research purposes. Several studies emphasize the benefits of utilising existing datasets in secondary analysis, which often contain reliable, well-documented, and carefully collected data (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). One advantage of secondary analysis is the potential for working with well-established datasets that have undergone rigorous data collection procedures. Many existing datasets are generated through large-scale research projects, national surveys, or administrative records, where extensive efforts are made to ensure that data quality is not compromised (Cheung, 2020; Khan, 2017). These datasets are often designed by experienced researchers, employing robust methodologies and standardised protocols to collect accurate and reliable data.

Furthermore, secondary analysis provides researchers with the opportunity to utilise validated measures and instruments that have been used in previous studies. Established datasets frequently include validated survey instruments, assessment tools, or measurement scales, which have undergone extensive testing for reliability and validity (Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). Researchers can benefit from the use of these validated measures, enhancing the quality and credibility of their research. An aspect that contributes to the high quality of data in secondary analysis is the comprehensive documentation often associated with existing datasets. These datasets typically come with detailed metadata, codebooks, and technical documentation, providing researchers with valuable information about the data collection process, variable definitions, and coding schemes (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). This documentation enhances transparency and facilitates accurate data interpretation and analysis.

The existing datasets may have undergone thorough data cleaning and preprocessing by the original researchers or data custodians. Data cleaning involves identifying and rectifying errors, missing values, and inconsistencies in the data (Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). By working with cleaned data, researchers can focus on analysing the data and deriving meaningful insights, rather than spending substantial time and effort on data cleaning procedures. However, it is crucial for researchers to critically evaluate the quality and suitability of the original data for their specific research objectives (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). Factors such as data reliability, validity, representativeness, and relevance to the research questions at hand should be carefully considered. Researchers should assess the original data collection procedures, sample characteristics, and potential biases in the data to ensure the integrity of the secondary analysis.

According to Smith et al. (2011) when good secondary data is available, researchers can access and utilize high quality larger datasets, such as those collected by funded studies or agencies that involve larger samples and contain substantial breadth. He further stipulates that the larger samples represent the target population and allow for greater validity and the findings are more generalisable. As mentioned earlier, primary data used in this study was indeed a larger study consisting of eight (8) universities in South Africa. It sampled 80 students: ten ($n=10$) from each institution. It took the researchers over five (5) years to complete collecting and processing data. As a result, I was able to work with a large sample of data in a short space of time, which would be impossible if I was a primary investigator undertaking this research.

Another advantage of secondary research is that the researcher can base the research project on a large scope of data (Chivaka, 2018). In the present study, for instance, I wanted to obtain a large data set from the students in different higher education institutions in the country; so, I would have to dedicate an immense amount of effort to the data collection exercise. This

research allowed me to rely not only on a large scope of data, but also on professionally collected data. I also had to use data that had been collected by researchers who have had years of experience in recruiting representative participant samples, designing studies, and using specific measurement tools.

4.3 Process of secondary analysis

This study recognises that secondary analysis is a systematic data collection method with procedural and evaluative steps (Johnson, 2014). Yet, there is a lack of literature that defines a specific process on the steps to be followed when analysing secondary data. Therefore, in writing this thesis, I opted to be guided by the steps to be followed when analysing secondary data as Johnston (2014) suggests. These steps will be discussed in combination with the methodology used in the primary study and that used in the present study.

4.3.1 Step 1: Developing research questions

Secondary analysis serves as a valuable approach to the development of research questions by providing researchers with the opportunity to explore new avenues of inquiry and investigate alternative perspectives (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). Through the reexamination of existing data sets, researchers can generate novel research questions and expand the scope of their investigations. One advantage of secondary analysis is the ability to generate new research questions based on the existing data. Researchers can leverage the richness and diversity of available data sets to delve into different aspects or dimensions of the phenomenon under study (Cheung, 2020; Khan, 2017). By examining variables, subgroups, or interactions that were not the primary focus of the original study, researchers can discover new patterns, relationships, or trends. This process allows for the formulation of fresh research questions and the generation of new knowledge.

In addition, secondary analysis enables researchers to test alternative hypotheses or theories. By reanalysing existing data, researchers can examine different theoretical frameworks or perspectives that were not originally considered (Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). They can challenge or build upon existing theories by exploring alternative explanations or interpretations of the data. This process of theoretical triangulation enhances the depth and richness of the research and contributes to theoretical development within the field. Furthermore, secondary analysis facilitates the integration of different data sets to develop more comprehensive research questions. Researchers can combine multiple data sets that were collected for different purposes to gain a broader understanding of the research topic (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). This integration of data from various sources allows for comparative analyses and the examination of patterns or trends across different contexts. It enables researchers to generate and address more complex research questions that require a broader perspective.

The key to secondary data analysis is the application of theoretical knowledge and conceptual skills to existing data to address the research questions (Johnston, 2014). The first step relates to develop the research questions and this helped me create the research questions for the current study. This study aimed to explore Black African students' social and academic attrition and integration experiences and responses in South African universities. This was done successfully by focusing on four objectives (as discussed in Chapter One), where the researcher first critically explored the Black African students' experiences of South African Higher Education Institutions which is referred to as SAHEIs in this study. The researcher then identified and analysed social and academic factors that influence students' integration and attrition in these institutions. Finally, the researcher proposed innovative recommendations for averting (social and academic) attrition and encouraging (social and educational) integration of

Black African students in SAHEIs, which would be discussed in detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

4.3.2 Step 2: Identifying data set

Most research studies begin with an investigation into what is already known and what remains to be learned about a topic (Cresswell, 2009). This includes related and supporting literature, but one should also consider previously collected data on the subject (Dale et al., 1988; Doolan & Froelicher, 2009). In the case of this research, an in-depth literature review of the areas of interest was conducted examining the previous and current work of experts in the field of education in general and higher education in particular (refer to Chapter Two). Antecedent researchers who researched on this topic were identified through the literature review, and agencies and research centres have conducted related studies.

Identifying suitable data sets for secondary analysis is a crucial step in conducting research. Researchers employ various strategies and methods to locate relevant and appropriate data sets for their research questions (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). This literature review explores the different approaches used to identify data sets for secondary analysis. One common approach is to explore established data repositories and archives. Many organisations and institutions maintain data repositories that provide access to a wide range of data sets across different disciplines and research areas. These repositories, such as the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) or the UK Data Service, curate and archive data sets from various sources, making them easily accessible to researchers (Cheung, 2020; Khan, 2017). Researchers can search these repositories based on keywords, topics, or specific variables of interest to identify relevant data sets.

The present study's research questions fit well with the original research (education and emancipation project), since both studies focused on Black African students' experiences of

university life in the South African context. The primary investigators made me aware that data collected from questions addressing Black African students' attrition and integration at university in South Africa had neither been reported nor analysed. After realising that this data would adequately address the research questions guiding the current research and that the primary method of data collection was appropriately suited to the current research, the decision was then made to utilise existing data from the education and emancipation project to find the answers to different research questions than were asked in the original research. The next section presents a summary of the research questions that guided the primary study (Education and Emancipation project). This will provide a gap between the primary study and the present study.

4.3.2.1 Research questions of the Education and Emancipation Project

The primary study had three main research questions, which were as follows:

1. What structural and social factors do 'historically disadvantaged' students identify as helping and hindering success?
2. What role do intersecting identities (race, class, gender, and language) play in students' perceptions and experiences of, and access to, success?
3. How do students use agency to create opportunities and attain success?

The present study aligns with the first research question of the primary study, which reads:

What structural and social factors do 'historically disadvantaged' students identify as helping and hindering success? In addition to this view, the project was aligned with DHET's strategic outcomes as set out in the DHET Revised Strategy for 2010-2014, which specifically focused on developing a better understanding of the notion of transformation by first, considering transformation strategies and actions and incidents related to social cohesion and discrimination

within HEIs; second, considering the student's background, conditions, and mindset upon entering and travelling through HEIs; and lastly, fostering an understanding of the obstacles to access and throughput in qualifications, especially those that are governed by professional bodies.

4.3.3 Step 3: Evaluating the dataset

Evaluating the suitability and quality of data sets for secondary analysis is a critical step in ensuring robust and reliable research outcomes. Researchers employ various methods and criteria to assess data sets and determine their appropriateness for secondary analysis (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). One key consideration when evaluating data sets is the relevance of the data to the research questions and objectives. Researchers should carefully assess whether the variables, measurements, and data collection methods align with their research aims (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). It is important to ensure that the data sets contain the necessary information to address the specific research questions being investigated. Researchers should also consider the scope and coverage of the data, ensuring that it adequately represents the intended population or phenomena of interest.

Data quality is another crucial aspect of evaluation in secondary analysis. Researchers need to assess the reliability and validity of the data sets. Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the data, while validity refers to the accuracy and authenticity of the measurements (Khan, 2017). Researchers should examine the data collection procedures, including sampling methods, data collection instruments, and quality control measures employed during the original data collection process. They should also consider any potential sources of bias or error in the data and evaluate the steps taken to minimise such issues. The representativeness of the data sets is also an important consideration. Researchers should assess whether the data sets adequately represent the target population or the phenomena being studied. This involves

examining the sampling methods used during data collection and determining whether the sample is representative of the larger population (Cheung, 2020; Hammersley, 2019). If the data sets are derived from surveys or studies with specific sample characteristics, researchers should critically evaluate the generalisability of the findings to other populations or contexts.

In addition, the documentation and metadata associated with the data sets play a crucial role in evaluating their suitability for secondary analysis. Researchers should look for comprehensive documentation, code-books, and technical descriptions that provide information about the data collection procedures, variable definitions, and coding schemes (Hammersley, 2019; Khan, 2017). Adequate documentation enhances transparency, facilitates data interpretation, and ensures the reproducibility of the analysis. Ethical considerations are also paramount when evaluating data sets for secondary analysis. Researchers should ensure that the data sets adhere to ethical standards regarding data privacy, informed consent, and confidentiality (Cheung, 2020; Khan, 2017). Depending on the nature of the data, researchers may need to seek appropriate permissions or approvals before accessing or using the data for their analysis.

Johnston (2014), citing Dale et al. (1988), Kiecolt and Nathan (1985), Smith (2008), and Stewart and Kamins (1993), reveals that once a data set that appears able to address the initial requirements discussed above, the next step in the process is evaluation of the data set to ensure its appropriateness to the research topic. Johnston (2014) further reports that there are evaluation steps to be followed to determine the appropriate match of a dataset for a research study and ensure the congruency, and quality of the preliminary study and the resultant dataset: (a) what was the purpose of this study; (b) who was responsible for collecting the information; (c) what information was collected; (d) when was the information collected; (e) how was the information obtained; and (f) how consistent is the information obtained from one source with information available in other sources (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). To complete this evaluation,

the researcher got access to and utilised all documentation on data collection. These steps would be discussed further as the study proceeds.

4.3.3.1 The purpose of the primary study

Johnston (2014) communicated a fundamental point, stressing the importance of determining the purpose of the original project that produced the data because this can influence many factors such as the targeted population, the sample selected the wording of questions on the survey, and the general context of the study (Doolan & Froelicher, 2009). He further cites the work of Boslaugh (2007) and Stewart and Kamins (1993), who posit that it is also important to know about the agency or individual(s) that collected the information and the similarities or differences in research goals between those researchers and the researcher contemplating secondary data analysis. The researcher was fortunate enough to get into a professional relationship with the researchers who conducted the original study, and maintaining such a contact was limited to getting information on the data collection process.

According to Chivaka (2018), when a researcher is evaluating secondary data, they first need to identify the aim of the original study. This is important because the goals of the author of the original study would have impacted several important aspects of their research, including their population of choice, sample, employed measurement tools, and the overall context of the study. A researcher also needs to pay close attention to any differences in research purposes and research questions between the original research and their investigation. The researcher discovered that the original Education and Emancipation Project had a different research question in mind compared to those of the present study, and the project sought to address the objectives outlined the following section.

4.3.3.2 Objectives of the Education and Emancipation study

The overall objectives of the Education and Emancipation Project were to provide the

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) with the ability to:

- a) Have a better understanding of the actions, interventions and incidents about transformation, social cohesion and discrimination within higher education.
- b) Further develop a comprehensive understanding of first-intake students within Higher Education based on qualitative and quantitative research by answering the question: “Who are our students and what happens to them?”
- c) Understand the journey that students take from their first year through to graduation, thus, to understand access, throughput and entering the industry by assessing both opportunities and obstacles.
- d) To ultimately provide recommendations for potential intervention strategies and policy development within the Department of Higher Education and Training.

The biggest question is how these objectives differ from the aim of the current research. This data set has been reused for the current research. Although the current study sought to do a similar investigation of student experiences at university, its objectives and questions are different from those of the original study because the researcher used a different paradigm (critical paradigm) as well as a different theoretical framework (Tinto’s Student Integration Method) to understand Black African student’s experiences of university life in South Africa. Hence this secondary data has assisted in answering the research question outlined in Chapter One.

4.3.3.3 Responsible person for collecting the data for the primary study

In addressing issues around the one responsible for collecting the information, Johnston (2014) posits that the secondary researcher again benefits from their relationship with the primary research team. The researcher then sought to understand the one who was responsible for collecting the data for the primary study. This granted the researcher an opportunity to work closely with the Principal Investigator (PI) of the Education and Emancipation Project, who had to take me through the whole process and stages they had accomplished as researchers. It was indicated that a team of eight (8) researchers was responsible for an individual university selected for this study where they collected data. As indicated earlier that this study pertained to eight different universities in South Africa, the researcher checked the background of these researchers and concluded that they all had sufficient professional knowledge and skills in collecting data, which made the researcher conclude that the professionalism of this data source was valid and clear.

4.3.3.4 Data collected from the primary study

The secondary researcher needs to have access to adequate documentation from the primary research, including the protocols and procedures followed during the data collection process (Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2011). In acknowledging this claim, the primary research team kept a detailed documentation that provided evidence showing that the data collection process was carefully and consistently executed in this study. The documentation, the survey instrument, and published findings were also consulted. Johnston (2014) contends that the secondary analyst researcher must obtain all documentation regarding the processes and protocols to be followed by the primary researchers, including the questionnaire, all coding materials, and any publication related to the data. Acknowledging this depiction, all the necessary documents from the primary research were kept safe and given to me as the secondary data analyst. Finally,

Boslaugh (2007) concurs that it is paramount that the secondary researcher accesses the raw data set to perform new analyses and consider and account for all the possible concerns. The researcher was granted permission to access the raw data set, and all the supportive documentation was made available.

In addition to the above points, Punch (2005) echoed the same sentiments, reiterating the need for the secondary analyst to know the type of data that was collected, the measures that were used, and whether such measures were reliable and valid (if they were quantitative measures). He contends that the secondary data analyst also needs to clearly outline the type of data collected and the data relevant to their research as a secondary researcher. Hence, the pertinent data solicited for the current study was qualitative and “aimed to reveal a comprehensive and contextualised understanding of students’ subjective experiences and micro-social processes over five years” (Swartz et al., 2018, p.13). Below is a summary of the qualitative data collected from the primary research, which underpinned this study. The data addressed the following aspects:

Structural and social factors: The aspect addressed what students understand by advantage and disadvantage in terms of resources; how students across universities do perceive their experience of university life and access to the resources available to them within these institutions; how students do perceive experience of and access to the personal, community and familial resources available to them; and lastly, whether or not these perceptions, experiences and access do change over the five years of study (Swartz, 2018).

Intersecting identities: This aspect addressed how students both identify and dis-identify with categories of race, age, class and language in identifying themselves. It also addressed how students’ identities impact obstacles and opportunities in the five-year course of their lives (Swartz et al., 2018).

Agency opportunity: This addressed students' perceptions and experiences of, and access to, opportunity; it probed into what students identify as moments of agency that allow for accessing opportunities. Lastly, the aspect addressed what students identify as impasse moments that restrict access to opportunities (Swartz, 2018).

4.4 Research design

In this study, the researcher opted to use the qualitative research design. However, this discussion will provide a broader understanding of what a research design is and different types of research designs. According to Terre-Blanche and Durrheim (2006), a research design provides a detailed overview of the plan of the study and how data are generated and analysed. The authors add that a research design is a strategic framework of action linking research questions to the execution or implementation of the research. In contrast, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) posit that a research design is a descriptive methodology used to obtain answers to the research questions used when probing into the phenomenon under study. Expanding on this notion, Mouton (2008) argues that a research design embodies plans directing the research project to ensure maximisation of the validity of the research findings. Therefore, a research design outlines the entire plan of the study and describes the steps the researcher must follow in conducting the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The research design focuses on what the researcher wanted to do, for example, exploring Black African students' experiences in South African higher education institutions to identify social and academic factors that influence students' persistence in or dropout from these institutions.

According to Creswell (2007) and Nieuwenhuis (2012), there are three types of research designs, namely, the qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Qualitative research is an inquiry process in which the researcher seeks to develop and understand a complex, holistic picture of phenomena through an analysis of words; the qualitative researcher reports on

informants' detailed views, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). A typical example of a study that employs qualitative procedures is an anthropological study. The researcher goes out into the field where individual participants live, gathers their stories and writes a persuasive account of their experiences. In quantitative research, an investigator relies on numerical data which they use to test relationships between variables (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). A typical example of such a study would be an experimental study or a survey. Quantitative research design emphasises the collection and analysis of numerical data, while qualitative research design focuses on understanding subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Lastly, a mixed-methods research is relatively new and builds on both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A typical example of a mixed-methods study would be a survey that first establishes participants' attitudes towards a topic and this would be followed up by in-depth interviews that seek to learn more about individual perspectives on this topic. Nieuwenhuis (2012) also contends that a mixed methods researcher combines qualitative and quantitative strategies within one study, collects both numeric (numbers) data and text (word) data concurrently or sequentially, and chooses variables and units of analysis that most appropriately address the study's purpose and are capable of finding answers to the research questions. Therefore, Mixed-methods research design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to enable the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Researchers need to carefully consider the nature of their research questions, and the type of data that best serves the purpose of their study when selecting the appropriate research design.

In addition, research design involves the identification and control of potential sources of bias and confounding factors. Researchers should consider various threats to internal and external validity, such as selection bias, measurement bias, and confounding variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Creswell, 2014). By implementing appropriate control measures and

research protocols, researchers can enhance the validity and reliability of their findings. Moreover, research design also includes decisions about the timing and sequencing of data collection, as well as the overall structure of the study. Researchers need to determine the appropriate timeline, order of research activities, and overall organisation of the research process (Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Creswell, 2014). These decisions impact the efficiency and coherence of the study, ensuring that data collection, analysis, and interpretation occur in a logical and systematic manner.

4.4.1 Qualitative approach

This study employed the qualitative approach to research. In choosing the qualitative approach for this study, the researcher took cognisance of what Bell (2006) and Litchman (2006) posit when they articulate that qualitative research emphasises the participants' lived experiences. Thus, the researcher tries to understand the world of the research participants, and this can be explained as understanding the life experiences of individuals. Therefore, through the qualitative research design, the researcher was able to engage with Black African students' experiences of the university in the South African context, where the researcher explored their lived experiences in these institutions. According to Nieuwenhuis (2012), qualitative research is a methodology concerned with understanding the processes and social and cultural contexts that underlie participants' various behavioural patterns and is mostly concerned with exploring 'why' questions. Nieuwenhuis (2012) adds that qualitative research studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural settings and focusing on their meanings and interpretations. At the same time, Bell (2006) and Lichtman (2006) posit that qualitative research emphasises the participants' lived experiences in their natural settings, that is, Black African students' university experiences.

Furthermore, as the researcher have provided an overview of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research and articulated my reasons for using the qualitative research methodology, the researcher proceed to discuss the different types of qualitative design.

Nieuwehuis (2012) mentioned the types of qualitative design, namely, conceptual studies, historical research, action research, case-study research, narrative inquiry, ethnography and grounded theory. Conceptual studies are largely based on secondary sources. It critically engages with an understanding of concepts and aims to add to the existing body of knowledge and understanding of phenomena (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Accordingly, historical research is a systematic process of describing, analysing and interpreting the past based on information from selected sources that are related to the topic under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). He further describes action research as a qualitative method that requires the researcher to understand the context of and possible solutions to the problem under investigation.

On the other hand, Yin (2009) and Nieuwenhuis (2012) define the case-study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. The authors stipulate that ethnography assumes that all human behaviour is international and observable, and research should therefore be orientated towards understanding the reasoning behind people's actions. Furthermore, Corbin and Strauss (2008) define the Grounded Theory as inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. Hence, within the qualitative research design, the researcher opted to utilise the narrative inquiry design (which would be discussed in in subsequent sections), as it was deemed appropriate and relevant to this study since it allowed the participants (Black African students) to narrate their experiences (university experiences in the South African context).

4.5 Research paradigm

The present study used the critical paradigm. It is mandatory for a researcher to choose an appropriate research paradigm to guide the data collection and analysis processes and to view the phenomenon under investigation. Creswell (2012) defines a paradigm as an approach to looking at the world. A research paradigm is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct the researcher's actions and thinking during the execution of a research study. Expanding on this notion, Creswell and Clarke (2007) defined research paradigms as world views that researchers bring into their research, which influences how they design and conduct their research projects. There are four major paradigms in research, which are: positivism, interpretivism, critical and post-positivism (Creswell, 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Henning (2004) suggests that the positivist paradigm is rational and operates within the context of scientific laws and rules. According to Nieuwenhuis (2012), interpretivism assumes the meaning that individuals or communities assign to their lived experiences.

The critical paradigm is concerned with the critical meanings of participants' experiences as they relate to gender, race, class and other forms of social oppression (Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

Postpositivism comprises participants' multiple perspectives rather than a single reality (Creswell, 2012). The present study used the critical paradigm. Connelly (2016) points out that the critical paradigm perceives reality as being shaped by social, political, cultural, economic experiences and other dynamics. The critical methodology interrogates unaccepted injustices and discrimination and raises the awareness of participants. Since the present study sought to unveil Black African students' experiences of attrition and integration at a university in South Africa, issues of injustice and discrimination were reported by the participants. The study was then able to assert the awareness agenda that it intended to raise regarding the different forms

of injustice and discrimination that still manifest in South African universities. Hence, the critical paradigm was deemed to be the most suitable paradigm for this study. Therefore, the following sub-section justifies the researcher's use of the critical paradigm.

4.5.1 The critical paradigm

As mentioned earlier, the present study was located in the qualitative critical paradigm because its aim was to uncover issues dealing with social justice and power. The critical paradigm is explicitly prescriptive and normative, as it prescribes what behaviour in a social democracy should entail (Manion & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, critical paradigm sees reality as shaped by social, political, cultural, economic and other circumstances. The intention of the critical paradigm is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour, but to realise a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members (Niewenhuis, 2012). On the other hand, Cresswell (2012) posits that the purpose of the critical paradigm is not merely to understand situations and phenomena, but to change them. The researcher found that these authors' description of the critical paradigm best matches the intentions of the current research. This study did not intend to understand the experiences of Black African students at university, but to critically explore how their experiences impact their decision to persist or dropout at university and to assist change their situation through proposing a new model of addressing dropout rates at a South African university. In addition to this, the critical paradigm seeks to emancipate the disempowered, redress inequality, and promote individual freedoms within a democratic society. The intention of the present study was to emancipate Black African students from pervasive experiences of exclusion, inferiority and therefore empower them.

Cohen et al. (2011) contend that with the critical paradigm and critical educational research, researchers can no longer claim neutrality and ideological or political innocence. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) take the argument further, explaining that critical researchers do not believe

that it is possible to be an objective outsider and to collect objective or neutral knowledge. Since the researcher opted for this paradigmatic approach to this study, he was aware that the perspective would be recognised in drawing conclusions in this study, given the fact that what we claim to know about the world is always subjective, influenced by our own values and place in society. Furthermore, critical researchers recognise that their starting point in research is informed by their values (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Hence, throughout the research, the researcher consciously guarded against producing a biased and self-serving study my exploration Black African students' experiences at a South African university.

The researcher was cognisant of the fact that research in the critical paradigm focuses on bringing about some kind of social change that would benefit the participants, who are understood to have little power, or fewer opportunities open to them (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Hence, the intention of the critical paradigm is transformative: it seeks to change society and individuals to social democracy. Having situated this study within the critical paradigm, the intention of this study was to bring about change through the product (the findings of the research) and propose a new model that university policy makers and researchers who intend to study Black African students do so by utilising the proposed model (see Chapter Five).

4.6 Narrative inquiry

Since this study used the narrative inquiry as a research approach, I drew on several writings that describe the narrative inquiry and its implications for the present study. Creswell's (2007) definition of qualitative research aptly explains my research process. According to Creswell (2007, p. 37), qualitative research is an approach that: "allows participants to narrate stories about their experiences, how they behave and what they understand about the world in which they live," whereas Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define narratives as testimonies and stories that

people tell about how they behave, where they are at any point in time and how they understand the world.

Narrative inquiry is a research approach that places narratives and storytelling at the center of the research process, aiming to explore and understand individual and collective experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry draws upon the belief that individuals construct and communicate their experiences through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Researchers using this approach seek to uncover the rich and multifaceted narratives that individuals use to make meaning of their lives and the world around them. These narratives capture the complexities, emotions, and personal perspectives of individuals and communities. A key characteristic of narrative inquiry is its focus on the lived experiences and the sense-making processes of individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Researchers employing narrative inquiry engage in conversations, interviews, or written accounts with participants to elicit their stories. These stories provide insights into how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences, identities, relationships, and social contexts.

Narrative inquiry recognises the importance of context in shaping narratives and meaningmaking (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Researchers using this approach pay attention to the socio-cultural, historical, and interpersonal contexts that influence individuals' narratives. They explore the interplay between personal experiences and broader social, cultural, and political structures. Researchers employing narrative inquiry use various methods to collect and analyse narrative data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). These methods include in-depth interviews, participant observations, diaries, written narratives, or audiovisual materials. Researchers often engage in iterative processes of data collection and

analysis, identifying patterns, themes, and plotlines within the narratives. They interpret and make sense of the narratives through close reading, coding, and thematic analysis.

The role of the researcher in narrative inquiry is crucial, as they actively engage in dialogue and co-creation of narratives with participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Researchers build relationships of trust and reciprocity, respecting participants' agency and giving voice to their stories. The researcher's reflexivity and self-awareness also play a significant role in understanding their own positionality and biases that may shape the research process and interpretations. Narrative inquiry is characterised by its potential for producing rich, nuanced, and contextualised understandings of human experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). It allows researchers to explore complex narratives, reveal diverse perspectives, and challenge dominant narratives or stereotypes. Narrative inquiry offers insights into individual and collective identities, personal growth, meaning-making, and social change.

The present study solicited narratives from the participants (Black African students) at a university and these narratives were then transcribed. In these narratives, the participants spoke of their testimonials about how they were treated and how they behaved at university. Yet, Cele (2018), citing the work of Gallo et al. (2014), postulates that the narrative inquiry is about collecting and telling a story or stories (in detail). Gallo et al. (2014) further explain that researchers write narratives about an individual's experiences, describe a life experience, and discuss the meaning of the experience with the individual.

According to Creswell (2012), in a narrative inquiry, the researcher seeks out information through interviews, family stories, journals, field notes, letters, autobiographies, conversations, photographs and other artifacts. To gather adequate data from the participants (via primary research), the researcher of the current study prepared interviews conducted yearly for five

years (2013-2017). This data collection method (to be discussed in detail below) fulfilled the intentions of this narrative inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explain that the narrative inquiry goes beyond telling stories because, participants are encouraged to express, define, describe and translate their life stories, making the narrative inquiry different from a conventional narrative. They add that the narrative inquiry helps researchers in examining social evils and injustices and consider how change might be brought about. According to Creswell (2012), in education, narrative studies are not usually about a person's entire life; they focus on a single event or episode in an individual's life. In essence, this study did not look at students' experiences in general, but rather on their university experiences which contribute to their decision to persist in or drop out of the institution.

Clandinin (2008) maintains that the narrative inquiry allows researchers to get insights into the lives and experiences of other people that are both important and significant to researchers: The narrative inquiry enable researchers to work with one another in different settings. What researchers hear about other people's stories is important insofar as it fosters an understanding of the society, culture, and place around them. Such an approach helped me (via this study) to understand Black African students' experiences at the university much better through the stories they told. For this reason, our lives become enriched and changed when we can learn from other people's experiences (Clandinin, 2008). However, in comparison with other research methodologies, there are possible pitfalls, limitations and disadvantages that are inherent in narrative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) mentioned that one advantage of narrative inquiry is that it helps us examine social evils and injustices and consider how change might be brought about.

In addition to the ideas raised above, Creswell (2012) postulated that another advantage of the narrative inquiry is its very naturalistic approach, which allows the participants to talk easily

about their stories. However, throughout the research project, the researcher remained mindful of the premise that the narrative inquiry has its limitations and pitfalls. In line with this view, Gallo et al. (2014) notes that participants may present a false story in narrative research, which could result in incorrect data being gathered. In narrative inquiries, participants may also be unable or unwilling to provide the complete story due to trauma or memory limitations, which contributes largely to the collection of inadequate data. However, the present study was able to circumvent this limitation since students were given enough time to express themselves. Those who were too shy to speak were visited in their places like homes, with some being interviewed via phone calls, which gave them an opportunity to speak freely in their own spaces.

4.7 Sampling method

According to Punch (2005) and Chivaka (2018), when evaluating the quality of a secondary data set, it is of paramount importance to evaluate the employed methodology. Furthermore, Punch (2005, p.33) adds that “you need to evaluate how the sample was obtained, whether the sample was large enough, if the sample was representative of the population, if there were any missing responses on employed measures, whether confounders were controlled for, and whether the employed statistical analyses were appropriate. Any drawbacks in the original methodology may also limit your own research”.

According to Newby (2010), it is noted that the selection of respondents in a research inquiry is referred to as sampling. He adds that sampling is effective because it seeks to link the findings from a selection of respondents or instances to the entirety of the respondents or instances. Nieuwenhuis (2012) identified two major classes of sampling methods: probability methods based on the principles of randomness and probability and non-probability methods. Nieuwenhuis (2012) outlines examples of probability methods: simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling. He further mentioned examples

of non-probability sampling methods: convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling. This study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling means that the researcher makes specific choices about which people, groups and objects to include in the sample.

In this case, the researcher targets a particular group, knowing that the group does not reflect the wider population but rather represents itself. Purposive sampling is used in special situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Before discussing the sampling process, it is necessary to clearly define the terms ‘population’ and ‘sample’. Best and Khan (2003) describe a population as a group of individuals that display one or more common characteristics that are of interest to the researcher. Careful consideration must be taken into account when choosing a sample. It is impossible to research on the entire population; hence, a small group is studied (De Vos, 2010). Therefore, the present study selected only sixty-six participants, and this research was mindful of the fact that the participants did not represent the entire Black African student population, but rather, they were representing themselves.

4.7.1 Research sites

The researchers in the primary research selected eight universities to capture some of the other variants within the higher education sector. For example, the ‘advantaged’ institutions in urban areas chose one English-medium university, the University of Cape Town (UCT), and one historically Afrikaans-medium university, the University of Johannesburg (UJ). Amongst the resource-poor institutions in rural areas, they selected the University of Fort Hare (UFH). They also included North West University (NWU) in the ‘rural-disadvantaged’ category; they were conscious of the fact that the university is also host to a ‘rural-advantaged’ community of students (in Potchefstroom). The University of Limpopo (UL) was added to represent

‘rural-disadvantaged’ higher education institutions further. This study also included universities of technology, such as Durban University of Technology (DUT) and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and these institutions were perceived to have a different historical trajectory and the recent shift towards increasing the focus on their research and knowledge creation presents various challenges and possibilities. They also added the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) to their sample; however, they were conscious that UKZN is both an advantaged and disadvantaged institution. The institution was selected since it is a major South African university with a varied student population. Following the approval of the study, they contacted relevant authorities at each of the universities, introduced them to the research and invited them to participate in it. Each university from the above list conducted its ethical review of the study and gave written permission signalling the study to proceed. Below is a brief discussion on how students (participants) were selected to participate in the study.

The following is a brief description of each of the research sites, which are eight (8) universities that participated in this research. Although the names of these universities were not hidden, pseudonyms were ascribed to the participants (students) owing to the confidentiality and sensitivity of the research. The brief descriptions of each institution were retrieved from the university’s websites. Whilst describing each institution, the researcher unpacked the retention and attrition associated with each institution to bring along the motive as to why these institutions were participants in the present study.

(i) University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) was founded in 2004. UKZN merged the University of Natal (founded in 1910 as the Natal University College, previously for White students only) and the University of Durban-Westville (established as the University College

for Indians in the 1960s and opened its doors on the current site to all races in 1984). Being one of the first merger institutions, the UKZN is the largest residential university in KwaZuluNatal Province. It has four campuses, which include: Howard College (an environmental conservancy in Glenwood, Durban, largely a quiet residential suburb); Edgewood campus (situated in Pinetown with easy access to the N3 Highway and approximately 20 minutes' drive from Durban CBD and the campus is growing several education students and is close to all suburbs); Pietermaritzburg campus (the centre of scenic Natal Midlands, close to numerous nature reserves and parks, only a one-hour drive from Durban CBD and two hours' drive from the Drakensberg; and Westville campus (located within an environmental conservancy about eight kilometres from Durban's CBD. The Westville campus' Hindu temple and the Islamic place of worship reflect its rich multicultural history) (UKZN, 2021).

Reviewed literature sheds light on specific challenges and factors that affect the retention and attrition of Black African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Sibanda and Msila's (2015) study explored the experiences of Black African students at UKZN and identified several key issues. The research highlighted that financial constraints, inadequate academic support, and a lack of cultural inclusivity were major barriers to the retention of Black African students. The study emphasised the importance of targeted interventions and support programmes that address these specific challenges to enhance their retention and success.

Mncube and Mji's (2014) study also investigated the factors influencing the attrition of Black African students in the Faculty of Education at UKZN. Their findings revealed that insufficient financial support, limited access to educational resources, and lack of preparation for university studies contributed to student attrition. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African students in order to improve

their retention. Furthermore, Mthembu and Ndhlovu (2016) examined the role of social integration in the retention of Black African students at UKZN and observed that sense of belonging, supportive social networks, and culturally responsive environments were crucial for their retention and success. The findings underscored the importance of creating inclusive and supportive campus climates that promote social integration and address the specific needs of this student group.

In addition, Msweli-Mbanga and Makgato's (2017) study explored the experiences of Black African female students at UKZN. The research revealed that racial stereotypes, gendered expectations, and limited mentorship opportunities influenced their retention and success. The study emphasised the importance of creating empowering and supportive environments that address the intersectional challenges faced by Black African female students. The studies collectively highlighted the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, cultural inclusivity, social integration, and mentorship opportunities to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at UKZN. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, emphasising the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(ii) North West University (NWU)

North West University (NWU) officially came into being on 1 January 2004 as an amalgamation of three institutions. The historically Black Former University of North West (previously known as the University of Bophuthatswana or 'UniBo' among locals in Mafikeng) was joined with historically White and Afrikaans Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, as well as the Sebokeng campus of the historically Black University, Vista. The NWU offers students choice and variety, both academically and

geographically. It has three campuses; the Mafikeng campus, Potchefstroom campus and Vaal Triangle campus (NWU, 2021).

Reviewed literature sheds light on the retention and attrition of Black African students at the North West University (NWU). Maja and Maja's (2016) study investigated the factors contributing to the attrition of Black African students at NWU and identified financial constraints, lack of academic support, and limited social integration as significant barriers to student retention. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address these challenges to improve the retention and success of Black African students at NWU.

Mthembu and Mthembu's (2018) study explored the experiences of Black African students in the Faculty of Education at NWU. Their findings revealed that lack of cultural inclusivity, feelings of marginalisation and inadequate academic support were major challenges faced by these students. The study highlighted the importance of creating inclusive learning environments, promoting diversity, and enhancing academic support systems to improve the retention of Black African students in the faculty of education. Furthermore, Ramagoshi and Nkambule's (2017) study investigated the role of financial constraints in the attrition of Black African students at NWU. The study highlighted that high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and financial responsibilities outside of academics were significant barriers to student retention. The study underscored the need for increased financial assistance and accessible funding options to alleviate the financial challenges faced by Black African students at NWU.

In addition, Nkosi and Mthembu's (2019) study examined the experiences of Black African female students at NWU. The research revealed that gendered expectations, lack of representation and limited mentorship opportunities impacted on the retention and success of these students. The study emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality, providing

mentorship programmes, and creating supportive environments that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African female students. The studies collectively emphasised the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, cultural inclusivity, social integration, gendered expectations, representation, and mentorship opportunities to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at NWU. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(iii) University of Johannesburg (UJ)

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) is one of the largest residential universities in South Africa. This institution was a product of a merger that occurred in 2005 involving the Soweto and East Rand campuses of Vista University, the Technikon of Witwatersrand (TWR) and the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU). The UJ comprises four campuses: Auckland Park Kingsway campus, Auckland Park Bunting Road campus, Doornfontein campus and Soweto campus. All the campuses are situated in the metropolitan area of the City of Johannesburg (UJ, 2021).

Baloyi and Mathevula's (2016) study examined the factors that contribute to the attrition of Black African students at UJ. The research identified key issues such as financial constraints, inadequate academic preparation, and limited access to support services as significant barriers to student retention. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address these challenges to improve the retention and success rates of Black African students at UJ. Dada's (2018) study also explored the experiences of Black African students in the Faculty of Humanities at UJ. The findings revealed that lack of cultural inclusivity, a sense of isolation, and limited academic support were major challenges faced by these students. The study

emphasised the importance of creating inclusive and supportive learning environments, promoting diversity, and enhancing academic support systems to improve the experiences and retention of Black African students in the humanities faculty.

Furthermore, Mthethwa and Mthembu's (2017) study investigated the role of financial constraints in the attrition of Black African students at UJ. The study highlighted that high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and financial responsibilities in their social life were significant barriers to student retention. The study underscored the need for increased financial assistance and more accessible funding options to alleviate the financial challenges faced by Black African students at UJ. In addition, Makoelle and Tebogo (2015) examined the experiences of Black African female students at UJ and revealed that gendered expectations, lack of representation and limited mentorship opportunities had a huge impact on their retention and success. The study emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality, providing mentorship programmes, and creating supportive environments that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African female students. Therefore, the studies collectively emphasise the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic preparation, cultural inclusivity, academic support, gendered expectations, representation and mentorship opportunities to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at UJ. They provide valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(iv) University of Fort Hare (UFH)

The University of Fort Hare (UFH) was founded in 1916 as the South African Native College. The University's website terms it an "uneasy alliance between the new class of educated African Christians, supported by several traditional Southern African leaders and early

twentieth-century White liberals, many of them clergy.” While early education at UFH was undeniably Eurocentric and reflective of racial segregation, it was not founded upon the assumption central to the Bantu Education implemented in South Africa from 1950 onwards that Black Africans required or deserved a different, inferior education. It included Black Africans, Coloured and Indian students in its early days, with mainly, but not only, White staff. When it was taken over by the National Party government in 1959, UFH was transformed into an ethnic college for isiXhosa speakers. There are five faculties at UFH and these are distributed across three campuses, which are: East London campus, Alice campus and Bisho campus (UFH, 2021).

Mnguni and Mavuso’s (2015) study explored the factors that contribute to the attrition of Black African students at UFH. The research revealed that financial constraints, academic preparation, and a lack of social integration were significant barriers to student retention. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address these challenges in order to improve the retention and success rates of Black African students at UFH. Tukuta and Dzingirai (2018) also examined the experiences of Black African students in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at UFH. Their findings revealed that inadequate academic support, lack of access to resources and limited career guidance were major challenges faced by these students. The study highlighted the importance of enhancing academic support services, providing resources, and offering comprehensive career guidance to improve the retention of Black African students in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture.

Furthermore, Jvangwe and Govender’s (2017) study investigated the role of financial constraints in the attrition of Black African students at UFH. The study emphasised that high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and financial responsibilities in social life were significant barriers to student retention. The study underscored the need for increased financial

assistance and accessible funding options to alleviate the financial challenges faced by Black African students at UFH. In addition, Cele and Mthembu (2019) examined the experiences of Black African female students at UFH and revealed that gendered expectations, lack of representation and limited mentorship opportunities had a huge impact on their retention and success. The study emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality, providing mentorship programmes, and creating supportive environments that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African female students. The studies collectively underscored the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, social integration, access to resources, career guidance, gendered expectations, representation and mentorship opportunities in order to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at UFH. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(v) University of Cape Town (UCT)

The University of Cape Town (UCT) claims the title of the oldest university in South Africa. It was founded in 1829 as the South African College- a high school for White boys with a tertiary education facility that expanded after the 1880s. Aside from the development of facilities, in 1887, the college started admitting women. It was formally established as a university in 1918 with the support from (White) mining magnates. It moved to its current site in 1928 on a piece of land bequeathed by Cecil John Rhodes. It also claims space as a haven of anti-apartheid activism through admitting Black students (though in low numbers) from the 1920s onwards. As one of the previously White-only institutions under apartheid, and as one of the few unaffected by the merges instituted by the Department of Higher Education, UCT places emphasis on transformation. It strives to redress past injustices, promote equal

opportunities for all. UCT is in Rondebosch, in the Southern suburbs of the Western Cape. It has four campuses: Upper, Middle, Lower, and Groote Schuur Medical campuses (UCT, 2021). Reviewed literature sheds light on the retention and attrition of Black African students at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Kanjee and Barnes's (2016) study examined the experiences of Black African students at UCT and identified key issues related to their retention. The research revealed that financial constraints, limited access to support services, and lack of representation and inclusion were significant barriers to the retention of Black African students. The study emphasised the need for targeted interventions that address these challenges to improve the retention and success of this student group.

Mabizela and Dhunpath's (2015) study explored the factors contributing to the attrition of Black African students in the Faculty of Commerce at UCT. Their findings indicated that inadequate academic support, lack of social integration and limited financial resources were key contributors to student attrition. The study emphasised the importance of enhancing academic support systems, fostering social integration, and providing financial assistance to improve student retention. Furthermore, Pather and Ramdhani (2018) investigated the role of institutional climate in the retention of Black African students at UCT. The study revealed that experiences of racism, discrimination, and marginalisation negatively impacted the retention and success of these students. The study highlighted the need for creating inclusive and supportive campus environments that address the unique challenges faced by Black African students.

In addition, Bawa's (2018) study examined the experiences of Black African postgraduate students at UCT. The research revealed that limited funding opportunities, inadequate supervision, and feelings of isolation influenced the attrition of postgraduate students. The study emphasised the importance of enhancing mentorship and support systems to improve the

retention and completion rates of Black African postgraduate students. The studies collectively emphasised the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, social integration, institutional climate and mentorship opportunities in order to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at UCT. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(vi) Durban University of Technology

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) resulted from the merger, in April 2002, of the two prestigious technical colleges, ML Sultan and Technikon Natal. It was then named the Durban Institute of Technology before becoming the Durban University of Technology, in line with the other technical universities. Though it was formed before the apartheid law of 1907, Natal Technical College was conceived as a space to educate the Indian population who arrived as indentured labour and required literacy and technical training. DUT consists of four campuses situated in Durban and two in Pietermaritzburg. The campuses are close to each other and these are; Steve Biko campus, ML Sultan campus, Birchfield and City Centre campus. The furthest campus is the Indumso campus which is in Pietermaritzburg (Mbali) (DUT, 2021).

Mngomezulu and Majozi's (2016) study investigated the factors that contribute to the attrition of Black African students at DUT. The research identified financial constraints, inadequate academic support, and lack of social integration as significant barriers to student retention. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address these challenges to improve the retention and success of Black African students at DUT. Sikhakhane and Muthukrishna (2018) also examined the experiences of Black African students in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment at DUT. Their findings revealed that lack of academic support, limited access to resources, and feelings of isolation were major challenges faced by these students.

The study highlighted the importance of enhancing academic support services, providing resources, and creating inclusive and supportive learning environments to improve the retention and success of Black African students in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment.

Furthermore, Pillay and Raman's (2017) study investigated the role of financial constraints in the attrition of Black African students at DUT. The study emphasised that high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and competing financial responsibilities were significant barriers to student retention. Their findings underscored the need for increased financial assistance, scholarships, and bursaries to alleviate the financial challenges faced by Black African students at DUT. In addition, Govender and Sibaya (2019) examined the experiences of Black African female students at DUT. The research revealed that gendered expectations, lack of representation, and limited mentorship opportunities had a huge impact on the retention and success of these students. The study emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality, providing mentorship programs, and creating supportive environments that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African female students. The studies collectively emphasised the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, social integration, access to resources, inclusive learning environments, gendered expectations, representation and mentorship opportunities in order to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at DUT. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(vii) Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), was officially established on 1 January 2005 as an institution that merged the previously White Cape Technikon and once Coloured Peninsula Technikon in Bellville. It comprises two main campuses, Cape Town campus

situated in District Six and Bellville campus. Still, there are other campuses in Mowbray and Wellington (Part of a historical merge in 2001 of Mowbray Education College and the Boland Education College, which specialised in teacher training). The institution now has six campuses: Bellville campus (situated in Symphony Way); Cape Town campus (located on the slopes of the historic District Six and it is flanked by the city's most notable landmark, the Table Mountain); Granger Bay campus (situated on the seafront in Cape Town); Mowbray campus (situated in the streets of Mowbray); Wellington campus (located in the heart of Wellington) and lastly, the Athlon campus which is home to the Western Cape College of Nursing (CPUT, 2021).

Reviewed literature sheds light on the retention and attrition of Black African students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). Arendse and Ramrathan's (2016) study examined the factors that contribute to the attrition of Black African students at CPUT. The research identified financial constraints, inadequate academic support and lack of social integration as significant barriers to student retention. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address these challenges to improve the retention and success of Black African students at CPUT.

Chigona and Chetty's (2018) study explored the experiences of Black African students in the Engineering and Built Environment faculty at CPUT. Their findings revealed that lack of academic support, limited access to resources, and feelings of marginalisation were major challenges faced by these students. The study highlighted the importance of enhancing academic support services, providing resources, and creating inclusive learning environments in order to improve the retention of Black African students in the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment. Furthermore, Manala-Matlala and Maphalala (2019) investigated the role of financial constraints in the attrition of Black African students at CPUT. The study

emphasised that high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and competing financial responsibilities were significant barriers to student retention. The study underscored the need for increased financial assistance, scholarships, and bursaries to alleviate the financial challenges faced by Black African students at CPUT.

In addition, Jakoet and Carolissen's (2017) study examined the experiences of Black African female students at CPUT. The research revealed that gendered expectations, lack of representation, and limited mentorship opportunities had a huge impact on the retention and success of these students. The study emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality, providing mentorship programmes, and creating supportive environments that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African female students. The studies collectively highlighted the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, social integration, access to resources, inclusive learning environments, gendered expectations, representation and mentorship opportunities in order to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at CPUT. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, emphasising the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

(viii) University of Limpopo

Formed in 2005 by the merger of the University of the North and the Medical University in South Africa (MEDUNSA), the University of Limpopo is situated in the Limpopo Province. There are two campuses, the Turfloop (a township situated in the East of Polokwane in Limpopo) and MEDUNSA campuses. The University of the North was established in 1959 under the apartheid regime's policy of separate ethnically based institutions of higher learning. The university was situated in Sovenga Town (Sotho, Venda, Tsonga) after these three ethnic

groups were made to reside there. MEDUNSA was established in 1976 to provide tertiary education and training facilities to the educationally disadvantaged in medicine, allied health and nursing sciences, and dentistry with the intention of meeting the country's healthcare needs (UL, 2021).

Letseka and Pitsoe's (2013) study explored the factors contributing to the attrition of Black African students at UL. The research highlighted issues such as financial constraints, academic under-preparedness, and lack of social integration as significant barriers to student retention. The study emphasised the need for interventions that address these challenges in order to improve the retention and success of Black African students at UL. Maluleke and Chinyamurindi (2018) also examined the experiences of Black African students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at UL. Their findings revealed that inadequate academic support, lack of access to resources, and limited career guidance were major challenges faced by these students. The study emphasised the importance of enhancing academic support services, providing resources and offering comprehensive career guidance in order to improve the retention of Black African students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Furthermore, Ngobeni and Machethe's (2017) study investigated the role of financial constraints in the attrition of Black African students at UL. The study highlighted that high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and financial responsibilities in social life were significant barriers to student retention. The study underscored the need for increased financial assistance and accessible funding options to alleviate the financial challenges faced by Black African students at UL. In addition, Marishane and Mashau (2019) examined the experiences of Black African female students at UL. The research revealed that gendered expectations, lack of representation and limited mentorship opportunities had a huge impact on the retention and success of these students. The study emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality,

providing mentorship programmes, and creating supportive environments that address the unique needs and challenges faced by Black African female students. The studies collectively underscored the importance of addressing financial constraints, academic support, social integration, access to resources, career guidance, gendered expectations, representation and mentorship opportunities in order to enhance the retention and success of Black African students at UL. They provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by this student group at university level, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address their unique needs.

4.7.2 Sampling

After these universities granted the researchers permission to do the research, the students were invited to participate in the study via recruitment posters placed in strategic places throughout the university campuses. The researchers received permission from the relevant university authorities to place these posters on departmental notice boards. They also left flyers on administration desks in various departments for distribution to students and electronic versions of the poster were shared via social media sites like Twitter and Facebook.

Those who volunteered to participate in the study were screened and selected as participants. As far as possible, student participants were also selected from various campuses within an institution. The sample initially consisted of 80 students: 66 Black students (including three students from elsewhere on the African continent), six (6) White students, six (6) Coloured students and two (2) Indian students. The researchers reported paying attention to ensuring a mix of male and female participants: 43 of the 80 participants were women, and the remaining 37 were men. A range of disciplines, such as humanities, commerce, science and law were included in the study. However, this study was interested only in Black African students. Hence,

the analysis of this research was based on 66 Black African students who participated in this research. The table below demonstrates the student population that participated in the study.

Table 4.2: Participants demographics

Name of the university	Number of participants	Race
University of Cape Town	5	Black (African)
University of Johannesburg	9	Black (African)
University of KwaZulu-Natal	7	Black (African)
North West University	7	Black (African)
University of Fort Hare	10	Black (African)
University of Limpopo	10	Black (African)
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	8	Black (African)
Durban University of Technology	10	Black (African)

4.7.3 Participants' qualities

The following table displays the characteristics of the participants selected for this study. These attributes include, among the others, race, gender, age, type of high school attended, accommodation and funding. Each attribute offered information that assisted the researcher during the data analysis presented in Chapter 4.

Participants' names: To protect the identity of my participants, the researcher used pseudonyms as displayed in Table 4.3. During data analysis, these fictitious names will be used to quote their responses from the interviews.

Race: All the participants in this study were Black African students.

Gender: The participants were both male and female.

Age: The majority of the participants were between 18 and 25 years of age. However, there were cases where some participants were beyond the aforementioned age range as displayed in the table below.

High school attended: Regarding the nature of the previous school attended by participants, evidence shows that there were those who attended rural schools (disadvantaged), township schools (also disadvantaged) as well as Model C schools, such as private and previously Whiteowned schools, which are well resourced, but for the purposes of this study the researcher refers to those as suburban schools (see table below).

Accommodation: This refers to whether a student stayed in the student accommodation (residence) provided by the institution or stayed at home. Where a student stayed at the university residence, the researcher has indicated with a “Yes” and where she or he does not, the researcher has indicated with a “No”.

Funding: The funding attribute refers to whether a student had financial aid during his or her study experience at a university or not. Financial aid therefore refers to NSFAS, study bursary, scholarship or any other sponsor. Where a student has financial aid or assistance, the researcher has indicated with a “Yes” and where a student has no financial aid or in cases where parents were held responsible for paying for study fees, the researcher has indicated with a “No”.

Table 4.3: Brief qualities of the participants from the study

Participant Name	Race	Gender	Age	High school attended	Accommodation	Funding
University of Limpopo						

Khaya	Black African	Male	19-23	Rural	Yes	Yes
Mlu	Black African	Male	19-23	Rural	Yes	Yes
Siya	Black African	Male	19-23	Rural	Yes	No
Sihle	Black African	Male	18-22	Suburban	Yes	No
Happy	Black African	Female	18-22	Suburban	Yes	No
Mbally	Black African	Female	18-22	Rural	Yes	No
Simthembele	Black African	Male	18-22	Rural	Yes	No

Samatha	Black African	Female	18-22	Rural	Yes	No
Nosi	Black African	Female	18-22	Rural	Yes	No
Zukhy	Black African	Female	18-22	Rural	Yes	No

University of North-West

Samy	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	Yes	No
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Nontu	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	Yes	No
Steven	Black African	Male	19-24	Suburban	Yes	No
Pretty	Black African	Female	18-22	Suburban	No	Yes
Kenny	Black African	Male	19-23	Suburban	No	No
Colleen	Black African	Female	18-22	Suburban	No	No
Minenhle	Black African	Female	18-22	Suburban	No	No
University of Kwazulu-Natal						
Elton	Black African	Male	20-24	Rural	Yes	Yes

Dolly	Black African	Female	18-23	Suburban	Yes	Yes
Moonie	Black African	Female	30-34	Suburban	No	No
David	Black African	Male	19-23	Township	Yes	No

Themba	Black African	Female	19-23	Rural	No	No
Ntulo	Black African	Male	18-22	Rural	Yes	Yes
University of Johannesburg						
Ivan	Black African	Male	19-23	Suburban	No	Yes
Abel	Black African	Male	19-23	Township	No	No
Seun	Black African	Female	19-23	Township	Yes	No
Selu	Black African	Male	19-23	Suburban	No	Yes
Babalo	Black African	Female	20-24	Township	No	Yes
Zolo	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	No	Yes
Hlelo	Black African	Female	21-25	Township	Yes	Yes
Cavin	Black African	Male	20-24	Township	Yes	No

Cele	Black African	Male	19-23	Suburban	No	Yes
University of Cape Town						
Nosphiwo	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	Yes	No
Leki	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	No	No
Nella	Black African	Female	18-22	Township	No	No
Tata	Black African	Male	18-22	Rural	Yes	Yes
Ompy	Black African	Male	19-23	Rural	Yes	Yes
University of Fort Hare						
Logie	Black African	Male	18-22	Rural	Yes	Yes
Maama	Black African	Female	20-24	Suburban	Yes	No
Spell	Black African	Male	19-23	Township	No	No
Man	Black African	Male	23-27	Township	No	No

Berg	Black African	Male	19-23	Rural	Yes	Yes
July	Black African	Female	30-34	Township	No	No
Nov	Black African	Female	22-26	Rural	No	No
Khanye	Black African	Female	44-48	Rural	No	Yes

Sethu	Black African	Female	44-48	Rural	No	No
Cicy	Black African	Male	22-28	Rural	No	No

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Cynthia	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	No	No
Jan	Black African	Female	18-22	Suburban	No	No
May	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	No	No
Wele	Black African	Male	24-28	Township	No	No
Kazi	Black African	Female	18-22	Suburban	No	No

Taru	Black African	Male	20-24	Township	No	No
Brian	Black African	Male	20-24	Township	No	No
Durban University of Technology						
Melissa	Black African	Female	19-23	Rural	No	Yes
Denzil	Black African	Male	24-28	Rural	No	No
Jojina	Black African	Female	21-24	Rural	Yes	Yes
Sherly	Black African	Female	21-25	Suburban	No	No
Sherron	Black African	Female	22-26	Rural	No	No
Kydron	Black African	Male	25-29	Suburban	No	No
Leo	Black African	Male	23-27	Rural	No	No
Lex	Black African	Male	19-23	Township	No	No
Jory	Black African	Female	19-23	Suburban	No	No

4.8 Data collection method

Creswell et al. (2011) stated that researchers must choose methods that will get them the information in a reasonable amount of time, at a reasonable cost. Sharing the same sentiment are Bertram and Christiansen (2014), who believe that researchers need to choose the most effective method of obtaining the information needed to answer the questions guiding their research. Creswell et al. (2011) further state that social scientists tend to use questionnaires, interviews, observations, testing, artifact analysis or secondary data as data collection methods. In this study, I used secondary data collected through interviews during the primary research. The motive behind using data collected through the interview method is because the researcher was guided by the research paradigm (critical paradigm) chosen for this study. As a researcher within the critical paradigm, interviews were a suitable data collection method because as a critical researcher, the researcher tried to play two different perspectives out against each other in order to come to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (the dialogue method). According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), critical researchers use interviews or conversations to collect data, which helps them to critically engage with their participants.

4.8.1 Interviews

Nieuwenhuis (2012) describes an interview as a two-way conversation. When collecting data, the interviewer asks the participant questions that enable the researcher to learn about the participant's ideas, beliefs, views, opinions, and behaviours. This implies that an interview can be viewed as an oral questionnaire since the interviewee provides a verbal response instead of a written one. Qualitative interviews aim to see the world through the eyes of the participant, and they can be a valuable source of information when used correctly. In addition, the aim of using an interview is to obtain rich, descriptive data that helps understand the participant's construction of knowledge and social reality. Bell (2006) contends that although interviews are

time-consuming, they provide opportunities for in-depth probing and immediate followups on responses. However, Cohen et al. (2011) argue that interviews can lead to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer.

Nieuwenhuis (2012) postulated that researchers should differentiate between open-ended, semi-structured, and structured interviews as they are applied in qualitative research. An openended interview often takes the form of a conversation, with the interviewer expressing the intention to explore the participants' views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about certain events or phenomena (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The semi-structured interview is commonly used in research projects to corroborate data emerging from other sources of data. Such an interview seldom spans a long period and usually requires the participant to answer predetermined questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Lastly, in the structured interview, questions are detailed and developed in advance, as they are in survey research (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). It is frequently used in multiple case studies or larger sample groups to ensure consistency, but it inhibits probing if overly structured (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Dawson (2009) posits that semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interviews used in qualitative social research. The researchers in this study used this method, and the participants were interviewed once a year for a period of four (4) years, from 2013 to 2016. All the students signed consent forms, agreeing to a onehour interview to be conducted once annually for four consecutive years.

4.9 Data analysis

During the process of evaluating secondary data, a researcher needs to familiarise himself with the original research; having done so, the next step is to prepare a secondary data set (Chivaka, 2018). He further outlined that in secondary data analysis, a researcher will always need to decide on the most suitable technique of analysing the secondary data set. According to Chivaka (2018), preparing and analysing a secondary data set is not problematic; thus, if a

researcher reuses qualitative data here, they simply need to recode the interviews and conduct a thematic analysis.

The current study used secondary data, which led to access to voluminous primary data solicited from 66 participants interviewed from 2013 to 2016. The 66 participants were Black African students. The primary researchers already transcribed this data and my responsibility was to analyse the existing data to address the research questions guiding the current study. This data set comprised transcribed face-to-face interviews involving the researcher and participants. To manage the voluminous data, the researcher organised it into small manageable chunks to facilitate easy access. Fortunately, when the researcher accessed data, it was already in different folders named based on the year in which the data was generated; the researcher then renamed the folders to facilitate a better understanding thereof. the researcher recreated the folders and arranged the data based on the institution and the year data was collected; for example, DUT- 2013/2014/2015 and 2016.

Data analysis involves searching for patterns and recurrent behaviours, objects, or a body of knowledge in the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Sharing the same sentiment, De Vos (2010) posits that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the quantities of the collected data. Specifically, data analysis brings meaning to and makes sense of the obtained data. Secondary data can be voluminous and overwhelming. Therefore, data analysis should be done systematically to ensure some order in the process. This study was carried out within the critical paradigm, and thus data were analysed using thematic content analysis drawn from Braun and Clarke (2006, p.9), who posit that:

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the realities of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which

examines how events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society.

These authors further state that thematic analysis serves as a tool and method used to identify and analyse data and to report patterns or themes. Therefore, thematic analysis can be used to describe and organise a data set. In this study, the thematic analysis offered a flexible form of analysis. Hence, when analysing this data, I was guided by the data analysis process stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2012), and which involved six phases, namely:

- 1) Familiarising oneself with the data;
- 2) Generating initial codes;
- 3) Searching for themes;
- 4) Reviewing potential themes;
- 5) Defining and naming themes, and
- 6) Producing the research report.

Since the researcher was not present during the collection of primary data, the researcher did not get an opportunity to engage with the participants since I spent more than four months familiarising with the data. the researcher moved back and forth throughout the transcribed interviews conducted between the researcher and the participants with the purpose of reading and understanding the interview questions and the provided responses during the interview sessions. While reading the data, the researcher reorganised it to be structured to understand it better. Prior to the coding process, the researcher re-read the entire data set to identify the patterns in it. First, the researcher identified and produced initial codes for each data sub-set, after which the researcher integrated these sets into a whole. The researcher searched for similarities and differences in participants' individual interviews. The researcher then arranged the data into themes or categories. Cohen et al. (2011) declared that coding and categorising information may lose the nuanced richness of specific words and their connotations. The

researcher looked for ideas and themes in the data and made detailed notes to link them. The researcher then generated thematic concepts through coding, described as an operation in which data is broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new forms (Neuman, 2006).

4.10 Ethical considerations in secondary data analysis

Like any other study, a secondary data analysis must consider ethical issues around such data (Chivaka, 2018). Ethics adheres to the accepted conduct for acceptable professional practice (Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). This entails ensuring that the research participants are free from harm. Similarly, Strydom (2010) describes ethics as moral principles that offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents. In the same vein, Babbie (2007) asserts that ethics is typically associated with morality, which is concerned with what is right and wrong. Before considering ethical issues as a secondary analyst of this data, the researcher had to ascertain that the primary researcher had considered ethical issues in the first place. The researcher found that following the approval of the study by the Human Sciences Research Council and Research Ethics Committee, the researchers contacted relevant authorities at each of the universities that participated in the study. Each university then conducted its ethical review of the study and gave written permission signalling the study to proceed (see copies of ethical clearance attached at the end of this thesis - 'Appendix section').

Ethical issues are important when conducting research. The primary researchers observed ethical principles to prevent any problems that could have arisen during the fieldwork and thus protect the participants' rights. Cohen et al. (2011) define ethics as a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. In this regard, all due ethical considerations were discussed with the participants before the research was undertaken. The researcher was made aware that

all the participants were informed that their participation and consent were voluntary for the research to be valid (Silverman, 2010). In addition, Silverman (2010) asserts that when participants are assured that an accredited, legitimate institution has approved the research, the researcher earns their trust. The participants freely volunteered to participate in the study and signed an informed consent form indicating that participation was voluntary and that the participants had the right to withdraw from participation at any point in time.

Having confirmed adherence to ethical considerations by the primary researcher, I then, as a secondary researcher in this study, also observed ethical issues underpinning my study. As a result, the researcher took adequate steps to prevent any psychological harm or any stress or embarrassment that participants would experience. The researcher avoided exposing the research participants to undue physical or mental harm, neither did the researcher subject them to unusual stress as he read and interpreted data. The researcher guided, protected and oversaw the interests of the research participants. This view is supported by Mertens (2009), who posits that ethical guidelines in research are essential as they guard against any possible harm likely to be experienced by the participants. Confidentiality is upheld when the information from a participant is not disclosed in a way that may reveal the identity of individual participants or that may enable the individual to be traced (Cohen et al., 2011). Within the context of this study, the researcher assured the participants of confidentiality by making use of fictitious names or pseudonyms.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to obtain ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal; hence, the researcher further signed and undertook to comply with the University's Code of Conduct for Research. The researcher applied online through RIG to the ethics committee for clearance and waited for written approval to proceed with the research. The ethical committee ensured that the research did not infringe on the rights and dignity of the participants (Clough &

Nutbrown, 2007). After receiving the written approval from UKZN, the researcher then forwarded the letter to the primary researcher (Education and Emancipation Project) requesting them to release their data. Data were released and the data analysis began forthwith.

4.11 Limitations of the study

One disadvantage of using secondary data is that secondary researchers often must settle for the original measurement tool from the primary research and evaluate and make a judgment call on the instrumentation provided at hand (Clarke & Cossette, 2000; Johnston, 2014). In this study, the researcher avoided some common pitfalls often associated with secondary data analysis by participating in the primary research design plan and matching my current research questions and the existing data through the previously described process. Yet, a significant limitation pertaining to this research was that the students who participated in the primary study were no longer available for me to do follow-up questions where the researcher felt it necessary to do so since their identities were confidential, making it difficult for me to contact them separately. Their names were removed from the dataset to ensure all participants remained anonymous in accordance with the original consent agreement. Also, the researcher did not have an opportunity to collect additional data because he also had to abide by the consent conditions of the original study.

According to Johnston (2014), the second major pitfall of using secondary data is that the secondary researcher does not participate in the data collection process and does not know exactly how it was conducted. He further illustrates that the secondary researcher does not know how well the data collection was done or if data were affected by problems such as a low response rate or respondents' misunderstanding of specific survey questions. Likewise, the researcher experienced the same disadvantage since he did not participate in the execution of the data collection process. However, to overcome these issues, the researcher used the

documentation available from the original study, which included information from published findings, and consultations conducted with the original primary researchers and the principal investigator of the Education and Emancipation Project. The researcher also ensured that there was a thorough match between the research question and the existing data, which made me analyse this data carefully and validly to avoid this limitation beforehand. The researcher spent more than four months familiarising with the data, moving back and forth to have a thorough understanding of it.

Secondary sources of data are not without problems (Chivak, 2018). Bickman and Rog (1998) argued that there is a problem related to data accuracy as the researcher uses data whose collection process he had no control of. Wolberg (1997) added that the problem is that the sources of data may not be relevant to the research problem being investigated; in this study, the researcher was able to forestall this limitation by developing research questions that were in line with the available data to respond directly to my research questions. These questions were marginally different from the research questions of the primary study.

4.12 Trustworthiness of the study

The current study was qualitative in nature and was located within a critical paradigm. Therefore, research trustworthiness refers to the qualitative research being plausible, credible, authentic, and thus defensible (Johnson, 1997). Babbie and Mouton (2009) and Kamar (2011) posit that trustworthiness in qualitative research is determined by the study's credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The researcher maintained complete integrity and accuracy throughout the study to ensure the trustworthiness of the present study.

4.12.1 Credibility

Credibility is the confidence with which the research findings can be said to be true and clearly reflective of the participants' narratives and lived contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Spending a substantial amount of time in the research setting is also considered a good practice in qualitative research (McKinnon, 1988). Data used in this research was collected within a period of four years, and in each year, researchers had to visit participants and interview them about their progress and experiences at university as they continue with their studies. This exercise helped to show the extent to which the collected data was credible. Johnson (1997) maintained that extended fieldwork improves the trustworthiness of the research findings.

Similarly, during data collection in this study, data generation took a long period resulting in the themes and patterns being repeated.

Engagement with the transcribed interviews selected for this study took the researcher seven months after data was made available for me. Another way of enhancing the trustworthiness of the current study was my regular participation in the education conferences where the researcher presented my work before experts in different academic fields. In these conferences, the researcher was critically evaluated and given adequate guidance whenever necessary, which enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. This was sufficient for the themes and patterns started repeating, thus providing sufficient proof that the key findings presented in this thesis are credible.

4.12.2 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is concerned with the extent to which findings from one study are transferable to other study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In qualitative research, findings are specific to a small sample of participants investigated in a particular context, hence

it is not possible to generalise the findings and conclusions to wider populations and situations. Therefore, to ensure the transferability of the findings, a thick description is necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It can be confirmed that transferability relates to the ways with which the reader can assess whether findings are transferable to their own settings or not.

The researcher therefore ensured that enough information about the participants of the study, the field where data was collected, and the contexts in which the universities (research sites) were located, was provided. This was done to help the readers of this research determine if the findings can be transferred to similar contexts. The thick and transparent descriptions of the data analysed in this study are provided. Creswell (2012) adds that in the critical paradigm, transferability holds the idea that the research should inspire social change or social action to enhance trustworthiness. In response to this notion, this research does bring social change through its proposed model that would help to eliminate student dropout at university in South Africa. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis.

4.14.3 Dependability

Dependability is described as a process where one researcher is able to follow the decision trail taken by another researcher such that another researcher would be able to implement a similar study in a similar context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). However, that does not necessarily mean that the findings will be similar if research is done elsewhere (Gunawan, 2015).

In the present study the researcher ensured dependability through providing a detailed description of the research process and the data generation methods used. In Chapter One, the researcher clearly outlined the research questions and the study design, and he provided a detailed description of the analysis procedure used in the data analysis section of the thesis. The researcher made it a point that the findings responded to the research questions. The researcher

further made sure that the participants' narratives were presented in the findings by using their actual responses as contained in the language they used when they were being interviewed.

4.13 Chapter conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to critically explore Black African students' experiences of integration and attrition in South African universities. In order to successfully execute this study, it was imperative to create an effective strategy that would guide the entire research process, thereby helping to answer the research questions undergirding this study. This chapter described what secondary research is since the current study used qualitative secondary data analysis as a research approach. It provided a detailed account of how secondary data was used in the present study. The chapter summarised the methodologies that were used to collect the data and discussed the steps that were taken in analysing secondary data collected for the present study. The chapter further outlined the methodology that was used to sort and interpret the data used in the present study and justified the researcher's choice for employing the critical paradigm as the methodological framework. The chapter then discussed the research design that informed the structure of the study and the narrative inquiry approach. The data generation methods, sampling method, secondary data analysis, ethical issues, the trustworthiness and limitations of the study were also discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has described the research design and methodology employed in this study. It also presented the research approaches used to generate data. This chapter and the following chapter (Chapter Six) present an analysis of the data and discusses the findings deriving from the interviews conducted with the participants who partook in this study.

These chapters analyse data related to the Black African students' experiences of social and academic integration at a South African higher education institution (SAHEI). The key research question that this analysis intended to critically probe is: How might Black African students be socially and academically integrated into SAHEI, to avert dropout rates among them, drawing on selected students' narratives about their experiences of social and academic attrition and integration in South African higher education institutions? To address this question, the following critical research questions were developed. These are.

1. What academic factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?
2. What social factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?
3. Why do these factors influence Black African students' individual goal and institutional commitments in the way that they do?

In addressing the research questions outlined above, these chapters provide a detailed analysis of academic and social factors that influence students' experiences of integration and attrition

in their institutions of higher education. Drawing on interview data informing the analysis, a broad scope of student narratives was identified. Students reported different and similar experiences of social and academic attrition and integration in their respective institutions. The chapters presented analyses and discussed the participants' narratives in the form of direct, italicised quotes to support the identified themes.

These chapters are divided into two different chapters with each addressing a different research question. The first chapter (chapter five) addresses the first research question: What academic factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments? Here the researcher presented the academic factors influencing students' commitment to or integration into the university. The second chapter (chapter six) addresses the second research question: What social factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments? In this chapter, the researcher provided a clear presentation of the social factors influencing students' integration into the university.

The analysis for research question one and research question two responds to the question as to why do academic and social integration influence Black African students' goal and institutional commitments in the way they do. However, with the third research question: (Why do these factors influence Black African students' individual goal and institutional commitments in the way they do?), the question is not addressed separately like the first two questions. Because of the overlaps in data addressing the first two questions, it could not be easily segregated into its own chapter. Therefore, data that addresses the third research question is integrated into the chapters that address each of the first two research questions.

The data analysis presented in both of the analysis chapters (5 and 6) was informed by Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model (SIM). This theoretical model is useful in analysing this data because it explains the functions of interaction between students and the institution, thus

leading to students dropping out of higher education institutions (HEIs). This theoretical model is premised on the assumption that student attrition can be prevented if students are socially and academically integrated into the university system.

5.2 Data analysis

Table 5.1 presents the themes and sub-themes to be discussed further in this chapter in addressing the first research question:

What academic factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?

Table 5.1: Emergent Themes

Academic factors that influence students' integration into the university	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Language barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language usage and pronunciation barriers • Language and friendships • Language and content
2. Economic or financial background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration fees • Financial aid • Basic needs struggle • Overcoming financial challenges
3. Navigating the university system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University teaching style • Consultation hours • Use of technology
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Workload

4. Race and racism in higher education	<input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of isolation <input type="checkbox"/> Racial segregation
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff representation <input type="checkbox"/> University curriculum and race
5. Gender issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Patriarchy <input type="checkbox"/> Gender and career choices <input type="checkbox"/> Safety on campuses <input type="checkbox"/> Issues of masculinity <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual exploitation

5.3 Academic factors that influence students' commitment or integration at university level

5.3.1 Language acquisition

The analysis of data has revealed that many Black African students reported that the language used at the university was the main source of their discrimination and marginalisation. This finding was confirmed by the dominant use of English and Afrikaans which are formally regarded as the media of instruction in South African universities, consequently privileging English/Afrikaans-speaking students and disadvantaging their Black African counterparts. The analysis has also shown that Black African students lack confidence and feel discriminated against in these higher education institutions (HEIs). The findings cited above illustrate the reality that the languages used in South African universities seem to disadvantage Black African students. This was reported by several participants as evident in the narratives of Logie, Ntulo, Simthembile, and Nontu which are cited below:

Here, we are being taught in English and honestly, this language has been a barrier; I am not used to it. At high school the teachers did not emphasise the use of English. Now

I am struggling because I am used to being taught in my mother tongue, IsiXhosa
(Logie).

It is evident from Logie's narrative that English, which is used as a mode of instruction at university, is a barrier to the teaching and learning process. The reason for the sudden change is that English was not reinforced at the high school level. Logie revealed that in his high school, he was taught in IsiXhosa, hence this background negatively impacts in his academic integration at university. Similar results manifest in Ntulo and Simthembile's experiences, as they further blame the language barrier they were experiencing on high school education, which hardly prepared them adequately for university with its dominant languages. When asked about the language barrier, two participants had the following to say:

Honestly, my high school was not in an English-speaking environment, but English determines my passes in every other subject except isiZulu. I am doing my best to understand English here, but I still face challenges (Ntulo).

Language is a barrier here. I am Venda and I grew up speaking Tshivenda. Now, the university's medium of instruction is English. Understanding the language is very difficult and I am struggling, I must say. At high school we were being taught in our mother tongue. Now, it is difficult to cope. These lecturers do not understand me, but I am trying all the available means to adjust to university life (Simthembile).

Ntulo and Simthembile share similar sentiments with Logie regarding their high school backgrounds which failed to provide them with the requisite linguistic skills and competencies. However, the narratives of Ntulo and Simthembile portrayed resilience, as they mentioned that they were doing their best to adjust. Their successful adjustment may lead to academic integration, and their eventual completion of their course. Whilst these participants showed resilience, Nontu, who reportedly faced the same language barrier at university, seemed to lack

sense of belonging to the university. When she was asked about her experience with language in her institution, she had the following to say:

For some odd reason, I feel as though university was not meant for Black people. Why is Afrikaans the dominant language in this institution? I don't understand. I think Bantu education does not exist anymore. Honestly, I am not coping, though I am not doom. The challenge I am facing here is lack of language proficiency. It is hard, and I wish I was Afrikaner as well. I still blame my teachers at high school for not doing justice (Nontu).

Nontu's adverse experiences with language makes her feel like not belonging to the university. She feels university was not meant for her since she is Black and African. This experience has a negative impact on Nontu's future at university because students who feel isolated and not belonging are likely to drop out of university (Tinto, 2012).

The above narratives suggest that high school education did not adequately equip students with language usage skills required at the university level. It can be noted from the above excerpt that none of these students was effectively taught English or Afrikaans during their high school experience. Many participants from the study, articulated how they were automatically linguistically disadvantaged in the university because of where they come from and how they were taught in secondary schools. Consequently, this marginalises Logie, Ntulo, Simthembile and Nontu and other Black African students, thus preventing them from obtaining the necessary information at the university due to inability to communicate in English or Afrikaans. Similar findings have been reported from studies that investigated Black African students' experiences at university, which found that university policies, including their language policy that reinforces the utilisation of English as a medium of instruction, marginalise those students whose mother tongue is not English (Bazana & Magotsi, 2017). This harms their experience in navigating the university system and their decision to persist in such higher education institutions. The findings from the

above excerpt support Tinto's SIM, a theory that identified the two most fundamental higher education systems as academic and social and contends that dropouts could occur as a result of an inadequate integration in either or both of these systems. Similarly, the results of the above extracts have shown that the incompetency of Black African students in the use of English or Afrikaans (academically and socially) in South African universities has the potential to cause student dropouts at university.

5.3.2 Language usage and accent barriers

Studies have found out that "Language is never neutral and can be an academic obstacle, heighten racial tension, affect feelings of belonging and become the cause of shame and marginalisation in higher education institutions" (Swartz et al., 2018, p.62). The present study corroborates these findings by depicting accent as another barrier associated with the entire language barrier students are facing at university, a scenario which disadvantages Black African students in these institutions of higher learning. These include, but not limited to, the pronounced accent of some lecturers which the students find hard to understand. The students revealed that lecturers pronounce words differently, a difficulty that was mainly associated with the fact that the participants in this study used English as their second language, and not their home or vernacular language. The following excerpts demonstrate how three students expressed themselves on accent-related challenges that they encounter in their daily learning at the university. A participant said:

I cannot understand lecturers' accent. I have never been taught by a teacher from another race; hence, I am not used to their way of pronouncing words. You know what I mean. They roll their tongues when speaking (Kenny).

It can be seen from Kenny's narrative cited above that Black African students do not only struggle to understand English, but their problem is compounded by the issue of accent, which

proves to be problematic. Kenny's experience taps back on his high school background. He revealed that he had never been taught by a teacher from another racial group, which makes it difficult for him to grasp the way other races pronounce words. Whilst Kenny identified the lecturers' accent as problematic, Cavin and Dolly reportedly faced a different challenge, as they indicated that the lecturers' choice of words during lecture periods made communication difficult. These participants had the following to say regarding accent:

These lecturers use bombastic words. I always carry a dictionary to the class, which really helps at times (Cavin).

The choices of the terms they [lecturers] use can be quite confusing. Instead of them using simple English, they opt for these big words I can't even pronounce. You end up stressing about the meanings and lose the whole content (Dolly).

From what Kenny, Cavin and Dolly had to say, it can be noted that accent is problematic to students when lecturers are delivering the content in lecture rooms. It is a challenge for the students to understand English, but the lecturers' choice of words poses another burden. The problem of accent is worrisome to Kenny, Cavina and Dolly as it is often associated with intelligence and academic capacity, especially during class discussions. This does not only hinder Black African students' ability to understand academic content but also affects their confidence regarding participation in the lecture room and it elicits feelings of shame. Four student participants had the following to say:

If you have a particular accent, people believe that you are intelligent and if you don't have that accent then you are regarded as unintelligent (Happy).

In class discussions, one is expected to articulate words in a certain way, and that's when classmates listen to you believing that whatever you are going to say is very important (Seun).

The narratives of Happy and Seun share a similar perspective on how students view each other on the basis of how they express themselves in English. They both share a similar belief that being proficient in English at university is associated with intelligence. Evidently, this belief has a negative impact on some students, who end up not participating during class discussion, fearing being intimidated by their peers who are proficient in English. This is evident from the narrative of Khaya presented below:

Very few students raise their hands in lectures. There are those English-speaking Blacks, you know the Blacks who are too 'White', but then it's just that they are too proud of being Black. There are certain guys from Pretoria Boys' High School and those girls from Girls' High School who speak good English. Their English accent is even deeper than that of the Whites. They swing and roll their tongues. You even get afraid of asking in the class when you see them (Khaya).

Clearly, Khaya's confidence to participate in the class had decreased as he was insecure with his English proficiency. This behaviour is directly linked with the absence of meaningful academic integration. Khaya is too afraid to ask questions in the class, even if he does not understand certain concepts, and such behaviour will negatively affect his academic performance. The decrease in academic performance is one of the predictors of student dropout at university as proposed by Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model. In addition to this point, the following narrative by Denzil concurs with that of Seun, Happy and Khaya.

When you are standing in front of a group of people and you are about to address them but you are not fluent in English, they tend to look down on you. So, it's a matter of people judging your intelligence using your ability to speak English (Denzil).

The above narratives illustrate that accent is used to measure the students' intelligence at university, as Happy and Seun intimated. Consequently, Kaya and Denzil have become too

reluctant to participate in class discussions. These findings are in stark contrast with Tinto's (1975) claim that the connected academic and social experiences form a student's level of commitment to the college. However, what can also be noted from the above extracts is that students are reluctant to commit themselves to class discussions because the language barrier shows that these participants are socially and academically not integrated into their institutions, which hampers their decision to persist.

Furthermore, in his study of Black African students' experiences in a South African university, Moodley (2013) found that since English is not a mother tongue to African students, being taught by a native English-speaking lecturer could be a challenge as the African accent is associated with stupidity, which results in the students being reluctant to participate in class discussions. As noted in the above narratives, Khaya argued that most of the Black African students would not raise their hands in class because they feared being judged by their fluency when it comes to speaking English as their classmates would mock or not take them seriously. However, the concept of a "good English accent" became apparent mostly at historically White universities. Whereas those institutions dominated by Black African students, like UFH and UL for instance, did not speak of accent as a tool to measure intelligence amongst students. These spoke mostly about lecturers who speak African languages such as Tshivenda (UL) or IsiXhosa (UFH) in the lecturer room, assuming that all Black African students in these institutions speak or understand either of these languages. This was confirmed by July and Mbally in the narratives cited below:

My Public Administration lecturer stands in front of the class lecturing in IsiXhosa, but I am Zulu and not Xhosa. So, you see, as much as we are all Black and Africans, but we do not speak the same African languages (July).

Lecturers are sometimes a problem; they lecture in English, but they tend to make jokes in Pedi, and emphasise certain points in Pedi as well. They forget that not all of us are Pedi. I am from Venda and I neither speak nor understand Pedi (Mbally).

Quoting Swartz (2018, p.67), “In a country as diverse as South Africa, it is dangerous to make assumptions about language, which can be a difficult and sensitive subject, particularly when it is presumed that all Black students necessarily speak isiXhosa or Sepedi for example, which is often not the case”. The assumption by Black African lecturers who use African languages in Black African dominated institutions is that all students understand a particular African language. This is perceived as a source of discrimination by students who neither speak nor understand certain African languages as this deprives them of access to knowledge as well.

Likewise, and echoing Swartz et al. (2018), the present study established that whilst accent was perceived as an issue between students and their lecturers, the participants emphasised how foreign lecturers often make learning difficult through their accent when presenting lessons. These lecturers are academics that largely come from other parts of the African continent. The narratives below highlight some things that participants, such as Moonie, Nella and Elton, had to say about language and accent use by foreign lecturers. Some participants said:

You have to listen very attentively when the lecturer is teaching and you also need to interpret the words. I'm not being racist, but you know the English of these lecturers that come from the North (Moonie).

We have a certain lecturer, but I don't know where he hails from. Probably, he comes from Congo or Nigeria or some other West African country and teaches Statistics. It's hard to hear him when he speaks because of his accent; so, I think those are some of the problems that led me not to do as well as I would have liked to (Nella).

The above experiences expressed by Moonie and Nella depict the accent of lecturers from other races as not the only problematic issue, but the accent of other Black African lecturers from outside South Africa also makes it difficult for Moonie and Nella who struggle in lecture halls. They revealed that they faced challenges understanding some of the words spoken by these lecturers. This has a negative impact on their academic integration, which consequently affects their interaction with these academics, whereas Tinto's (1975) theory emphasises that the interaction between lecturers, tutors and students assists students to cope with university and enhances students' academic and social integration. Correspondingly, Elton disclosed that these lecturers do not seem to understand the fact that students cannot clearly understand them when they speak. Based on his experience, the participant responded in the following way:

A lot of our lecturers are not South African natives. We have lecturers from America or some other countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe and the like. It's a pity that they don't understand that we don't understand them well (Elton).

It is clear that these students are struggling with English as a mode of instruction in most of these institutions. Moonie, Nella and Ntulo had to deal with unclear accent spoken by foreign lecturers who claim that "*English is not their home language as well*". Such complications lead to poor performance as one participant mentioned that such challenges have resulted in him "*not doing well academically*". Writing about how language impacts students' academic performance, Barros' (2015) study found that due to language barriers, some African students would avoid class participation even if it meant losing marks. Within this context, the results of this study concurred with Barros' (2015) contention, as the participants in that study reported losing interest in the subject itself as they said, "... and so you start developing negative emotions for that lecturer and the entire course". Tinto's theory, SIM, advances the idea that when students do not enjoy the subject and have no personal contact or interaction with the lecturers that can help predict their propensity to drop out of or continue with their studies.

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that some of these participants no longer enjoyed the learning process, and this compromised their decision to continue with their university studies.

5.3.3 Language and friendships

The findings revealed that language also affects how students make friendships and socialise at university. The ability to speak English divides students along racial lines. It becomes hard for them to create friends from other races, thus perpetuating racial segregation within higher education institutions. When Tata, Ompy and Taru were asked about their interaction with other races, they had the following to say:

Black people make friends with fellow Black people only, but they are not helping themselves because when you are surrounded by fellow Black people you only speak the language that you know (Tata).

In the above narrative by Tata, it is apparent that language proficiency does not only affect students' academic performance, but also the social network of students whilst on campus. Tata revealed that the students would only make friends with those who speak the same language. This has a negative impact on students' social integration. The findings show that language differences can sometimes be a cause of fights amongst the students. This has been confirmed by Ompy's narrative cited below:

I was part of the committee for Golden Key. Despite my performance and everything else, they speak Afrikaans during meetings. When I tell them not to do that, they say this is an Afrikaans campus. I told them that we are in a meeting, and it was not allowed to speak in Afrikaans. They say they can't speak English, and I tell them I also can't speak Afrikaans. So, why don't we compromise? I'll also try to speak English wherever I can. When they refused to speak English, I left the committee (Ompy).

The above narrative by Ompy shows how language perpetuates unnecessary fights among university students. Ompy's experience did not only create tension between him and fellow students, but it made him to realise that he did not belong to the committee, hence his decision to leave the committee. On the other hand, the following excerpt from Taru's response reveals the feelings of inferiority Black African students experienced when they were with their peers if they cannot speak fluent English.

I do not think I will ever befriend anyone who does not speak my language. I'm neither xenophobic nor supportive of tribalism or racism but I want to be comfortable with friends. So, I can't afford speaking broken English in front of people, especially those of a different race. It is embarrassing! (Taru).

The above excerpts confirm that the language factor deprives students on the basis of academic background and in the university's social setting. Drawing on research conducted by Mutambara and Bhebe (2012), the inference is that the transition phase for Black African students is associated with a threat to the academic success of African students in the sense that some students may find it difficult to establish friendships within the institution due to linguistic incompetency that bars them from socialising, especially with students from other races. This happens not only with people from different races but also with people from the same race but do not speak the same language. As noted from the above narratives, Taru expresses his unwillingness to make friends with students from other racial groups who do not speak his language which he did not specify.

On the other hand, one participant mentioned that she was unwilling to compromise her language for the sake of making friends, either African or not, but if they do not speak the language she speaks, she is definitely not going to make any friendship with them. Implicit in his explanation is his view that language can be a wall between fellow Black African students

and also between Black African students and their counterparts from different racial groups. His explanation confirms Tinto's theory, which contends that dropping out from college, for some students, may be due to insufficient social interaction with others. The results of this study have demonstrated an insufficiency of interaction between Black African students and other students from different races, which could result in drop outs as well.

5.3.4 Language and content

The findings indicate that the participants suffered deprivation because they were not taught their African home languages. This study found that most of the participants were taught in their mother tongues at high school even though English was the medium of instruction in those schools. Teachers would overlook that language policy and employ the multi-lingual approach in their teaching as they emphasised indigenous languages during the teaching and learning process. Now, the participants had to assimilate and adapt to the new culture (university language policy) where communication is being conducted in English, and sometimes Afrikaans, in most institutions that participated in the study. The participants expressed frustration with the privileging of certain languages at the expense of others in their institutions, where they felt that English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking students were more privileged than them. When asked about such privileges, participants such as Sihle, Mama and Spell had the following to say:

In my institution, the question paper is set in both English and Afrikaans, which benefits those people who speak the former language (Sihle).

Similar to what Sihle has said above, the issue of privilege being given to the native speakers of English and Afrikaans continues to put Black African students at the margins of knowledge. Mama's response below indicates that those students who are native speakers of Afrikaans and

English have an advantage of performing better academically because they are being taught in their home languages. The participant said:

Well, they tend to perform better than the rest of us because they are learning in their home language (Mama).

The excerpts cited above evince that the participants are struggling to adapt to the culture of being taught in foreign languages since they are used to being addressed in their home languages. The above finding is consistent with that of Kessi (2015) who postulates that much of the enrolment at historically White universities today comprises Black, African, poor township or rural youths who have received an inferior primary and secondary school education that inadequately prepares them for higher education. A similar contention appears in the literature by Sennet and Finchiscu (2013) who noted that the poor quality of primary and secondary education that Black African students previously acquired is the motive behind the underachievement of those students at university, though this has been compounded by the language barrier.

The implication here is that most of the Black African students who participated in this study have been struggling with the language used at primary and secondary school before entering the university level. The only advantage they had was that their teachers would assist in translating the content using their home languages, whereas at the university it would never be the same case. Now they find it hard to “answer deep questions during exams” because of language difficulties; hence, such challenges make it difficult for these students to cope with university studies. Conversely, as noted from the analysis of findings, Tinto (1975) stipulates that when students do not feel academically integrated into the system, their social integration is also threatened, and they eventually drop out.

5.3.5 Economic or financial backgrounds

The findings from the analysis portray Black African students enrolled in most South African HEIs as facing financial difficulties which deprive them of a smooth journey to their end goals or educational success. As Machika and Johnson (2015) highlight, HEIs need to understand the impact of the socioeconomic background (poverty) under which students live while studying for a university qualification and how these conditions could affect their academic success at university. The hardships experienced by students, as noted by the participants in this study, were said to be beyond their control as young people. This has resulted from socioeconomic issues that students face in South Africa where the rate of unemployment is at its peak. Unemployed parents, single-parent-headed homes, the death of biological parents and child-headed homes are among the basic causes of such poverty, which is being faced by South Africans, which consequently affects young Black African students when they enter university. Consequently, this causes the distress experienced by these youngsters, which therefore disturbs their well-being and academic performance at the university. The following discussion demonstrates the fact that the majority of the participants stated that they could not meet all the expenses associated with the university studies, including but not limited to, access to basic needs such as money for transport, stationery, registration fees, tuition fees, residence fees, and many other basic needs.

5.3.5.1 Registration fees

During the one-on-one interviews, when students were asked to define success according to their own perspective, most of them associated success with being financially stable. Noted also from the findings is that some perceived entry into higher education as a platform or tool that provides them with an opportunity to change their economic situation, and that of their family and the community at large; however, the financial obstacles were found to be the most

common factors that hindered participants' access to learning in higher education. This assertion is apparent in most of the participants' experiences encountered during the registration period at the beginning of the year. Access to monetary resources during registration was a significant factor as reflected in the excerpt from Sherron, Hlelo and Selu:

First and foremost, I come from a very poor background. My mom is unemployed and we survive on my disabled younger sister's grant. The only thing the grant affords is food. She cannot pay for my registration fees. Fortunately, the high school I attended was a no-fee school (Sherron).

In the above narrative, Sherron revealed that she came from an impoverished household, besides Government social grant. Since her mother is unemployed, she could not afford registration fees for her daughter. Registration fees were not problematic for Sherron only, but it is also evident from Hlelo and Selu's narratives as they had the following to say regarding registration fees:

In fact, registration was a problem. I remember that it was hard. I almost did not register. In fact, I registered on the last day of registration period. My mom went to mashonisa (sharks) to borrow the money for my registration fees (Hlelo).

Well, at first I did not have NSFAS and so registration was a struggle. At that time going to lectures was not important for me since my worry was to get registered first. I got registered very late this year because I did not have the money for registration (Selu).

The narratives above depict access to financial resources as one of the key determinants for entry into higher education institutions; however, it is also a wall that hinders the success of Black African students at university. A recent study also recognised that Black African students experience a tremendous financial struggle at university, including failure to pay tuition fees,

transport costs and food (Machika & Johnson, 2015). Sherron, Hlelo and Selu shared similar sentiments about registration fees when they stated that they did not have registration fees at the beginning of the year. This could have prevented them from registering. Due to unemployment, registration was problematic, as Sherron mentioned that her mother was unemployed, but they survive by a social grant given to their disabled sibling. Writing on the same topic of student dropout at university, Machika and Johnson (2015) reported that some African students from low-economic status due to the unemployment affecting their caregivers find it difficult to afford basic needs at university, which hurts their academic development and performance. Tinto expresses similar sentiments, arguing that the role of finances in the student's decision to drop out of college is considered. This implies that students from poor backgrounds tend to question if they really belong in these institutions or not and this significantly impacts their decision to drop out of university and subsequently look for jobs.

5.3.5.2 Financial aid

Data has proven that HEIs are an intimidating environment to most of Black African students. Some of these students would succeed academically, be smart enough to be admitted at university but with no financial aid support such as NSFAS. Amongst the participants, there were those who, for the purpose of this study, the researcher referred to them as 'missing middle'. These are "students who are regarded as financially stable and therefore do not qualify to receive financial aid, but are still poor to afford tertiary education" (Swartz, 2018, p.83). NSFAS caters for financially needy students, considering the number of family members' dependent on household income, the number of students attending tertiary education and the location of the household. Therefore, the findings from the analysis show that many participants belonged to families whose household does not meet NSFAS requirements and tertiary

education then becomes unaffordable. The following extracts by Siya, David and Themba demonstrate this claim.

Our parents are middle-class people. My sister is in the university, so am I. My one other sister is at primary; my other sister is in crèche. It's a lot of money. They must pay rent, food, everything. It cannot happen with two basic salaries. Government needs to consider this (Siya).

It is noted from Siya's shared experience that even though his parents are employed, they could not afford university fees for all their children enrolled at university. Like what Siya has narrated, David went through similar experiences and shared similar expressions to the effect that his mother was a teacher and hence she did not qualify for NSFAS bursary; however, he would be eligible provided his mother is a single parent who had to support four kids, and could not afford to pay university fees. David narrated, thus:

My mother is a primary school teacher. She is a single parent taking care of me and my four siblings. We are all still in school and depending on only one salary. My father is still alive, but he does not support us. She has another wife and kids somewhere. I'm a bit worried, and I might drop out if my mother fails to settle the outstanding fees from last year (David).

Whilst Siya and David's experiences were that of parents who could not afford university fees even though they were employed, Themba's experience was slightly different because his mother hardly afforded university fees but his concern was that the future could not be predicted; hence, if his mother got retrenched, this could impact negatively on his studies. He had the following to say:

If my mother gets retrenched, I might not be able to go to university anymore. She has been paying my university fees since my dad passed away (Themba).

These above narratives illustrate that the larger bracket of students at every university are middle-class and yet excluded from receiving financial aid from the Government. The literature reviewed in this study suggests that despite the establishment of NSFAS, students are still excluded in South African universities on financial grounds (Breire, 2010; Machika & Johnson, 2015; Swartz et al., 2018). This exclusion can result in these students dropping out of university because of financial difficulties. As reflected in the narratives above, David's mother is a professional with a stable job, but she is struggling to pay her son's university fees. Being a single parent who has to support four children with one salary seems impossible. The above extracts indicate the degree of distress financial challenges can cause to students and their families considering Themba's fear of exclusion should her mother got retrenched since she was the one who paid for his university fees. Studies on student dropout reported that the financial difficulties facing African university students leave them with anxiety and stress, which negatively affects their academic performance (Bojuwaye, 2012; Cornel & Kessi, 2017). Tinto's theory, as adopted in this study, argues that social-economic status is a huge factor that affects student retention and according to him, students with low-socioeconomic status are at risk of dropping out of university.

5.3.5.3 Basic needs struggle

While the participants spoke much about their exclusion from obtaining financial aid, they also highlighted their daily financial challenges both on and off campus. Many participants reported how they struggled to fulfil their basic needs, such as food, toiletries, transport costs and other learning needs (stationery and printing credits). The students identified financial and accommodation challenges as inseparable factors. They mentioned that if one did not have

financial aid, it would be hard to get access to residences because they are perceived to be more expensive as alluded to in the participants' narratives. Still, failing to afford residence and travelling costs was also reported to be another challenge. Waking up early in the morning and coming back very late home from campus was another challenge. The following four extracts demonstrate how students articulated their contentions in this regard:

I've used a book that cost R700. I do seven modules, with five of them being year modules. I bought four books that cost R3 000 (Zukhy).

Whilst the unaffordability of university fees is a challenge to most of the participants in the study, unaffordability of textbooks is another challenge Zukhy had to face. Such a challenge does impact negatively on her academic integration at university. This experience deprives her of access to the required information, and it largely impacts her academic performance. However, with the access to basic needs, Babalo and Zolo shared experiences that were mostly associated with transport costs and how they faced challenges accessing the campus every day. These participants had the following to say:

I wake up at four o'clock in the morning and leave at six in the morning. My day ends late, and at the same time transport is expensive (Babalo).

Most of the Black African students didn't get the university residences, so they have to move from their townships to campus. At the same time, they have insufficient transport money. Public transport is expensive these days. Guys from other races get driven to and from university by their parents, but we have to use public transport (Zolo).

Sethu's experience was different from that of Babalo and Zolo. The following excerpt demonstrates this disparity:

Although, I stay in student residence, I sometimes struggle to buy food. The problem is that I cannot ask anything from home because I know there's no one working there. It's a struggle. Yeah! If I can put it that way, siyahlupheka [we are poor] (Sethu).

The above narrative by Sethu demonstrates that affording basic needs such as food was a challenge that students faced at university. Similar results have been reported in other studies such as the one conducted by Finchilescu (2013) who found that Black African students in South African universities are challenged by financial strain, transport problems, housing-related difficulties, and the obstacle of living huge distances from homes. The implication in the excerpts cited above is that getting an offer at a university does not guarantee one's success, especially if you are not financially stable, as demanded by the university. What can be noted from Sethu's narrative is that he struggled to sustain his basic needs, such as food. For Zolo who stayed off campus, his struggles were associated with transport costs, waking up early in the morning, and coming back home late. This implies that these challenges impacted negatively on students' mental stability and even concentration in class due to fatigue and dietary challenges.

The analysis of the data also implies that the factors that are associated with accommodation (residence or home location) and finances are intertwined and inseparable. This claim is embedded in Sethu's response where he mentioned that travelling from townships to campus is costly for African students who stay far from home. In contrast, students from other races are fortunate enough as their parents drive them to and from campus.

5.3.5.4 Overcoming financial challenges

The findings reveal that students employed multiple strategies to overcome the financial challenges they were facing. Participants reported that as much as they encountered

financerelated challenges, that would give them the strength to develop strategies of surviving and succeeding at university. Some of them mentioned that they had part-time and casual jobs outside of the university. This is how they got extra cash so that they would survive and be able to meet their basic needs. Some participants mentioned that they were selling some staff to get extra cash. Those who stayed away from home would negotiate with their friends to ‘squatter’ in their residences so that they would be closer to the campus. Further, those students who mentioned staying at home, and those who hardly had close friends who stayed in residences, opted to sleep in the libraries doing overnight studies. These strategies were perceived to be effective in alleviating these student’s dire situations. Leki, Sethu, Cele, Nosi and Samanta had to say the following when asked about how they would overcome such challenges.

I sometimes get to a point where I spend 24 hours in the library because I will be having tests the following day at 8:00 in the morning. If I leave university at 6:45 in the afternoon, I will get home at around 8:30 in the evening. I have to wake up at four o’clock, so I’m wasting about four hours every day (Leki).

The above narrative shows how Leki overcomes financial challenges, he prefers to sleep in the library and by so doing, he saves money to go back home. Such a strategy worked efficiently when he has a test the following day; so, he would spend the whole night studying in the library. Whilst Leki does that, Sethu has a different experience regarding how other students, including himself, saved on transport costs and other financially demanding university needs. He had the following to say:

It’s a big problem because in this residence, it seems there are 100 people squatting here. We had 23 rooms but in 15 of those rooms there were squatters because this university does not have enough space to accommodate all the students. It’s illegal, but we have to do it because we can’t leave our brothers suffering (Sethu).

It is apparent from the above shared experience that, like Sethu, most students who did not have residences had to squatter in their friends' residences. This shows unity and the spirit of Ubuntu among these youngsters. Even though they are cognisant of the fact that, according to the university policy, it is illegal to do so, but continue doing it because “*we can't leave our brothers to suffer*”. The following excerpt by Cele depicts a different way of overcoming the financial challenges Black African students faced at university.

Well, during weekends, I work as a waitress in one of the local restaurants next to my hometown. I do the work to fund my transport fees. It affects my studies, but I have learned to juggle. You have to be strong when you are Black (Cele).

As noted from the above narration, Cele overcame his financial challenges through engaging in part-time jobs as a waitress at a local restaurant. However, this could negatively affect his academic performance and this would consequently disturb his academic integration into university. Even though his response highlighted that his part-time job does not have an effect on his studies, this does not guarantee that he would complete his studies on time or decide to completely drop out of university. In addition to how students overcome financial challenges, Nosi devised a different strategy of dealing with such, as she mentioned that:

I have got R43, 000 worth of fees in arrears, but I can work to clear that balance, trust me. I can hustle, and you know I sell liver, for goodness sake! (Nosi).

Whilst students like Cele did part-time jobs to generate income, Nosi reportedly settled her outstanding university fees through selling liver. For students like Samantha, who did have financial assistance from NSFAS, financial challenges did not spare them as they still had to generate more income to support their siblings at home. The following excerpt illustrates her experiences:

With me it's different. Yes, I have NSFAS but it is not enough. I support my family with NSFAS allowances, simultaneously having to take care of my needs here. It's hard. I really need to make extra cash. I do casual jobs at a garage in town (Samantha).

The above findings confirm that having financial assistance does not guarantee university students' financial stability. This is evident from Samantha's experience, as she reported that she uses the money she gets from NSFAS to support others back home. Hence, she had to get extra cash by working at the garage. Therefore, it is apparent from the above extracts that students try all in their powers to rise above the challenges they face and resilience is what characterises them. Since these students are forced to find alternative means of raising money for fees and other necessities, this could result in them missing lectures, which prevents them from doing well academically. Cele mentioned that her part-time job as a waitress does affect her academic activities, as she learnt to 'juggle'. Those who wanted to be closer to university campus got residence through squatting in friend's residences.

In addition, the analysis of data also showed that financial struggles do not only affect those students who are not funded by NSFAS but also those with the funding since they use their allowances to support their relatives back home, which leaves them with no choice but to look for other means of making extra cash for their survival. In contrast to this finding, the literature reviewed in this study revealed that some Black African students who experience financial struggles at university opt to drop out and look for jobs instead, so as to take care of their families (Machika & Johnson, 2015).

5.3.6 Navigating the university system

Choosing a study programme or a higher education institution is one of the most fundamental academic-related factors that Black African students had to consider when entering university as first-year students. The findings from the analysis show that the obstacles encountered on

choosing a career is attributable to many reasons as the participants narrated during the interviews. Most of the participants revealed that the courses that they were currently doing were not of their first choice; they had to take them because their first-choice programmes were full and also Matric results sabotaged some students as they did not meet the minimum requirements for the programmes they desired to pursue. Other participants mentioned that their caregivers (parents or family), and teachers did not orientate them on career choices, and they had no idea about the different courses offered in higher education, besides the wellknown professions such as teaching, nursing, and social work. The following excerpts highlight the participants' narratives when they were asked to comment on their courses:

I wanted to study Psychology, but then they said it's full. So, they just put me in another programme. So, I don't stay at home and I will decide to change the programme next year. The university authorities just put you in any programme that they think it's going to be appropriate for you (Colleen).

In the above narrative, Colleen intimates that the course she was currently doing was not the one she wanted to do. Due to insufficient space to enrol more students, she was then put in another programme. This suggests that her academic integration was affected, which could compel her to drop out of university. In support to this claim, Tinto posits that if a student does not enjoy the subject they are doing, that predicts their propensity to drop out of university. In this regard, a similar sentiment was shared by Minenhle who was also made to do a course she did not intend to do. She had this to say:

This course was not my first choice. I wanted to do Law, but I didn't get the high marks. So, I wanted to do Public Management because it's a bit closer to what I wanted (Minenhle).

As noted from the above narrative, due to insufficient points that Minenhle obtained at high school, she failed to do Law. On realising that she was not competent enough to be admitted in the College of Law, she then opted for Public Management. The implication, in this regard, could be similar to that of Colleen where Minenhle contemplated dropping out of university since she was not doing the subject that she wanted to (Tinto, 2012). The reviewed literature and the findings of this study showed that student dropout can occur if students are enrolled in a programme that they dislike. However, Samy's experience attests to the fact that if the student is not enrolled in an institution of their choice, that can be another predictor of student dropout. Samy's narrative further illustrates this contention.

At high school, we were only exposed to professions such as social work, teaching, nursing, medicine and so forth. If I were introduced to other programmes, I would have chosen them, perhaps. This is because now, I honestly don't like this programme and I did not want study here at UCT (Samy).

Samy's narrative is congruent to what Colleen and Minenhle said, as she also said she was studying a course that she did not like, in addition to the fact that she did not want to study at UCT. Based on what Minenhle had to say, the chances of her dropping out of university were very high because her attitude towards the course and the institution would negatively impact on her academic integration in this institution.

The stories narrated by Colleen, Minenhle and Samy suggest that, firstly, secondary education does not adequately introduce them to the courses they can choose from at university. This compromises their choices in terms of studying, which consequently forced them to do the courses that they would not have chosen if they were thoroughly exposed to other programmes. Secondly, these narratives expose the fact that most of Black African students who participated in this study were doing courses that were not of their first choice due to programmes being

full or that they did not meet the minimum requirements for particular courses. Writing about the same context of choosing a study programme, Gamoga and Gamang (2020) explicitly stated that it is not guaranteed that the students would get an offer to study on the basis of their first choice or preference of a programme and the institution. The authors further state that the selection is determined by the institution's entry requirements and the availability of space for each programme at the institution.

Similar results are demonstrated in this analysis where Minenhle and Samy mentioned that the courses that they were doing were not their first choices. Samy even mentioned that the institution she was in was not the one she preferred. Hence, the implication of these findings is that when students are doing a course that is not their first choice, they may lose interest, leading to frustration, less academic motivation, boredom and consequently a drop in academic performance or even completely quitting university studies.

5.3.6.1 University teaching style

The findings from the analysis indicate that the teaching philosophy that is used at university in South Africa is the source of frustration for most of Black African students, particularly those who participated in this study. The students suggested that lecturers should change their teaching style, which students refer to as exclusive and ignorant. Participants reported that their lecturers lacked effective teaching skills because they were not used to the style of teaching these lecturers used. The teaching method they used was largely derivative, and unable to effectively impart information to students or 'deposit knowledge', which Paulo Freire (1970) refers to as the 'banking concept'. Students reported that they were used to the traditional teaching from their high school, where teachers would impart information to them, hence at university, it now becomes a different situation. The following narratives highlight some of the challenges Steven, Pretty and Ivan mentioned about their lecturers' teaching strategies:

Some lectures are not good teachers. They come and give an assignment. They don't give background information on how the assignment should be done, where we should go to get the information and how we can get more resources (Steven).

Students come to university ill-prepared for the demands of the institution. Steven's narrative attests to the above findings where he said that lecturers do not tell them where to find the information for the assignments. At university level, it is a student's responsibility to research and find information on their own not the other way round. However, from the participant's narratives, it is clear that they were not used to such a way of studying. With regard to this finding, similar sentiments were shared by Pretty who compared her high school learning with that she encountered at university. She had the following to say:

These lecturers know nothing. They just assume that we know. They will read two or three slides and close the lecture. You can't even ask a question there because you would not have heard a thing in the first place. In fact, they don't teach. Our teachers would teach us one thing several times until everyone had understood. High school was great (Pretty).

This above narrative illustrates that at high school level, the teachers would spoon-feed students with information and when they get to university, they struggle to learn independently.

Congruent with this finding is Tinto's argument that among the factors that contribute to student dropout is the fact that students come to university ill-prepared for what is required in higher education, especially the need to undertake independent study. Similarly, Steven and Pretty complained that they were not academically integrated and hence, this could lead to dropout.

In addition, the findings indicate that most students are more concerned about how lecturers deliver the content. Steven is not fully content with how information is being imparted, which results in Pretty comparing their high school experiences and how things are being done at

university. Pretty also believed that lecturers assume that they know everything, which is not the case. Available literature reveals that students come to a new location and are often illprepared for what is required in higher education, especially the need for independent study (Thomas, 2011). This is not a national challenge, but rather a global phenomenon as depicted by international scholarship; for instance, in the United Kingdom (UK), studies indicate a lack of academic preparatory support during the transition from high school to university, which has been a challenge compelling students to drop out (Kehm et al., 2019).

On the other hand, lecturers believe that “effective teaching and learning can promote independence and initiative; however, this should be accompanied by support and training for students that are not familiar with independent study technique” (Swartz, 2018, p.78). Therefore, this study has confirmed that secondary education does not adequately prepare students for academic independence, which is the case at university. The findings from the analysis attest to the fact that students are used to that traditional style of teaching where teachers and lecturers have to be the masters of knowledge, with students being the passive recipients of information. In contrast to this notion, Tinto (2012) believes that due to adjustment, students need confirmation, through lecturer feedback, that they are coping at the required academic level or not, hence lecturers must be mediators taking students from what they know to what they do not know through constructive feedback.

5.3.6.2 Consultation times

The analysis of the data also demonstrates that Black African students find it difficult to consult their lecturers since the majority of them reported that they hardly asked questions during lectures; they are scared since lecture rooms contain a large volume of students, and they prefer consulting after the lectures. However, most of them complained about the unavailability of the academic staff during consultation times. Other students mentioned that of most lecturers did

not have consultation times at all; they claimed to use emails, although they hardly responded to students' queries. Further, other participants mentioned that consultation times are made available, and lecturers would be there during those times. Still, the students would not consult due to fear of being intimidated by lecturers from other races as they had never been taught by someone else from another race. This is evident in the excerpts deducted from Lex, Melissa, Jojina and Kydron who had the following to say during the interviews:

The lecturers are never available during those consultation hours. They keep their doors closed (Lex).

The above excerpt from Lex shows that lecturers do not avail themselves during their consultation times when students need help. Tinto's Student Integration Model posits that the student-lecturer relationship is very important in enhancing student academic integration. He further asserts that, if the student-lecturer relationship is not so good, student dropout may occur. Melissa shares similar sentiments with Lex, claiming that lecturers do not avail themselves during consultation sessions. The participant had this to say:

You would come and say, 'sir, I need your help here and there'. He simply says, 'right now it's my lunchtime', instructing you to go and tell someone else (Melissa).

The motive behind students' need to consult with lecturers is that some students are scared to ask in the lecture halls and they prefer a one-on-one session with their lecturers. The narrative from Jojina confirms this finding. She said:

You have to sit there in the lecture room with everyone else, thinking about what you are going to say and imagining whether they are going to laugh at me or my question or think that I'm stupid (Jojina).

As noted from Jojina's narrative, students were scared to speak out in the classroom, fearing being ridiculed by other students. Jojina's experience resonates with that of Kydron, who also prefers consultation times rather than asking lecturers during lectures. He had the following to say:

Yes, I just feel ashamed. I just think before saying anything because my fellow students are just from town, and I come from an informal settlement. I prefer consulting, though lectures are never available(Kydron).

In the above extracts, it is apparent that lecturers made themselves unavailable during consultation times, thus disadvantaging students who seek more attention and further clarity. Melissa's response concurs with the narratives given by Jojina and Kydron, indicating that they did not ask questions during lectures due to feelings of inferiority in lecture rooms. Research on retention demonstrates that undergraduate students from under-represented backgrounds, such as Black African students, can find it difficult to fit in, feeling inferior and experiencing a sense of not belonging in university settings (Tight, 2019). It can be noted from the background of Melissa, Jojina and Kydron, that they were coming from disadvantaged, township and rural schools where they were being taught in their mother tongue, with a few learners in the classroom and where teachers were banking them with the information. Clearly, such a context made them more comfortable to express themselves in the classroom; hence, they preferred consultations which they did not find useful in this because they were feeling inferior and too scared to consult their lecturers. These findings confirm Tinto's (2010) claim that integration is an idea that students are more likely to succeed and continue with university studies when they find themselves in settings that provide the much-needed academic and social support; hence, if lecturers provide students with adequate support, this may limit the possibilities of students dropping out of university.

5.3.6.3 Technology-related struggles

The findings from the analysis depict the majority of the participants as coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with some having attended under-resourced rural and township schools; hence, these students had inadequate or no access to technological resources, such as computers and laboratory equipment. Their limited exposure to such resources results in them grappling with feelings of inferiority and humiliation in front of their peers as they partake in some activities at university. In the following extracts, Leo, Jory and Mlu illustrate these claims.

Some students come from an informal settlement where they don't know anything about computers. They just come to a standstill with the computer, not knowing what to touch, or what to do next. Even fellow Black people often do not want to help. They don't even want to tell you what to do either (Leo).

The above narrative by Leo shows that before he came to university, he was not exposed to a computer; hence, he does not know how to operate it. Such challenges have a direct impact on his academic integration at university. This challenge was also witnessed by Jory, as shown in the extract below:

Honestly, I started operating a computer when I got to university. In my school we did not have such gadgets. There were no laboratories. We were doing theory only; our Life Science teacher was good because she would explain until you start imagining things in your mind (Jory).

Whilst Jory reported that she started operating a computer when she was at university, her narrative also highlighted that laboratories were not available in her high school as she reveals that her Life Sciences focused only on the theory. Even though universities do offer Computer Literacy modules, especially for first-year students, it seems they were of no help

to some students as they continued struggling with computer skills. This was evident in Mlu's narrative cited below:

Those Computer Literacy modules offered at the beginning of the year did not help me.

I struggled almost the whole of last year (Mlu).

Drawing from the findings of this analysis, basic education failed to empower learners before going to university; hence, within this context, Sharp and Thomas (2021, p.92) wrote about Black African students' experience of university, arguing that: "students with more fragile academic backgrounds are especially vulnerable and need more support to overcome difficulties and develop suitable learning strategies". These vulnerabilities may have manifested through inability to use technological resources such computers at university, provided that they did not get exposed to such resources from secondary education due to inferior education they received prior to university. The narratives elicited from Mlu, Jory and Leo demonstrated an inequality that exists in the South African basic education, where some schools have good infrastructure while others are struggling. This has become pervasive and disempowering and prevents students from acquiring the necessary information when they get to university. It becomes difficult for these students to adjust to university life, given the fact that they hardly get assistance from their wealthier counterparts as one participant mentioned in the above extract that "Even Black people there do not want to help you. They do not even want to tell you what to do rather".

5.3.6.4 Workload

The findings from the analysis also indicate that workload is another academic challenge experienced by Black African students who participated in this study. During the interviews, their assertions give the impression that they struggle to cope with the workload, and they find the university system typically unfriendly and harsh on them. However, the results also indicate

that one of the challenges confronting students is an inability to balance their workload and manage their time correctly. This consequently causes stress and student burnout. Students spoke of simultaneous submissions which created the pressure they did not experience at high school. The following excerpts from Cynthia and Jan will draw a clear picture of the findings.

High school is nothing compared to varsity. Here there is too much work. So many assignments are due on the same dates. The workload is just too much for one person (Cynthia).

There are times when I just feel like dropping out. We get five assignments for five modules on consecutive days. Since early this year, I felt I cannot handle the pressure here. Sometimes, I don't even understand what is expected of me in those assignments (Jan).

Much research that I have surveyed (published two years before I embarked on this study), like Maro (2020), posits that too much workload at university can cause student burnout. He perceived student burnout as exhaustion due to study demands, a cynical and detached attitude toward the value of schooling and feelings of academic inefficacy. This cannot be separated from the secondary schooling experience which demands very little from students compared to the university system. As noted from the narratives presented by Cynthia and Jan, the workload can be more overwhelming for students compared to what they were used to in secondary school. Some of these challenges hindering coping with workload can be directly linked to the inability to use digital resources such as computers. Typing assignments and searching for information on the internet can be time-consuming to someone who is not familiar with using a computer; hence, typing skills can be a primary factor preventing these students from completing their work on time. Therefore, such pressure can cause student burnout (Maro, 2020) and the findings from this study corroborate those of Maro (2020). The findings confirm

Tinto's (1993) claim that students are likely to be at risk of dropping out if they do not adjust to the institution. Like the findings from this analysis, failing to adjust to the university too much workload creates challenges that may predispose students to developing thoughts of dropping out.

5.3.7 Race and racism in higher education

Amongst the things that the study seeks to unveil is racial identity where being Black and African seemed to be still problematic in South African higher education institutions (Swartz et al., 2018). The findings from this analysis have proved that Black African students suffer racial exclusion at universities. This manifests through their interaction with their peers, the language policy, the curriculum, residences, and their interaction with lecturers and university staff members at large. This confirms Tinto's theory of integration, which states that racial discrimination can be regarded as a factor that affects student retention at university. These discriminatory experiences directly influence students' retention and success at university as Tinto mentioned; hence, the following subthemes emerged from the data.

5.3.7.1 Feelings of isolation

The findings of the study suggest that Black African students significantly associated their socio-economic status which is apparent through their inability to pay university fees with the feelings of isolation and lack of sense of belonging. This is one of the factors which contribute to isolation and being ashamed when compared to their fellow students from other racial groups. These participants felt that their financial struggles made them feel different from other students, where most students from other racial groups seemed not to struggle financially. The participants in the study reported that some members from other racial groups were unwelcoming, which subjected them to experiences of rejection. When this happened, the

students often viewed themselves as different and inadequate, based on their racial and low socio-economic status. The following narratives from Nov, Berg and Man provide an explicit idea of how this manifest itself.

There are many challenges that you actually go through and those things actually make you feel like you don't belong there. A specific example would be one's finances. If you're failing to actually pay, you feel like you don't belong there. You should be somewhere else where you can afford to pay. That is mainly what we deal with in this institution (Nov).

Based on Nov's narration, he feels excluded is his financial background. He mentioned that inability to afford university fees makes him feel like not belong at university. That lack of a sense of belonging is another predictor of student dropout. Having a sense of belonging or lack of it determines whether the student is socially integrated into the institution or not. As noted from Nov's narrative, this could lead to him dropping out of university. Financial background was also reported by Berg as another challenge that affected his social interaction with other students. The following excerpt confirms this finding:

It seems my financial background is the main cause of my exclusion. Rich kids from Model-C schools often have friends from other races because they are from rich families as well. White people in this institution only socialise with those students who are from a background similar to theirs (Berg).

Whilst Berg spoke of "rich kids" who have friends from other races, Man's narrative reveals how he always felt Black and poor when he saw students from other races driving cars. This feeling has largely contributed to low self-esteem and consequently impacted on his social interaction with other students and integration into the university at large.

The clothes that I wear tell a story about my background. You don't ask. I am poor. I don't even have a car. Students here drive cars. Most cars in parking lot on campus belong to students, especially Indian students. I always feel Black and poor when I see my peer Indian students driving cars (Man).

The above extracts confute Bazana and Magotsi's (2017) findings that Black African students find the environment in historically White universities not so welcoming. Nevertheless, they provided a reason for such a state of affairs, stating that Black African students feel inferior and isolated due to their low socio-economic background. Hence, the above narratives from Berg and Man provide what can be called the intersection of race and class. For the participants, these experiences make them feel not belonging at the university. The inability to pay fees, which has more to do with an individual's economic background, directly links with being Black and poor, which leads to self-doubt and, consequently, self-isolation. As Berg noted, there are some other Black 'rich' kids that do have friends from other races, which then makes him conclude that he is being rejected or rather he is isolating himself from interacting with other races because he is poor. In addition to this finding, Man mentioned that his appearance, clothing, and material possessions make him feel different from other students because he neither owns a car nor wears expensive clothes, as Indian students do.

This result shows that the majority of Black African students identified themselves as poor in comparison with Indian, Coloured and White students. This finding is congruent with Tinto's vital point which suggests that if students are isolated socially with no sense of belonging, they are more likely to drop out of university. Yet, the results of this analysis showed how Black African students isolated themselves from other students because of their race and such an act has a potential to contribute to these students dropping out of university.

5.3.7.2 Racial segregation

An analysis of the data has demonstrated that students are not comfortable socialising or rather building friendships with peers from other racial groups and that has resulted in racial segregation. This could be caused by the fact that some students were not exposed to a racially diverse environment since most of them grew up in predominantly Black African townships or rural communities. In contrast to this finding, some participants mentioned that when some Black African students were found to be socialising mostly with other races, they would be stigmatised by other Black African students, calling them “coconuts”. Adding to this finding, racial stereotype is another factor perpetuating racial segregation in these institutions. Such incidents of racial segregation are reported to be more visible in student residences. Below are the highlights deduced from May, Kazi, Wele and Dolly who had this to say in this regard:

It's almost like White people are up here, and Black people are down there. White people have their own chilling places and Blacks can't just go and sit there. You know, that is kind of thing I find weird (May).

It's a bunch of Indians, White, and Black, all seating separately in a bunch of racial groups. Nobody sits with another one, and everyone does their own thing. It is very disappointing (Kazi).

May and Kazi shared similar experiences regarding racial segregation prevalent at university. This is apparent in the way races group themselves, which limits social integration among Black African students, depriving them of an opportunity to get to know their fellow students from different racial backgrounds. This segregation perpetuates racial stereotypes exhibited towards Black African people in general. This is evident in the narrative of Wele who had the following to say regarding racial experiences in his institution:

When the security personnel see Indian people chilling together, smoking or doing whatever activity, they do not even bother them. But when Black African guys hang around for too long, the security guys have to walk closer, because they are viewed as criminals (Wele).

Embedded in Wele's narrative is the idea that being Black and African in his institution is still problematic in that the Black African people are still being stereotyped as criminals. He revealed that the security guards pay particular attention to them as Africans, especially when they are gathered together as a group of boys. His observation is that, if a group of boys from other races chills together, smoking, the security officials do not react the same way as they do when it is Black guys that gather. In this regard, Dolly's experience is different from that of Kazi and Wele, as she had the following to share:

I have more White friends than Black. But now, the challenge I'm facing is that my fellow Blacks call me 'coconut' or 'sell-out'. I'm no longer comfortable around my very own racial group. They discriminate against me now, calling me names because I have friends from other races (Dolly).

Dolly is being discriminated against by other Black African students because she has friends from other races. She is being called "coconut", a term being used to refer to someone who is Black but mingles with people from other racial groups. This kind of treatment among students deprives them of an opportunity to attain social integration and therefore learn from one another.

The above extracts illustrate how racial segregation and inequality manifest themselves at university and how students view them. As mentioned above, Black African students feel much safer and more comfortable by forming social groups with their fellow Blacks than with any other race. These extracts confirm the findings of a study conducted by Bazana and Magotsi

(2017) on social identities and racial integration in historically White universities. In that study, the researchers contend that Black African students would feel inferior to White students at university because of racist comments and stereotypes that other races still have about Black African people. Hence, the findings prove that the racial segregation prevailing at university is perpetuated by the stigmas and stereotypes that are exhibited towards different races in the South African context. This is apparent in the above extract where Wele mentioned that there were incidents when Blacks were seen handled together for the longest time on campuses, with the security having to react differently to such gatherings in comparison with what they do when it is other races, such as 'Indian'. This is so because Black people are perceived to be thieves.

Writing about a similar context on the racial stigmas prevailing on campus, Cornell and Kessi (2015) noted that feeling Black can lead students to internalise negative comments about themselves and therefore end up isolating themselves from other students from different racial groups with an understanding that they are different from them. The findings from this analysis also indicate that horizontal racism is taking place in South African universities, and such a conclusion has been drawn after Dolly's comment on how she is being ill-treated and called names by fellow Black students who perceive her as a 'coconut' and 'sell-out' because she relates with students from other races.

5.3.7.3 Staff representation

The findings from the analysis further suggest that the issue of equity and representation of academic staff within institutions of higher education is still problematic. When the participants were asked to comment on the visibility of racial balance amongst academic university staff, they indicated that Black and African academic staff was scarce, especially in historically White-dominated institutions. This had impacted negatively on these students' experience of

university where the majority of participants had their first time being taught by a White English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking lecturer, which they felt intimidating. This has been noted as a significant disadvantage, considering the language issue. They mentioned that, since language is an issue with them, it becomes easier for other races (Whites, Indians and Coloured) because English or Afrikaans happens to be their home language. The following excerpts from Brian, Cicy and Kenny highlight how students voiced their experiences regarding racism in lecture rooms.

If you ask a question in your language, some lecturers don't want to speak the language that you speak and things like that, while some don't even want to give you the help you need (Brian).

Brian's narrative depicts African languages as still being marginalised in his institution. This is noted from his experience with lecturers refusing to help if they addressed them in an African language which deprives him of his right to information. On the other hand, Cicy's narrative shows that some students had a negative attitude towards lecturers from other racial groups.

She had the following to share:

We have a few Black lecturers here. One of my friends said he does not attend a lecture that is conducted by a White lecturer. The things that our parents tell us about apartheid have changed our attitude towards other races. We did not experience apartheid, but our parents did. We also study about apartheid in history books. That's why (Cicy).

Cicy's narrative suggests that discrimination at university is not one-sided where students are always victims of racism; however, lecturers are also victims of racial discrimination as it appears in this excerpt that Cicy's friend does not attend lectures that are conducted by White

lecturers. Kenny has a different experience in this regard, as his narrative portrays Black African students as victims of racial segregation. He says:

The lecturer was a White man, and when I asked him a question he said that he had no time, claiming that he was leaving for a meeting. But then, a few seconds after, White girls asked the same question we had asked and he gave them time. He showed them the answers, and entertained them for more than ten minutes (Kenny).

As noted from these extracts cited above, White-dominated institutions still have a few Black academic staff members, such as lecturers, a situation which is perceived to be a challenge to Brian, Cicy and Kenny. This can possibly compel them to drop out of university. These findings are in line with other studies which found that the lack of Black African academic staff in previously White institutions can reinforce a sense of exclusion towards African students (Cornell & Kessi, 2015). This exclusion can be directly linked to the language barrier. Thus, Brian narrated an experience where he spoke about how embarrassing it was when “you ask a question in your home language” in lecture rooms and how lecturers react disdainfully to that. This suggests that indigenous languages are still marginalised in universities. The findings from this analysis also show how parental influence impacts negatively on children’s experiences at university.

As noted from the above excerpt, Cicy narrated that her friend did not attend lectures conducted by a White lecturer because his parents influenced his attitude towards White people and how they treated Black people during apartheid. Adding to the above point, the experiences of Kenny and Brian also reveal how White lecturers discriminated against Black African students in the lecture rooms where White students were given more attention than them. Such exclusion of Black African students in lecture halls is in sharp contrast with what Tinto’s theory of integration contends, as this theory emphasises that when students are socially integrated into

the institution, which could be in formal or informal learning spaces, such integration results in students' full engagement in and persistence at university. However, if the opposite happens, like how the three participants from the above extracts experienced in this study, then this could result in them dropping out of the institution.

5.3.7.4 Curriculum and race

What is being taught and learnt at the university is central to the purpose of students' enrolment. The findings from this analysis depict Black African students as more concerned about the content of the curriculum in their institutions and how this content impacts on their race as Africans. This was concluded when the participants expressed themselves on how they viewed the content to be unfriendly and irrelevant to their lived experiences as Africans. The majority of the participants mentioned that the knowledge being imparted to them contains Eurocentric and Western epistemologies and does not cater to nor portray the South African context. Apart from the Western language, which is a challenge on its own, the books reflect Western knowledge which puts the African perspective on the margins of knowledge. The following excerpts are reflective of some of the narratives given by four participants when they commented about the university curriculum and content and how it marginalises the African race.

Why aren't we reading literature from Blacks? Why are we not reading court cases decided by our Black chief justices? We are busy reading cases from 1902. We just need to transform everything we do. For example, the curriculum needs to be transformed, starting with the literature we're reading (Abel).

I mean; the content we learn here has Western theorists who created the content. Where are our African scholars, who understand our context? Who will make scenarios that are in our context? (Ompy)

The narratives by Abela and Ompy suggest that the university curriculum in South Africa is not friendly to them since they cannot relate the content to their contexts. The issue of content, and its negligence of African knowledge, deprives these students of an opportunity to integrate academically. Like what May expressed, at high school the teachers would teach giving relevant examples which enabled them to relate content to real life experiences. At university, the story is quite different. May had the following to say regarding curriculum and its relevance to her context:

You sometimes struggle to relate the content to what you experience in your everyday life. It was better in high school; teachers would make examples of something that you have seen before at least it made sense by then. Now, it's hard (May).

Spell had a different experience at his institution where some lecturers would speak in English and translate the content into IsiXhosa to make it easier for them to understand the concept. This helped students like Spell to achieve a smooth academic integration at university. The excerpt below expresses Spell's experiences:

Black students constitute the majority of the students and you find that a lecturer will say something in IsiXhosa and then translate the message into English. I don't have a problem with it. Sometimes, you need to say things in IsiXhosa (Spell).

The above extracts depict university content as exclusive to the African perspective. These findings are congruent with a study that investigated social identities and racial integration in historically White universities, where Bazana and Mgotsi (2017) found that the curriculum dehumanises African students in that it requires them to use Western epistemology as a standard

way of thinking and looking at the world. Similarly, the analysis of data shows that students find the curriculum content irrelevant to what they experience in the contemporary South African society. This has a negative impact on their academic success and clearly shows that knowledge production has an impact on how they navigate university life and consequently their decision to persist.

According to Hlela (2016), higher education is based on Eurocentric epistemology and is also reported to be colonial. Further, the analysis of data also shows that the language used within the content transmission is problematic and does not show curriculum decolonisation in any way possible. However, in his narrative, Spell applauds some lecturers who translate English into IsiXhosa when they teach. This shows that as much as the content is irrelevant, the language which is foreign to these students will continue making things even worse. To that end, the implication is a call for curriculum decolonisation in higher education (Hlatshwayo, 2022). “In this case, Black students will continue to feel alienated from universities they have inherited because these universities are not transformed enough to reflect, affirm and narrate African systems of knowledge and practice” (Hlatshwayo, 2019, p.13).

5.3.8 Gender issues

Swartz et al. (2018, p.51) note that “there is an insufficient amount of literature on gender in higher education institutions in South Africa”. However, this study revisits the gender experiences of Black African students in universities and their impact on students’ attrition and integration. Although there is not much written on the subject (Swartz et al., 2018), the findings from the analysis indicate that Black African male and female students experience pervasive factors related to gender at university and this impacts negatively on their decision to persist at university. Tinto’s (1970) SIM posits that gender is also regarded as a significant factor that

affects student retention at universities. The following themes emerged from the data related to the gendered experiences of students.

5.3.8.1 Patriarchy

The participants in this study were Black African students. Therefore, it was imperative to be mindful of the need to acknowledge the fact that most African communities are still very primitive and still believe in separating people on the basis of their gender. The roles of people in Black African communities are still distributed according to gender and this is learned through culture and then perpetuated through the socialisation process (Swartz et al., 2018). This kind of practice promotes gender inequality, as men dominate and oppress women. Hence, the findings from this analysis show that this practice has escalated up to the education sector as well. The following extracts from Dolly and Sethu portray how students view patriarchal attitudes in their institutions:

What I've noticed at Fort Hare University is that the males really do look down on us and they get surprised when they find an outspoken female like me. They demean us mostly, and they get so surprised when you are outspoken, you can think for yourself.

That's what I've noticed, but in the outside world I think the situation is changing slowly. I think women, especially Black women, are slowly making a name for themselves and proving themselves. So, hopefully, by the time I get into the professional world it won't even matter whether one is female or male (Sethu).

Well, there's patriarchy, which starts at the management level. I've never seen any lady in management, particularly senior management- I've never seen any lady (Dolly).

The above narratives show what participants observed male dominance on their campuses. Both of these extracts evince the fact that female leaders are looked down upon as less capable

of leading in comparison with males. In the first extract, Dolly, a female student in student leadership, reports her experience in the leadership position which gave her the impression that there are still men who undermine women, who believe that a woman cannot talk sense in front of men. She mentioned that ‘men look down on them’ which means women should be submissive to men. The other participant, Sethu, seems to observe that senior management positions are occupied by men in her institution and that also suggests that men, and not women, are the heads and hence have to lead. The literature on gender studies disapproves of gender discrimination and patriarchy in the South African education system in particular (Moorosi & Moletsane, 2009).

5.3.8.2 Gender and career choices

The findings from the analysis suggest that male students dominate their female counterparts in lecture rooms, especially in professions such as medicine, electrical and civil engineering, and computer science. This is caused by the female students’ family backgrounds and the advice they get from their parents and caregivers who still believe that there are professions which are better meant for women, such as teaching, nursing and social work, because these are associated with being soft and more domestic. These impressions are evident in the following extracts, as alluded to by Jan, Kazi and Samy:

I don't know, but I guess females aren't all into engineering. I'm not into engineering myself and all of that. I wouldn't just wake up one day in Matric and think of going for engineering. The two engineers I know are both male (Jan).

I would not have done anything else besides social work. My mum advised me to do so. In fact, I wanted to do engineering. I was advised that as a girl, I can't handle such a job (Kazi).

I grew up in a society without a female attorney or doctor. The women were only teachers and nurses (Samy).

The above narratives clearly indicate prevalence of socialised gender roles and the impacts they have on career choices. These socialised gender roles create an impression that African students have limits, as Kazi found herself doing a course that she did not even like because of her gender. The advice they got from their parents also emphasised the value of being submissive and allowing men to be in charge hence promoting gendered stereotypes depicting woman as soft, not intelligent enough, domesticated and not good enough. The analysis of data has revealed that in universities some participants still believe that there are certain courses which are not meant for women; hence, they do the courses they do not like, eventually losing passion in their learning. This is what Tinto refers to as academic disengagement.

5.3.8.3 Safety on campus

The findings from the analysis indicate that gender discrimination also manifests itself in safety, residences and other places around campuses. The participants reported that security is not guaranteed for female students who reportedly experienced harassment, rape, and being mugged on campus and residences especially during the night. This kind of experience has negatively impacted on female students' persistence in their studies through preventing them from participating meaningfully in academic and other campus activities. This is evidenced by what Sherrona, Khanye and Pretty had to say:

Our campuses are not safe for us female students. We cannot study at night because the library is very far from our residence. It's a satellite campus, our residences are all over, and you can't even study at residences because people will be making noise, telling you that a hall of residence is not a place for study, but a place for sleep (Sherron).

The experience shared by Sherron confirms that female students in some universities are still victims of violence. She narrated that she felt unsafe on campus at night; she could not walk freely to the library because it is not safe to do so. Sherron's academic integration is hampered by the unsafe campus environment. This has a potential to contribute to Sherron's poor academic performance. A similar experience was shared by Khanye who spoke about a rape incident that happened in their residences. She had to say the following:

In my opinion, there are more problems affecting female university students, especially at Fort Hare University because they are being raped, especially in female residences. There's high incidence of the rape of female students there (Khanye).

While Khanye spoke of a rape incident at her residence, Pretty narrated that she did not attend late classes due to the fear of being mugged and kidnapped on campus. She narrated the following experience regarding safety issues on campus:

I just do everything online. Although attending classes is very important, I can't do it because I am scared of getting mugged or kidnapped on campus. I don't even attend my six o'clock classes anymore because I'm just scared of violence. Every time I see a car behind me, I just panic and my palms sweat (Pretty).

The above stories emphasise the fear that female students have around campuses. Three of these participants mentioned how fearful they are and that their reaction towards this fear is to avoid being around campus for safety reasons. This harms the students' learning activities because they no longer go to the libraries at night as Pretty reported that she does not attend classes after six in the evening. It was also mentioned that residences are still an unsafe environment for students; hence, Khanye spoke about an incident that happened at Fort Hare University where a female student was raped in her residence. Such incidents imply that safety

measures are still not in place in South African higher education institutions, particularly for female students. Such unsafe environments could result in female students' academic performance dropping because they are not socially integrated into these institutions.

5.3.8.4 Issues of masculinity

Participants reported interpersonal discrimination that exists at university and this comes in the form of bullying and violence perpetrated against students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, intersex (LGBTQI), characteristics that are often attributed to culture. The participants in this study were Black Africans (see Chapter 3); hence, they reported that their families condemn homosexuality. This resulted in them having to hide their real identities until they were at university where they felt free to express their sexual identities. However, when they get to university, they then experienced discrimination perpetrated by their peer students, being called by names, with others reporting assault. These students expressed how difficult it is to be Black, African, and homosexual. Notably, the African culture is perceived to perpetuate homophobia. The following excerpts are some of the responses from Cavin and Hlelo who shared their personal experiences on issues of sexuality:

When I was in a lift, coming from the ground floor, I met Xhosa guys. They just refused sharing the lift with me, saying 'soze ndingene kwilift nemoffie' ([We] won't go into the lift with a moffie), which they thought I couldn't understand. They were actually surprised when they saw that I actually understood what they were saying (Cavin).

The issue of homophobia seems to be problematic at university in South Africa. Apparently, Cavin's narrative shows how he was discriminated against by a group of boys on the basis of his sexuality. On the other hand, Hlelo's narrative below shows that he could not truly show his identity because of the fact that he was afraid of being judged by the society. Such issues do have a negative impact on these students' social integration at university. According to Tinto,

if the student is not socially integrated, then it has an impact on his academic integration and that predicts student dropout at university. Hlelo shared his experience as it appears below:

Let's start by what I don't tell most of people. I'm actually gay. The reason why I hide myself is that my culture does not approve of it. They say when you are gay you are actually possessed with bad spirits. Even here on campus, it's hard. You can't express who you really are (Hlelo).

The above extracts display how homosexual students experience discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. They cannot walk freely on campuses because they are bullied and harassed in different ways. It can be noted from the story narrated by Cavin, that he was being called 'moffie' by a group of African boys who barely thought he could understand them. Discrimination based on sexual orientation may negatively influence Cavin, motivating him to engage and participate fully in his learning. The implication of this phenomenon is that the African culture perpetuates exclusion of homosexual people. This has been narrated by Hlelo who mentioned that his family members, who believed that homosexuality is demonic, made conceal his sexuality. Such a belief has a negative impact on Hlelo's wellbeing, which can possibly lead to poor academic performance and lack of success at university.

In their paper titled: "Troubling men who teach your children", Moosa and Bhana (2020) reveal how heterosexual men exercise their power and violence towards fellow gay men and the negative impact this has on basic and higher education institutions. This analysis has demonstrated the way in which gay students have experienced exclusion because of their sexuality in these institutions and its impact on their decision to persist at university. This study argues that homosexuality is still a problem in South African higher education institutions and those students who describe themselves as members of LGBTQI are socially not integrated in these learning institutions and such exclusion has resulted in these youngsters experiencing

feelings of inferiority and isolation, which consequently results in poor academic performance and completely dropping out of university.

5.3.8.5 Sexual exploitation

The findings from the analysis further indicate that gender exploitation, where lecturers ask for sexual favours in return for student assessment, is a major concern that students hardly speak about. Some incidents that students reported are that some male SRC members would ask for sexual favours in return for getting accommodation and financial aid. This kind of exploitation is experienced, especially by first-year female students. However, some students in the study indicated that they believed that as women they must be given special treatment though they do not condemn being asked for favours in return for the special treatment provided. They reported that they believe that whosoever is doing them favours must do it without expecting anything in return. Regarding this theme, Maama, Dolly and Colleen had the following to say:

SRC members take advantage of those young females who come from different places.

They come to the university without any knowledge about Fort Hare University. They don't have any residence, they don't have any place to sleep, and they don't have NSFAS.

SRC members take advantage of them and use them. They become sex slaves for them to get what they want (Spell).

Sexual exploitation has been reported by Spell who revealed that most female students are victims of sexual exploitation at the hands of student representative committee (SRC) members who promise to assist them. This again is supported by Dolly's narrative, when she says:

Yes, it's something that I have witnessed. At UKZN, for example, some students would engage in sexual activities just to get residence (Dolly).

Dolly and Spell's narratives share similar sentiments regarding SRC members who happen to sexually exploit female students. These experiences have a negative impact on the victims, as this could result in a drop in their academic performance and eventually dropouts could occur. Whilst Dolly and Spell spoke of how SRC members take advantage of female students, Khaya has a different experience regarding sexual exploitation at university, thus.

I find lecturers to be more inclined towards helping female students, and those that are vulnerable are those that look for marks. Male lecturers are often very harsh on me, but then they tend to be more lenient with the female students (Khaya).

Khaya's narrative evinces the idea that lecturers also take advantage of female students. In his shared experience, he confesses that male lecturers are more inclined towards assisting female students, whereas they become harsh on male students. Khaya's academic integration can be affected by this negligence and could predict dropout.

From the above extracts, it is apparent that Spell, Dolly and Khaya's perceived sexual exploitation as being pervasive in South African universities, though students do not speak about such incidents. This kind of behaviour marginalises male students where they find themselves struggling for marks, accommodation, and financial aid since they have nothing to offer to receive special treatment like women. It becomes even more frustrating for male students where lecturers seem to give more attention to girls and that consequently deprives male students of their fully deserved right to university education. As for female students, others sacrifice their principles for the sake of convenience so that they get what they get access to university residences, financial aid, and good marks in return for sex. This has a negative impact on students' success and integration in the social and academic spheres of the institution, thus leading to poor academic performance (Tinto, 2012).

5.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed data analysis and findings in relation to the one critical research question: What academic factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments? To respond to this question, the researcher used participants' narratives to understand and gain insights into the experiences of these South African university students. Findings from this analysis were presented under different themes, and each theme was a response to the critical question as highlighted in this conclusion. Overall, the findings from this study suggest that Black African students who participated in the study were not adequately integrated into the South African university's academic life. This lack of integration contributes largely to students' dropout. The data revealed academic factors that influence students' integration and attrition in these institutions. The factors included language, economic background, race and racism, and gender issues. These were revealed as playing a fundamental role in student integration into university. This data analysis employed Tinto's Student Integration Model as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter Two to understand and interpret this data.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a presentation and discussion of findings. The chapter focused on addressing the academic factors that influence Black African students' experiences of attrition and retention in their institutions. In this chapter I provide a presentation of the social factors influencing students' integration into the university. This chapter addresses the second research question of this study, which is done in combination with the third research question. The following table shows the themes and subthemes that I discuss in this chapter.

6.2 Data analysis

What social factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?

Table 6.1: Emergent themes

Social factors that influence students' integration into the university	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Family background	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family support• Family and community pressure
2. Unemployment	
3. Transition stage	
4. High school background	□ Quality of secondary education
5. Friends at university	

6.3 Social factors that influence students' integration at universities

The study uncovered particular social factors that contribute to Black African students' persistence or dropout at university. These factors were associated with their family backgrounds, particularly the way their social backgrounds impact on their current life at university. Secondly, the study considers their high school background, which has a major influence on students' life at university and, lastly, the relationship they have within and outside university space and how this impact on students' success at university. The following analysis of findings pertains to the themes that emerged from the data that relate to social factors that students experience at the universities that constituted the focus of the present study.

6.3.1 Family background

The findings from the analysis indicate that most of the Black African students who enter university are coming from, for purposes of this study, what I refer to as broken families. By broken families I refer to families that are child headed, families with single parents. During the interviews, some of the participants indicated that they came from families where they were being raised by grandmothers, single mothers, aunts, and fellow children in child-headed households. In several ways, this kind of upbringing impacts negatively on students' experiences at university as students indicated during interviews. This is evidenced by what Leki, Sihle and David had to say, thus:

I do not know who my father is because I have never seen him in my life. My mother got married to another person, so I do not live with them. I live with my grandmother (Leki).

Leki's narrative suggests that he comes from a broken family. This kind of background has a negative impact on the wellbeing of a student. He may suffer due to a lack of

sufficient emotional support from biological parents and this could lead to distress, which consequently has a direct impact on the student's academic integration at university. The following excerpt by Sihle attests to an experience slightly different from that of Leki; however, what seems to be similar is the fact that the both come from broken families.

I grew up in Verdeline in Carltonville with my mother, my aunt, and my brother. We are a big family under one roof and let me quickly count for you; my grandparents, my mom, three aunts and sisters. Basically, we are ten. It's hard to get what you want there, since they are all unemployed. We survive by Granny's social grant (Sihle).

Evidence suggests that Sihle comes from a massive family, where he mentioned that it is difficult to get what he wants as a university student. Sihle's background is different from David's, as shown in the following excerpt:

I take care of my siblings. In fact, both of our parents died a long time ago. My older aunt occasionally comes home. She is unemployed, and now I also have to do parttime jobs during weekends so that I support myself here at the university residence and I also take care of my two younger brothers at home (David).

David comes from a child-headed household; he does not have parents and so his role is to take care of his younger siblings. This experience does impact negatively on his university life and academic integration at university in the sense that he has many responsibilities which could demand much of his time which could be allocated to his studies.

These extracts show the complexities characterising university students' home backgrounds. This kind of environment definitely impacts negatively on the experiences

of these students. Black African students come from big families where the unemployment rate is very high, with family members surviving on social grants (Campbell, 2015). Shown above is Sihle's life experience, which is a perfect example of a student who takes care of his siblings as the head of the family since his parents are dead. These findings imply that such students find it difficult to meet their needs at university. This analysis implies that this kind of experience can result in these students dropping out of university and look for jobs.

6.3.2 Family support

The analysis of the data has also revealed that family support plays a vital role in students' academic journey at university. This support can come in the form of emotional and financial support. When the participants were asked about whether they were getting support from their families or not, most of them reported getting little or no support at all from their families.

These findings were based on the following extracts as narrated by Ntulo and Dolly.

My grandmother showed me support, though she could not give me hundred per cent support. I'm not the only person she was raising; she is also raising other orphans at home. So, she always encourages me to study hard, so that I can get a bursary or financial aid because she does not have enough money to pay my fees (Ntulo).

My mother is not an educated person, and she doesn't believe in education because she knows that she can't afford university education. So, she wasn't encouraging us to go to university. In fact, she was saying that we must just aim for a Matric certificate and look for work. She was not working, so it was really a struggle for us to grow up. I think each and every one of us struggled (Dolly).

The above extracts show the different forms of support the participants got. Ntulo indicated a lack of support from his grandmother who could not give financial support because she was raising ‘other orphans’, thus aggravating the distress characterising Ntulo’s university life. The second narrative from Dolly shows a lack of emotional support from a parent who did not believe in education at all because she knew she was not going to afford university fees. This lack of support from parents can lead to academic demotivation and to even student dropout. These above extracts confute findings from a study conducted by Muray (2014) which reveals a relationship between student dropout and low motivation from family members. Similarly, data analysis has revealed that there are students who suffer as a result of low family support, be it emotional or financial. Still, these students are demotivated in their studies, and this could compel them to drop out of university. These findings are incongruent to Tinto’s (1970) argument as presented in his theory of student integration that, apparently mostly students who remain enrolled at a university are more likely to come from families whose parents are highly educated and therefore capable of providing enough emotional and financial support to their children because such parents have a better understanding of how it feels to be at a university.

6.3.3 Family and community pressure

The results of the study indicate that as much as students need family and community support, but there is also need to be able to separate between pressure and support. The participants reported that students experience pressure not only within the university environment but also from their families and the community. The families and community have high expectations, which is a challenge to students and a cause of distress. This is reported to be caused by being the first one to be at university in the family or the community at large. Happy and Simthembele had the following to say regarding the issue of the pressure they experience from their families and the community:

In our home I'm the first person to go to university. My mum would call me every day, worrying about whether I might not make it to the graduation day. I don't know, maybe she doesn't trust my intelligence. She always craves to know about my class test marks. I'm being pressured at home (Happy).

In my village I think I'm a role model to many young people. People in the community tell their kids to look up to me. If I don't make it here, I will be a disappointment to my family and the whole village. I work so hard to make them proud. It's hard but I'm doing it for all of us (Simthembile).

The findings from this analysis acknowledge that family members seem to have high expectations on participants and demand good academic performance. Students feel that there are instances when they fail to appreciate this pressure and this makes them panic, trying to impress their families and community members. These findings confirm that in an African society, a child is raised collectively and hence belongs to the whole village. Though this is a good gesture that symbolises Ubuntu, but the data analysis proves that African students who participated in this study felt as though this does not give them a space to breathe, adapt to university and find their identities but do so to impress their families. This consequently compromises their academic and social integration in the institution. The family pressure becomes a challenge as students try to separate what Tinto (1975) calls the first phase where the students separate from the family of origin and their familiar context to the second phase of their transition which calls for students' assimilation, alignment, and adaptation to the dominant culture, ideologies and practices of the higher education systems. Hence, I argue that when a student is deprived unconsciously by the family and community of the opportunity to navigate through these phases as they enter university due to the pressure, then this affects their integration into the institution.

6.3.4 Unemployment

The issue of unemployment in the South African context compounds African students' adverse experiences in university. The findings show that Black African students who enter university do so in spite of coming from families where unemployment is a challenge; this challenge has a direct impact on the affordability of study fees, students' basic need at university, and etcetera. Now, students are also directly involved in resolving financial difficulties in their households. The findings indicate that some students had to source alternative funding to support their families while others are forced to work and study at the same time. The following extracts demonstrate the responses from Sherly, Nella and Nov who voiced these challenges.

It's a lot because I'm the only one who is working. I do part-time jobs and my mom is not working. Even my sister here in Durban is not working. So, when I get paid, I need to buy groceries for my mum and also send money to my sister (Sherly).

Yes, they did agree because there's no one working at home. I'm the only one who is working, so I'm supporting myself and my family. My sister just got a baby now, so I have to help out again (Nella).

Well, my mum doesn't work. We live with my grandmother who doesn't work as well, and we basically live under a government grant. NSFAS sometimes helps me with some money to send back home as well (Nov).

These extracts suggest that doing part-time work was the only way in which Shirley and Nella tried to overcome the challenge of unemployment that they were facing whilst studying. So, they also support siblings back home. The implication is that these family commitments may be stressful to these students as they interfere with their academic work. Also, as noted from the above responses, Nov's narrative reveals that she uses the funds (NSFAS) that she receives

from the university to support her family. The implication of this is that students whose families lack sufficient financial resources face greater risk of dropping out and have to fight harder to remain at university for the sake of their family's survival.

6.3.5 Transition stage

The findings further indicate that the transition from high school to university is reported to be the biggest challenge faced by most of the Black African students who participated in this study. This transition-related challenge is caused by a drastic shift in the environment with which these students are unfamiliar. The biographies of these participants (see Chapter 3) indicate that most of them were from African townships and rural areas around the country and had attended rural and township schools. Such schools are referred to as quintiles 1 to 3 and thus considered as being disadvantaged on the basis of socioeconomic status or income level of the community (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012). Such a schooling background has a huge impact on the academic and social integration of Black African students at university. As highlighted in the above discussion, Tinto's (1975) theory of integration also depicts that student integration presents the different aspects of the individual in distinct phases that begin with separation from the family of origin and the familiar context, while the second phase is the transitional phase which calls for students' assimilation, alignment, and adaptation to the dominant culture, ideologies, and practices of the higher education system. Based on what the participants had to say about their high school background, the following themes emerged in the data.

6.3.6 High school background

The participants in this study acknowledged the importance of adapting to university spaces; however, the shift from high school to university requires them to adapt to new academic learning styles which the participants reported to be quite different and challenging. The

university lifestyle was also mentioned as being another adaptation to be confronted, including social interaction and self-management. These participants acknowledge that university becomes a foreign land to them considering their secondary schooling experiences. The extracts from Elton and Mbally illustrate what they had to say about their schooling background and how it impacts their current learning in the university space.

High school and university are widely different. First of all, university buildings are just intimidating. I come from a very small rural school. The first thing that overwhelmed me is that more than 100 students constitute one class. That was too much for me and I could not focus on the class activities (Elton).

I am concerned with the style of teaching and learning. Lecturers do not put any pressure on us. At high school teachers cared much about us. They would make sure we do our tasks so that we pass. Here, the situation is different and you're on your own (Mbally).

The above extracts show that Elton and Mbali adapted to the university learning space was a bit overwhelming as Elton mentioned that classrooms were overpopulated and this affected his learning ability as his concentration was distracted. This student is not used to such an environment as he came from a high school with a little population of learners. The implications here are that the size of the university population seems to be a source of discomfort for these students. Furthermore, Mbally mentioned that at a university you are on your own. The lecturers do not put any pressure on them unlike what high school teachers used to do. This compromises their smooth academic and social integration and consequently impacts negatively on their decision to persist.

6.3.6.1 Quality of secondary education

The participants in this study observed that secondary education did not prepare them adequately for social and academic integration into university. Some of them mentioned that they were coming from high or secondary schools with inadequate learning resources. These included, among the other things, unqualified teachers and a lack of libraries, computer laboratories, science laboratories, and recreational or sporting facilities (sports). The following excerpts contain the perceptions of Siya, Ntulo and Denzil regarding the quality of education that they received from high schools.

Our high school teachers were very lazy. We didn't have a Maths teacher for the whole year at high school. We had to attend nearby schools on Saturdays to make it in Maths (Siya).

My first time to operate a computer was when I entered university. In fact, we didn't have a library at high school. It was a very poor school (Ntulo).

To begin with, language is a barrier. English was not compulsory at high school. Here, we communicate in English, and if your English is bad like mine, you're out. You won't make it. I think English should be made compulsory from high school because we are now struggling (Denzil).

Amongst the other things that this analysis has revealed is the lack of exposure to information from high school. This is reported to be a challenge to Black African students when entering a university in South Africa. Teachers are perceived to be the main resource at a basic education institution; however, some participants, as shown in the above abstract, went to schools with fewer teachers as the other subjects had no teachers. Now, these students enter university with little knowledge in other subjects, which puts them at a disadvantage in terms of integrating

high school knowledge and new university knowledge. The findings echoed that those who reported no or little orientation on using resources such as computers and laboratories also experienced difficulties adapting to the university.

6.3.7 Friendships at university

Nevertheless, the findings of the study reveal that creating friendships at a university is a challenge for most of Black African students who participated in this study. The participants reported feeling isolated as they could not form social networks that could help them adapt to the complex environment of higher education. On the same note, those who were able to make friends mentioned that it was hard to distinguish between a bad and a reliable friend with good intentions or rather the same mission with them. Some participants reported how meeting bad friends made them subscribe to peer pressure just for the sake of fitting in. In congruent to this Tinto's theory of integration recognises that social integration at university can be achieved through good relations between students, and academic and staff members. Tata, Wele and Kydron had the following to say regarding friendships at university:

It is very difficult to make friends here, especially when you are from a disadvantaged background like mine. As far as I can see, most of these people around here are from rich families. I can't befriend them (Tata).

I sometimes exclude myself on purpose. I feel different. Nobody has ever told me that. But I feel like that. I feel like I don't belong here (Wele).

So, I joined this group of boys here. I started to drink a lot. I mean, I didn't drink before I came here. I recently started drinking because I wanted to belong; actually, it's not what I wanted. I used to hate alcohol, but yeah, I think that's the biggest challenge with friends (Kydron).

The above extracts by Tata, Wele and Kydron suggest that the university environment promotes feelings of inferiority and self-doubt in students, as the participants described themselves as having a low socioeconomic background. The theme of inferiority comes when they isolate themselves from others because they ‘feel different’. This implies that low self-esteem also accounts for high stress levels and it negatively impacts students’ academic and social integration at university. Arguably, low self-esteem also accounts for high stress levels, and loss of confidence and those who experience low self-esteem could find it difficult to cope with being lonely and might end up absconding classes. Peer pressure, as reported by Kydron, suggests that some students sacrifice their principles ‘at the altar of convenience’ because they want to claim their space and to fit in a particular group. Alcoholism can lead to addiction and negatively impact one’s commitment to their studies. This analysis exudes the fact that enhancing social integration through making friends can be problematic to Black African students who participated in this study as it consequently impacts negatively on their academic integration if went wrong, for example, making bad friends who do not prioritise their studies.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the findings in relation to the second key research question: *What social factors influence Black African students’ individual institutional commitments?*

To respond to this question, I used participants’ narratives to understand and gain insights into the experiences of Black South African university students. The findings from this analysis were presented under different themes, and each theme was a response to the critical question as mentioned earlier. The findings from this study suggest that Black African students who participated in the study were not adequately integrated into the South African university’s social and academic life. This lack of integration contributes largely to students’ dropout. In

essence, data analysis also suggested several social factors that influence student integration at universities in South Africa. These factors include family background, unemployment, the transition stage, high school background, and friends. Consequently, such factors have a significant role to play in determining students' integration or attrition at the university. To conduct this data analysis, I deployed Tinto's Student Integration Model. Further, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two to understand and interpret this data. In the next chapter, I present a summary of the study, the main findings of the study, and the recommendations drawn from this research

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the key findings emerging from the data analysis. The current chapter begins by providing a synopsis of the goals of the study and they were achieved. I then discuss the key findings and the implication of the study. Thereafter, I present a discussion of the contribution that the present study makes to research within the social justice research focus of Black African student attrition and retention at Higher Education institutions. I conclude the chapter with the recommendations for higher education institutions, government and related stakeholders based on the study.

7.2 Thesis synopsis

This study intended to critically explore the university experiences of Black African students in South Africa. It critically analysed how these students' experiences influenced their social and academic lives in these institutions. Finally, it critically analysed the factors these students identified as influencing their experiences of social and academic life in these institutions. Chapter One provided the problem statement that motivated this study. It indicated the significance of this study. Central to this chapter is how my background as a Black African scholar relates to this study, though my experiences did not in any way influence the interpretation and analysis of the findings. Moreover, I further discussed a brief history of South African higher education because I strongly believed that in order to engage in the discourse on Black African students' experiences of university, it is pivotal that we first understand the roots (history) of higher education in the South African context. This is due to the fact that South African higher education is largely grounded in the roots of the

marginalisation of the African population before 1994; hence, this brief history enhanced the analysis of data where I was able to see through how history repeats itself in the 21st Century.

Chapter Two engaged with the literature concerning the research that has been done on students' experiences of a university at a national level (South Africa) and international level (the global context). Amongst other things, this literature review discussed the social and academic factors that significantly influence students' commitment to their universities. I discussed the causes of student dropout, the consequences of dropping out of university and the strategies adopted in the fight against student dropout. This literature review drew significantly from global scholarship, which I referred to as Part One of the literature review. The second part of this chapter explored literature on Black African students' experiences of a university in the South African context where my study is located; therefore, this literature review assisted me in identifying gaps and limitations in the relevant literature, as indicated in Chapter One, including how my study intended to close these gaps and limitations. To this end, the theoretical framework underpinning this study was reviewed in the same chapter and was identified as Part Three of the literature review.

I opted to employ Tinto's (1970) Student Integration Model (SIM) as a theoretical framework underpinning the study. Tinto's model provided an insight into the students' experiences that have a potential to lead them to drop out or persist at South African universities. At the centre of Tinto's (1970) SIM are concepts such as academic integration and social integration, which are depicted as the core factors that contribute to students' desire to pursue their goal of completing their degree programmes (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Tinto argues that dropping out of the institution results from insufficient integration into both the social and academic domains of the institution. Thus, for this study, Tinto's concepts of academic and social integration and how they intertwine to determine students'

decision to persist enabled me to critically explore the participants' university experiences. The findings from this study have demonstrated that if students are not socially integrated into the institution, that consequently leads to a decrease in academic achievement and thus their academic integration is affected and vice-versa. This was evident in all the interviews and narratives provided by the participants as they showed how their lack of social integration indirectly affected their academic integration into these institutions. The link between social and academic integration had an implication on these students' dropout. This finding corroborates the findings of a research conducted by Afolabi (2013) who found that students who are not socially and academically integrated into the institution of higher learning tend to drop out.

In addition to the above findings, my study was underpinned by the critical paradigm, which is a paradigm that is concerned with issues of social justice and empowerment as means of achieving democracy. In adopting the critical paradigm, this enabled me to explore and analyse the university experiences of the Black African students who constituted the participants for this study. The utilisation of critical paradigm enabled me to critically engage with the experiences of these students and understand how these experiences contribute to their decision to persist or drop out of university. Thus, during the interviews, the participants could critically reflect on the challenges that they experienced and why they experienced them. My study also provided an opportunity to witness the tenets of the critical paradigm on empowerment. Thus, the participants had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of university and how they impact negatively on their future and how they would make sure that these are eliminated to enhance their social and academic integration.

Such action responds to the change agenda of the critical paradigm used in this study. My study employed the secondary analysis of data elicited from the Education and Emancipation Project which traced students' journeys through university, asking what obstacles the students

encountered, what they, along with their institutions, were doing in response to their challenges at different institutions. I particularly used a qualitative data set obtained through a study conducted through in-depth interviews. Since this study was exploring the Black African students' experiences of social and academic attrition and integration in South African higher education institutions, it used the data collected from 66 African students from a larger data set based on education and emancipation. Using this data, this study sought to address its objectives that were guided by the following three research questions:

1. What academic factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?
2. What social factors influence Black African students' individual institutional commitments?
3. Why do these factors influence their individual goal and institutional commitments in the ways that they do?

As highlighted in Chapter One, there is still limited research on Black African students' experiences of higher education and causes of a high student dropout rate, particularly among African students, in comparison with other races (Whites, Indians and Coloured). The presentation and interpretation of data responded to the following critical question driving the whole study: To avert dropout rates among Black African students in South African Higher Education Institutions (SAHEI), how might Black African students be successfully socially and academically integrated into SAHEI? From this perspective, the data analysis provided the numerous experiences that made Black African students to drop out of university. To this end, I then developed a new theoretical model that can be used by the institutions of higher learning to understand Black African students better so as to avert the dropout rate among students from

Black and African communities. The proposed theoretical model can also be used by researchers who are studying students from a similar context (see the contribution of this study in this chapter).

Hence, it can be concluded that this study contributed to the body of knowledge on African students' experiences of higher education and what makes these students drop out of South African university prior to 1994. To support this finding, the following section presents a summary of the key findings emerging from this study.

7.3 Summary and discussion of the key findings

The key findings reflect on language, financial or economic backgrounds, navigating university, race and racism in higher education, gender issues, and background.

7.3.1 Language

The findings of this study illuminate that language is a source of discrimination and the marginalisation of Black African students at university. The dominant use of English and Afrikaans was perceived to be a significant challenge that Black African students encounter in these institutions. The findings revealed that this marginalisation results in students experiencing feelings of inferiority and lack of confidence when participating in university activities. This inferiority was associated with fluency and accent that the participants reported to be a barrier as well. The findings further reveal that the language barrier among African students is caused by the fact that English and Afrikaans are not their first languages. Apparently, the language barrier prevents African students from making friends with students from other races, a scenario that then perpetuates racial segregation among students, as they only interact with those from the same racial group. Adding on to this finding, my research findings recognised that African students suffer from what I refer to as culture shock at a

university in South Africa. This culture shock illuminates from being taught in a foreign language (English or Afrikaans) since these students are not used to such language. The findings revealed that, most of the African students come from high schools where English is not prioritised, with teachers teaching in African languages (IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, and Tshivenda amongst others). Hence, the findings show that understanding content delivered in English or Afrikaans at university becomes difficult for these students. Therefore, the study results indicate that the language barrier deprives students of a smooth social and academic integration into South African universities and this has a potential to contribute to student dropout.

7.3.2 Economic or financial backgrounds

The results from this study exposed how financial challenges impact on African student's decisions to persist at university. The findings reported that most of these students suffer financially, which deprives them of a smooth journey to their end goals or success. Financial challenges, for the purpose of this study, have been regarded as macro challenges because students have no control over them. The findings confirm that financial challenges cause distress in these youngsters' lives; it disturbs their wellbeing and academic performance at the university. This was apparent as most participants reported how difficult it became for them to register at the beginning of each year. Other participants reported that they were struggling to afford basic needs for survival at university since they had no financial assistance.

In addition to the above point, access to financial aid such as NSFAS is still problematic especially with students who are classified as middle class. The findings also exposed the resilience of students in trying to overcome the financial challenges they were facing. Amongst other things, they would do part-time jobs to generate extra cash to take care of their basic needs and also support family members back home. Still, others reported that they were breadwinners in their homes. Such experiences hugely contributed towards these participants'

academic and social integration at university. Their resilience and commitment to their goals is what motivated them to continue with their studies. However, the findings acknowledge the impact that financial obstacles have on students' decision to persist in or drop out of university.

7.3.3 Navigating university

The participants in this study reported that the most significant challenge they were faced with before entering university is related to choosing a programme to study. Most of them reported that the programmes they were doing were not their first choices due to limited spaces at university, with others failing to meet the minimum requirements. The challenge related to doing degree programmes that they disliked was compounded by failure to adapt to the teaching styles and independent learning practiced at university. These lead students to distress as the university teaching style is different from that of high school. The findings also reveal that lecturers hardly honoured their consultation times as they seldom availed themselves in their offices, thus disadvantaging the students, especially those who are too shy to participate actively in lecture rooms due to language barriers and fear. Noted from the findings also is that using technological resources at university is a struggle to most Black African students since they were coming from disadvantaged rural and township secondary schools prior to university. The results of this study also illuminate that the students are unable to balance university workload due to pressure and their personal lives, which causes burnout. Thus, the study results acknowledge that the transition from high school to university is a challenge that is directly linked to how socially and academically integrated the student has become. If this went wrong, the chances of attrition would be high.

7.3.4 Race and racism in higher education

At the heart of the findings of this study is the point that race contributes to the exclusion of Black African students in South African universities. This exclusion results in the development of feelings of isolation, loneliness, and low-self-esteem among these youngsters. Issues of race have been reported to manifest themselves in many ways, including language, the curriculum and university culture. The feelings of isolation have led to racial segregation where Black African students did not mix with students from other races. The findings also suggest that most of the historically White universities in South Africa still have a small number of Black and African academic staff as the participants mentioned that they were not being taught by Black professors in these institutions. Such racial imbalances have bred feelings of doubt in the participants as they constantly asked themselves if they did belong in these institutions or not.

The findings of this study also depict the curriculum as un-African. This conclusion was based on the narratives proffered by the participants who revealed that the curriculum does not address the issues around the African context, but rather it promotes Western epistemologies. I therefore contend that the South African education system must be decolonised. This decolonisation of curriculum must not be considered only in higher education, but rather, must begin in basic education, because basic education is the root of what higher education will entail. Hence, if we are to decolonise education, we must begin with basic education (primary and secondary education). If not so, Black African students will continue to experience the university as a foreign land and continuously made to believe that they do not belong in these institutions.

7.3.5 Gender issues

The study further revealed that gender issues contribute largely to students' decision to persist at university, as the participants spoke of patriarchy that characterise relations in these institutions of higher learning. The findings revealed that the division of roles according to gender has also manifested itself through the courses that they were doing at university, where it was apparent that courses such as Engineering and Medicine were dominated by males (because they are perceived to be strong) whereas Teaching, Nursing, and Social Work were dominated by females (because they are perceived to be soft and domesticated) and this was also strengthened by their parents or caregiver while choosing their courses at university. Up to this end, the findings of this study have also revealed that issues of masculinity are a major problem that is not getting a full attention in these institutions. The university students who define themselves as the LGBTQI community are being abused and discriminated against by their peers on the basis of their sexuality.

The findings further show that South African universities are still an unsafe or unfriendly environment for Black African students who are made to appear queer due to stereotypes and false information that is associated with being gay or lesbian in the primitive African society of the 21st Century. Additionally, the findings of this study reveal that female students are victims of sexual exploitation being perpetrated by men who wield masculine power; For instance, lecturers, SRC members abuse them in return for favours. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that female students are not safe around campus premises as they are victims of rape occurring in residences. These experiences directly contribute to students' decision to persist or to drop out of university due to the fact that when they feel unsafe, their social integration is negatively affected and that consequently leads to decrease in academic integration as well.

7.3.6 Family background

The study has found that family background has a huge impact on Black African students' decision to persist or to drop out of university. This background includes broken families, poor economic background and the unemployment of parents or caregivers. This has a direct impact on students' university life when it comes to financial resources, as indicated earlier in this section that most of the participants in this study revealed that they were coming from impoverished backgrounds (due to unemployment of parents) and could not afford university expenses, such as tuition fees, transport costs as well as stationery. Family background also impacted negatively on the support that these students received from their families and the findings showed that there is little or no support (emotional/financial) from their families, which then affects the students' well-being in these institutions.

Adding to the above discussion, the study also unveiled how high school background impacts on students' decision to persist at university. The study demonstrated that Black African students find it difficult to adapt to and integrate into university due to their previous high school experiences. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that high school or secondary education does not adequately prepare students for university. This is due to the fact that rural and township schools have inadequate resources such as computers, science laboratories, recreational facilities and etcetera, which makes it difficult for students who come from those schools to adapt to university life. These high school experiences impact students' experiences of social and academic integration at university in South Africa.

7.4 Contribution of the study

Essentially, this study has contributed to new knowledge from the theoretical and methodological perspective. As indicated in the introduction of this thesis that the primary goal of doing this research was to develop a new model that can be used by the South African universities to mitigate the dropout rate of Black African students at university. Therefore, below I discuss the new model that can be used to understand Black African students enrolled at a South African university and how best the institutions of higher learning can successfully integrate this population to mitigate attrition. I will also discuss how the study contributed in methodological lens.

7.4.1 Theoretical contribution

In addressing the key research question underpinning this study sought to avert dropout rates among Black African students in South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), focusing on the question: How might Black African students be successfully integrated into SAHEIAs socially and academically? Throughout this present study, it has been argued that while university students' experiences that hinder success and dropout are a well-documented phenomenon, scholarship that focuses on Black African students' experiences of integration and attrition in the South African university context, especially after 1994, is still limited. Thus, the present study adds to the literature that focuses on Black African students' retention and attrition at university in South Africa, with implications for other higher education institutions who operate in a similar context.

Secondly, the findings suggest that the integration of Black African students who participated in the study was challenged by a number of factors which contributed to how they were successfully integrated socially and academically in these institutions. These factors

demonstrated how they impacted on these students' decision to persist or drop out of university. Notably, the findings indicate that the factors that contribute to student integration and attrition included language acquisition, economic background, family background, gender discrimination and stereotypes, as well as race and racism. Furthermore, the findings suggest that language used at universities in South Africa puts the participants on the edge of knowledge since they are not the native speakers of English and Afrikaans, which are dominant languages used at university.

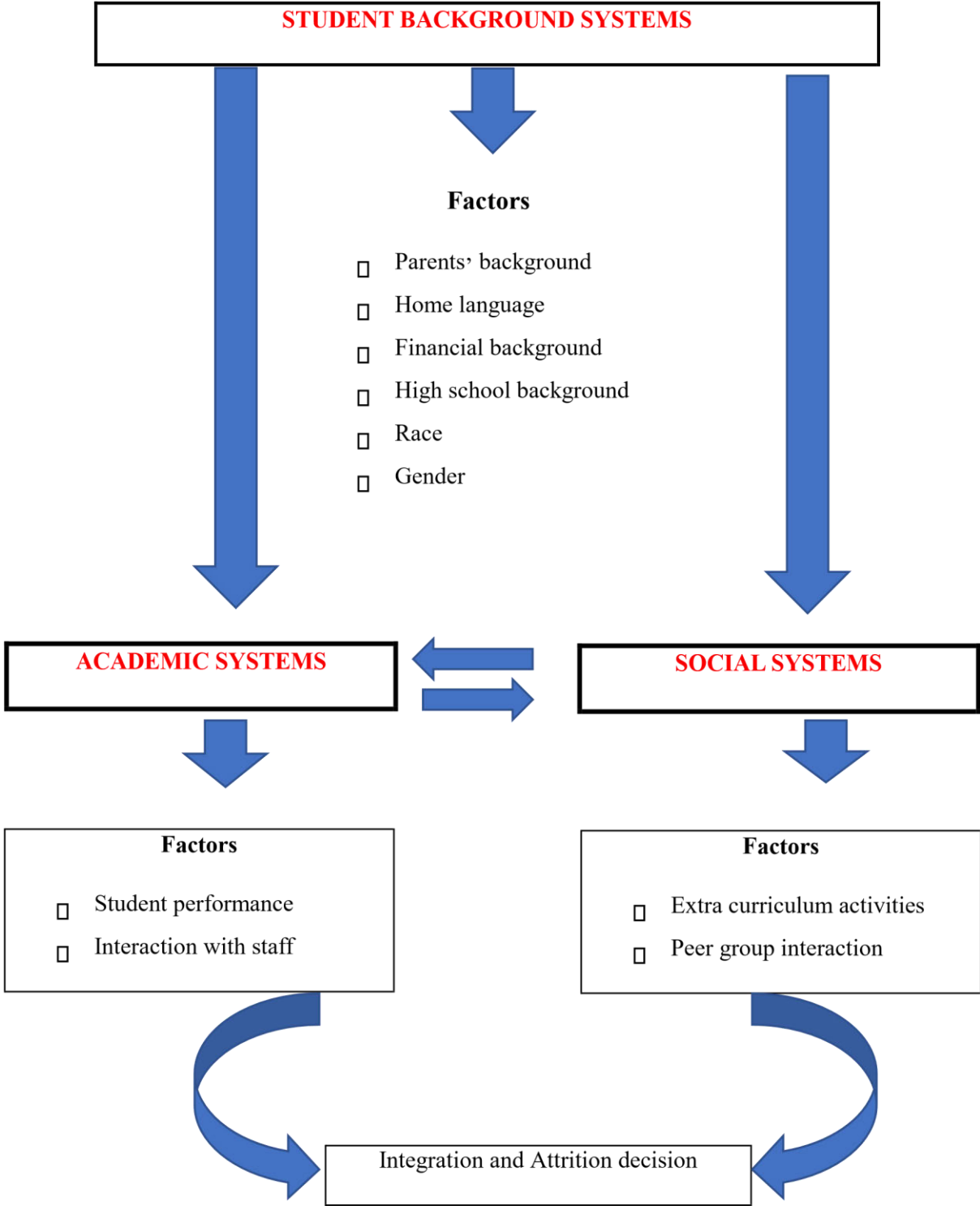
Moreover, these challenges have a direct link with the students' high school background where high school education failed to prepare students for university education. Thus, to address the issue of student dropout at university, the study used critical paradigm to bring about change to students who are coming from the contexts similar to that studied in this study. As noted from Chapter Three that the interest of researchers in critical paradigm is not merely to understand situations and phenomena, but to change them, which this study ought to do.

In this regard, the theoretical framework developed from the reviewed literature in Chapter Two suggests that students' success at university is determined by their social and academic integration within these institutions (Tinto, 1975). This suggests that if students are socially and academically integrated at the university, they are determined to persist at university until they have graduated. However, if the opposite prevails then the students may drop out of university. Informed by the findings from this study, this thesis therefore expands on Tinto's SIM, which is the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two. This theory posits that there are two most vital higher education systems that contribute to student dropout at college or university level and those were identified as academic and social systems. This theory argues that student dropout could occur through an inadequate interaction in either or both of the systems. As noted in Chapter Two, if students are not socially and academically integrated into the university,

they are unlikely to complete the course. Within this theory, scholars such as Farmers and Hope (2015) confirmed that connected academic and social experiences form a student's level of commitment to the college, thus minimising the chances of dropping out. Therefore, informed by this understanding, SIM might be used to explore the dropout behaviour of Black African students in the South African context.

Moreover, the interest of this study was to help universities predict Black African students' propensity to drop out and to minimise attrition amongst other students from similar contexts. Based on the findings of this study, this thesis proposes that student background is the first predictor of whether the student will persist at or drop out of university. In the context of the findings, I have developed the third vital higher education system which I refer to as the student background system. This system adds to the two systems that Tinto identified as vital in his SIM. The following diagram illustrates how these systems will work out together in fostering understanding how Black African students can successfully integrate socially and academically at university and consequently minimise dropout rates.

Figure 7.1: Three vital higher education systems



Based on the findings of this study, I have realised that universities need to demonstrate a full understanding of their clients, which are the students in this context. Students are the primary

source of functioning for every institution or university; therefore, the wellbeing of students is paramount if they are to achieve their academic goals. As illustrated in the above diagram, universities need to pay particular attention to their student's backgrounds in order for the students to attain a smooth academic and social integration. Students' background system has a number of factors that have a direct or indirect impact on students' academic and social integration. If, for an example, a student comes from a financially challenged background, he cannot afford to pay tuition fees and other financial needs demanded by an institution, thus that student's academic integration may be adversely affected and a decision to drop out may be taken. Nevertheless, the diagram demonstrates that Black African students do come to university carrying burdens hailing from their backgrounds and to achieve the smooth social and academic integration of these students, each institution is required to devise a way of understanding its students. Hence, by so doing, they will create a safe space for their target students which they serve. As the findings of this study illustrates, universities seem not to be fully accommodative of students from poor Black African communities.

7.4.2 Methodological contribution

This study used secondary data analysis as an approach, which was discussed broadly in Chapter Four. As noted, conducting a study using secondary data analysis is important for several reasons. For example, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge with studies conducted in secondary analysis. Conducting a secondary data analysis study is advantageous due to its cost-effectiveness compared to primary data collection (Adam & Martinez, 2019), and I can attest to this because I realised it during the writing of this thesis. However, this methodology did not only assist me to save costs, but it also helped to save the time that I would have used to collect data. I then used that time to do other things related to this research such as reading more on the topic and attending conferences where I met new scholars in the field.

Having to utilise secondary data analysis gave me the opportunity to access large and diverse datasets that I may not be able to collect independently. This methodology has enabled me to explore research questions that required a large sample size, and my experience with this can be a testimony for those researchers who would do similar research in future.

The longitudinal datasets that I used in this study allowed me to examine trends and patterns over the four-year period during which the primary study was conducted. I was able to reflect on the plethora of challenges faced by Black African students in South African universities in this period of four years. I had provided some recommendations which will influence the policies in South African universities. This methodology enabled me to refine the theories based on existing literature and contribute to theory development for future researchers working in similar contexts. Brown and Jones (2018) assert that secondary analysis studies have direct implications for policy development and decision-making processes. Hence, this study's findings generated evidence that will contribute to the body of knowledge from which South African university policymakers and practitioners can draw to create a more inclusive policy that will accommodate Black African students in these institutions, and decrease the dropout rates. Therefore, despite the challenges I have encountered in using this methodology, I strongly believe that these hindrances formed part of my contribution to studies conducted using the secondary data analysis approach.

7.5 Recommendations of the study

- The findings and conclusions deriving from this study assist in the development of several recommendations designed to improve policy and practice in South African higher education institutions. Such recommendations will assist in reducing the dropout rate and improve the integration of Black African students in these institutions. These recommendations are presented below:

- Each university must design and provide enough support programmes that assist students during their first year of study, particularly those hailing from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Such support should include, among other things, academic support programmes and mentoring, counselling, and writing centres where students are introduced to university teaching and learning styles. Most of the participants in this study have indicated that their secondary education did not adequately prepare them for university education. Hence, these programmes will be of assistance to such students. Literature has revealed that universities have certain programmes that assist students during their first entry into university. However, the findings in this study have shown that even though those programmes are made available, but they were not being monitored to ascertain if the students really benefited from them. This study proposes that such programmes must be more specifically designed for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, like those who participated in this study.
- Government should provide disadvantaged schools, such as rural and township schools, with adequate teaching and learning resources that include libraries, science laboratories, computer labs and sport facilities. This is responsive to the findings of this study which revealed that most of the Black African students enter university with little or no background information on use of such technological resources because of their poor previous schooling backgrounds. This lack of knowledge leads to lack of academic integration and consequently leads to student dropout at university.
- Universities need to work more closely with rural and township schools in order to bridge the existing transition gap between these two institutions, and to ease the academic and social transition of Black African students when they enter university.

- It is recommended that universities should consider reviewing their curriculum to make it more accommodative of and responsive to the needs of the diverse student population, including Black African students. This transformation can consider utilisation of African languages across the curricula. This transformation is recommended because the findings of this study depict the university curriculum as un-African, as it is based on Western epistemologies, with African perspectives being it margins.
- The findings of this study revealed that most of the Black African students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often experience financial problems which initially impacted negatively on their academic and social integration at university. Hence, it is recommended that the South African government expands financial assistance programmes, such as NSFAS and other study bursaries, to cater for the financial needs of these youngsters.
- Universities should consider introducing student activities that are aimed at promoting the diversity and inclusion of students from different backgrounds such as race, class, and culture to create a sense of belonging and oneness among students. This will assist in creating good friendships among students, thus stepping up the fight against racial segregation, racial stereotyping and many other differences that the students pose.
- It is in the interest of this study that I recommend that universities should have an office or structure where students report any form of oppression or discrimination that they may be experiencing at the university.
- In line with the findings of this study, each course of study must have at least one module that will teach students about issues of gender, racism, classism,

xenophobia, homophobia and violence. This will assist in eradicating incidences of oppression that are taking place in South African institutions of higher learning.

- The media can play an important role in advising parents about the implications of choosing a career or course of study for their children. This study has noted that most Black African parents have influenced their children to choose a certain course of study on the basis of their preference as parents. This has a negative impact on these students' engagement with their course, as they cease to enjoy or like the course because it was not their first choice. Hence, I recommend that the media can play a vital role in advising parents about the disadvantage of choosing a career for their children.

7.6 Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings of my study, I make the following recommendations for further research, particularly for those whose research interest is based on higher education and university students' experiences at university in the South African context:

- The findings of my study have explicitly demonstrated that being Black and African still poses a significant disadvantage to Black African students in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. There is still not enough literature on the university experiences of attrition and integration among Black African students in South Africa. Future research should focus more on the factors that contribute to a lack of social and academic integration of African students, which has resulted in the students dropping out before completing the course. This recommendation is important as it will assist universities to be able to bridge the gap between African

students' background (school and family) and university. Such research can inform policies on how secondary schooling or education can prepare students, and how universities can accommodate the needs of Black African students, to enhance their social and academic integration.

- While this study focused on students' experiences of integration socially and academically, future research should consider focusing largely on university staff (lecturers, administration staff, and general workers) to respond to following critical questions: What is the role do university staff play in assisting students, particularly Black African students, during their transition from high school to university? What effort does university staff make to ensure that students' social and academic integration is smooth? This will also assist the university policy makers to do self-introspection if they are doing enough to assist students achieve their academic goals and eliminate dropout rate among Black African students at a university in a South Africa.
- The findings of this study revealed that the use of technological resources is still a challenge amongst Black African students when they enter university and it is imperative to note that this challenge impacts negatively on their academic integration; thus, I suggest that future research could focus on institutional elements such as resources and support services that are made available to students and how these impact negatively on their academic achievement, including what could be done to mitigate this negative impact.
- Furthermore, it is important to conduct studies that explore how Black African students respond to the challenges they face at South African universities and how they hold on to resilience in their fight against these adversities. Such research could be used by universities to validate students' responses to their challenges and this

could be institutionalised to improve student integration and thus reduce student dropout.

- Nevertheless, future research should focus on how universities and the community at large, including parents, could work collaboratively to provide enough support to students in a bid to improve their academic and social integration, and ensure they successfully achieve their academic goals.
- Finally, I propose that future research should investigate how first-year Black African students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (rural areas and townships), managed to integrate socially and academically during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown since they have been studying online since 2020 when the pandemic broke out compelling institutions of higher learning to shut down. Such an investigation will assist university management and policy makers employ measures that assist such students to be socially and academically included at university and thus eliminate the phenomenon of student dropout.

7.7 Limitations of the research

- Just like many other studies, the design of the current study is subjected to limitations that could be addressed in future research of this nature. Firstly, since the present study was a secondary data analysis, I was not present during the data collection process, which was a major limitation to this study. This limitation became apparent when I felt like returning to the participants for follow-up questions, which I could not do because the participants' contact details were no longer accessible. However, I was able to negotiate and overcome this challenge by engaging with the data back and forth so as to gain better insights into what I felt was missing from the transcriptions. Although this meticulous engagement with data had consumed a lot of time as I ended up

spending approximately six months familiarising with this data, this helped me to thoroughly analyse data and that is how I managed to come with rich and trustworthy findings.

- Secondly, semi-structured interviews were used to generate the data I used in this study. Yet, while this method enabled me to engage with the transcribed interviews between the researchers and participants, the major challenge I had to encounter had to do with grammatical errors (consisting of language, spelling, and etcetera) that characterised the transcriptions. These were very disturbing, so I had to first correct them because at times I would lose the actual content in the script. That forced me to firstly correct them so that they would make sense. Hence, I was cognisant of the fact that in correcting those grammatical errors, I did not have to change the idea or the content the participant was meaning in the script to avoid manipulating data, so that the findings would represent the exact responses from the participants.
- Adding to the above point, data for this study was collected in English and therefore, I also noted that the use of English during data collection might have influenced how the participants understood questions and their ability to express themselves. Despite the fact that simple English was used to enhance understanding by the participants, the language barrier has been a challenge to these participants (as the findings revealed), and may have influenced the results obtained during the interviews. Hence, I suggest that future studies of this nature should allow participants to respond to their home languages because this could enable them to express themselves in the language of their choice; therefore, rich data may be extracted.
- The final limitation I encountered during the data analysis process was that of a larger sample of participants that consisted of 66 students. Since this was a longitudinal study, data were collected in a period of four years. I was so overwhelmed by the volume of

the transcribed interview data I had to go through; however, I gave myself more than enough time to read back and forth, scrutinising all the transcriptions to pick out the themes I wanted. As already mentioned in this discussion, such an exercise provided me with an opportunity to fully engage with the voluminous data. Even though the present study used a large sample comprising 66 participants, it was not the intention of this study to generalise the findings; rather, it sought to explore the experiences of the students who participated in the present study.

7.8 Chapter Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that, as much as higher education has opened its doors to everyone irrespective of race, gender, culture or creed, since we are in the democratic dispensation, Black African students are still experiencing exclusion and alienation in higher education institutions. These students were reported to be socially and academically not integrated at university and those who failed to claim their space tended to drop out of university. Therefore, I posit that to increase student integration and mitigate attrition, higher education institutions must be transformed and decolonised to accommodate Black African students who still feel like foreigners when entering the South African university.

If that is done, all the students will claim their spaces and internalise the belief that the university ‘belongs to everyone who enrolled in it regardless of their background’. To conclude this thesis, the experiences of Black African students at universities in South Africa shed light on the complexities of pursuing higher education in a context marked by historical inequalities and systemic barriers. Recognising and addressing these challenges is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape that empowers and uplifts all students, regardless of their background. By doing so, South African universities can play a pivotal role in fostering social justice, promoting diversity, and contributing to the

transformation of society as a whole and consequently mitigate the dropout rate of Black African students. This study contributes a model by which this goal may be achieved.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



**UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL**
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

15 October 2021

Siyanda Mluleki Kenneth Cele (211544212)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear SM Cele,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003232/2021
Project title: A critical exploration of student intergration and attrition of Black African undergraduate students from selected South African universities.
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 16 August 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 15 October 2022.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/45573587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Funding Composites: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 2: DATA PERMISSION LETTER



Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (ccri)
2nd Floor, George Campbell Building,
Howard College campus,
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban 4041,
South Africa
(0)31 260 3903

21 September 2021

Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Westville Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Dear Chair of HSSREC

RE: Letter of Permission to use Data.

This letter serves to grant Mr. Siyanda Mluleki Kenneth Cele official permission to access qualitative data from the project entitled, *Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the higher-education-and-training sector in South Africa.*

The data are owned by the Department of Higher Education and Training, and ccri (UKZN) is the data custodian. As the director of the ccri, and the principal investigator of this project, I hereby grant Mr. Cele permission to access this data for the purpose of his PhD study, *A critical exploration of student integration and attrition of Black African undergraduate students from selected South African universities.* The interview transcripts have been anonymised to protect the identity of the participants and Mr Cele has been requested not to share the data with others or to use it for any other purpose beyond his PhD study.

I trust that to this data will give rise to an interesting and insightful PhD thesis and wish Mr Cele all the best for his studies.

Sincerely,



Professor Ralebohile Moletsane
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APPENDIX 3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SAMPLE INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

EDUCATION AND EMANCIPATION STUDY: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

- **Who we are**

Hello, I am. I am working for the Human Sciences Research Council.

- **What are we doing?**

We are conducting research on the obstacles and opportunities students experience in higher education and training institutions. Over five years, we would like to 'track' you to gain an understanding of your experiences at the university. The aim of this research is to understand the social factors that aid or hinder students' success; how race, class and gender impact on students' perceptions and experiences of success, and how students use personal and social agency to create opportunities and success. The intention of this study is to provide knowledge that can be used in interventionist strategies by the Department of Higher Education and training.

- **Your participation**

We are asking your permission to interview you for approximately 1—2 hours each year, over five years.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate is yours alone. If you choose not to take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop participating in the research at any time and tell me that you don't want to go continue.

If you do this, there will be no penalties, and you will not be prejudiced in any way.

- **Confidentiality**

All identifying information will be kept in a locked file cabinet (depending on the nature of the project/survey it could be a locked storage space/office) and will not be available to others and will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including

members of the ethics committee at the Human Sciences Research Council. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

We are asking you to give us permission to tape-record the interview so that we can accurately record what is said.

Your answers will be stored electronically in a secure environment and used for research or academic purposes now or at a later date in ways that will not reveal who you are. All future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Committee review and approval.

We will not record your name anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be linked to a fictitious code number or a pseudonym (another name) and we will refer to you in this way in the data, any publication, report or other research output.

- **Risks/discomforts**

At the present time, we do not see any risk of harm from your participation. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

- **Benefits**

There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to us in that we hope it will promote understanding of the obstacles and opportunities students experience in higher education and training institutions.

If you would like to receive feedback on our study, we will record your phone number on a separate sheet of paper and can send you the results of the study when it is completed sometime after December 2017.

- **Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns** This research has been approved by the HSRC Research Ethics Committee (REC). If you have

CONSENT

I hereby agree to participate in research on Education and Emancipation. I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop participating at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively. I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally in the immediate or short term. I understand that my participation will remain confidential.

Signature of participant Date:

.....

CONSENT FOR TAPE-RECORDING

I hereby agree to the tape recording of my participation in the study.

Signature of participant
Date:.....

I understand that the information that I provide will be stored electronically and will be used for research purposes now or at a later stage.

Signature of participant
Date:.....

APPENDIX 4: ANNUAL PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Notes to researcher

1. *Informed consent*: Only in the case of new participants.
2. *Contact details*: Ensure all are updated, including friends and family members.
3. **NEW** Please produce a paragraph summary for each participant for the annual report for 2014 and for 2015.
4. **NEW** *Student numbers*: Ensure you get student numbers for those still at university.
5. *SNI interviews*: Give each participant *ONE* SNI Interview booklet, explain the new procedures and incentives, and the collection deadline for 31 May. When you return on 31 May please ensure they sign to receive their money. Also to receive their new cell phone and insert the IMEI number. Max incentive money is R400 – R50 per SNI and a further R50 if they have completed the two lecture observations. Draw their attention to this.
6. *For participants no longer at university*: Questions have been phrased in a way to accommodate that some people are no longer studying as far as possible, but please note which questions are to be excluded depending on the status of the participant.
7. *Facebook*: Check participation. Re-iterate at least a post a month, but not too many either. For those who can't FaceBook due to technological inability – let it go.
8. *Next interview 2016*: Inform participants of the next interview in 2016 around the same time (March – April 2016) as well as the final one between September and December 2016.
9. *There is R500 available for a lunch or social gathering with your participants* – pay and claim if possible.
10. *Thank participants for their time, invite them to the social gathering*. Remind them about the photography assignment, social network interviews and monthly Facebook posting.

INSTRUCTIONS TO GO OVER WITH PARTICIPANTS

Photographic assignment

Use the cameras on your phone to take photographs of the things that help you succeed during the year, and those that you think are obstacles or challenges. (E.g. A dictionary to remind you

to tell me about language, or a beer bottle, or a great lecturer). Only post those photographs on to the *Facebook* group that do not show recognisable people.

Facebook posting

- To be completed on our *Facebook* group ‘Who succeeds? Who doesn’t?’ Please
- use your cell phones to take pictures to remind you what to write about.
- You need to post one short post every month – just a paragraph. You don’t have to include a photograph every month, only when it’s helpful.
- Please do not include recognisable faces in your photos you post on our *Facebook* group.
- It’s a secret/private group. You can be free to say what you like. Only other people in the study and the researchers will be able to read what you say.

In your post answer the one or both of the following questions:

1. What has happened this past month that has made you feel successful (or on the road to success) at university? What was your role in it?
2. What has happened this past month that has discouraged you about university? How did you respond?

Social Network Interviews

Hand-out Social Network Interview book and go through the new process. 2

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS Race, gender and identity

1. How do you respond to these stories (read each one in turn and ask the prompt questions for each story separately i.e. deal with one at a time):
2. Looking back over the last couple of years what makes you feel like you belong – at university, in the world? (Probe language, spaces)
3. What makes you feel excluded or different or what hurts you?
4. How would you define the difference between race and culture? Do you see that these influence how people relate with each other on campus?
5. How were/are you affected by our country's past history?
6. Do you experience any racism at university? At home? In other areas of your life?

Progress

7. Tell me how last year ended for you (academically) and personally, and how you feel/felt about it. (Probe: How was last year different to what you anticipated? How has this year been so far?)
8. (If student is still at university) What percentage of the students on your programme have made it through to third year? What do you hear from people are the major reasons for not continuing?
9. What has been the main contributor over this past year to your success/failure at university (or life)? (Probe: What obstacles have you experienced this past year at university (or in your life?)

Impasses and obstacles/Agency and self-efficacy

10. What are the things you are currently worried or discouraged about? (Probe: What are you doing about them?)

11. What advice would you have for first years? (Probe: freedom, safety, success, failure)

Social networks

12. In what ways have people helped you over this past year? (Probe: Ask for a story of someone helping you, especially with university)

13. Can you tell me about something you did this past year to help another student, or someone else in your network?

14. What do you think stops people asking for help?

Aspirations and success

15. How has your vision for your life changed over the past year?

16. What other careers have you considered since you started studying that you might never have thought of before?

17. What do you think about people who take breaks in their studies (stop outs, gap years etc.)?

18. What have you learnt about success over the past year?

19. To what extent do you consider yourself to be in control of your success here at university (in life in general)?

Capitals/Structure

20. How important, or what role have accommodation and finances played in your experience of university life?

21. How comfortable are you with the languages used on campus? What role has language played in your experience of university life? (Probe: social interaction, belonging, understanding of academic work)?

Services

22. What has your experience with university administrative services been like (registration, faculty, finance, exclusion) on campus? How has this changed over the past two years?

Facebook

23. What's it been like to be involved in the Facebook group? What particular comments have stuck out to you from others in the group?

24. What photographs did you post? Why?

Social network interviews

25. Tell me how your social network interviews went. What stood out for you from what people told you?

26. Why do you think we're asking you to do these social network interviews?

Conclusion (give participants a few minutes to think)

27. Looking back over your university journey so far, if you were to think of your journey as a long road, what are some of the points you have encountered along the way? (Encourage the interviewee to focus on words/images/metaphors/visual ideas that come to mind e.g. Roadblocks, swept away bridges, potholes, an open highway, a race track).

APPENDIX 5: TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW

SAMPLE OF A TRANSCRIBED ONE ON ONE INTERVIEW

Study name: Education & Emancipation: A five-year longitudinal, qualitative study of agency and impasses to success amongst higher education students in sample of South African universities.

Depositor:

Interview number:

Date of interview: 2013

Language: Interviewer read questions in English, interviewee responded in English mostly

Information of interviewee:

Date of birth:

Gender:

Geographic region/Location:

Number of interview: 1 of 1

Name of interviewer:

Interviewer: Alright so will talk about some of those now and tell me your ideas about that, let me ask you a little bit about your background. Can you tell me about your high school that you went to.

Hlelo: [m] okay, I went to [i-00:49] Adela, it's a

Interviewer: That's a funny one I remember yes

Hlelo [l]it's a, I don't know whether is a private or public school. But is in-between that's all I know is an Afrikaans school and is situated in Roodeport in Witpokkie.

Interviewer: In where

Hlelo: In Witpokkie. I started in 2008 I was doing grade 8 until last year. I was doing matric last year. Yes it's a nice school it didn't have any black teachers all white people, [l]quite nice.

Interviewer: So it was a very white space or Afrikaans?

Hlelo: Oh yes!

Interviewer: What was that like for you?

Hlelo It was amazing, it was amazing

Hlelo We used to call it Adis short for the Adela. It was a nice school, Adis was a best place ever and I was a prefect and in great 9, grade10, grade 11, and grade 12 yes, known as the RCL (Representative Council of Learners) it was quite a nice school, I miss it.

Interviewer: Did you choose or did your folks?

Hlelo I chose in grade 9 but at matric my teacher was like no Lesego we need you to be part of our team, yah, yah.

Interviewer: And did they encourage you to come to varsity or

Hlelo: Oh yes

Interviewer: And what did they do to encourage you.

Hlelo: Oh yes, they did. When I was in grade 11 we had a career fair where all the universities: came to school. And they will tell us come to UJ, or come to Monash or come to UP whatever. It's, yah they encourage us to go study or come study here if I can say. And our teacher's selected ten peoples of which she was like u know what go to this open day go and maybe you might like something. You might find something interesting, and yah we went, it was quite nice

Interviewer: And did they, so they encourage you not to come to varsity but to go study to whatever institution.

Hlelo: Yes

Interviewer: [m], so the community that you come from?

Hlelo: [l]

Interviewer: [m] what is that like, do many people there come from university or?

Hlelo: [l] I think it depends on you as a person because I grew up in Dobsenville in Soweto, do you know Soweto? [l] yah so what can I say people become dependent on things or people. To become something or to do something with their lives. They depend on Government, Social Grants what's so ever and but you as a person is up to you if you gonna make it or you gonna follow the crowd so.

Interviewer: So, would you say then success is something that is like personal thing, that's how, is up to you basically

Hlelo: Yes, is up to you, is a personal thing

Interviewer: oaky [m] and your family I mean did they support you at varsity not necessarily financially but just in general. I can't remember if you have family members who have come to varsity, you have? Okay

Hlelo: [m] my sister is at TUT. She doing her last year in nursing she did [i] technology for two year but change it. And my mom is a teacher she studied by UNISA, and then she would tell me last year to like, she would forces me literally [l] to apply. She'll be like apply Lesego apply apply. And she'll continuously remind me that Lesego without education you are going nowhere. You need to study, you need to do this.

Interviewer: Okay so that is quite strong emphasis on studying further,

Hlelo: [l] yes

Interviewer: You didn't wanna take a gap or anything, you wanted to study.

Hlelo: [l] no,no.no

Interviewer: So they kind of understand the pressures you're facing at university and they kind of so help you.

Hlelo: Yes

Interviewer: [m] so do u think where you live and where you go to school affect your life and your life opportunities?

Hlelo:

Not necessarily, no [p] what can I say. The first, It was in February when I move into the commune I wasn't comfortable, I missed home, I missed my mom doing things for me but it comes to a point whereby you realise as a person that I am hear now and what I have is to adapt to the situation or surroundings, I can't complain or mourn about things I just have to accept. And by accepting you become aware to the surroundings and it becomes like, it becomes a second home or whatever you may call it and with that you able to do what you have to do when you have to do it

Interviewer: Okay, so do you think that the kind of community that you come from, and whatever you think shaped you to be able to do that?

Hlelo: I think so, I think so yeah.

Interviewer: In what ways do you think?

Hlelo: [p] what can I say like from Dobsenville personally from where I grew up going to a multiracial school was something big, like people would see me as this person who's that better than them. In a way it was like people are talking already about me, people want to see if I'm gonna make it or, so it's up to me if I'm gonna make the proud or disappoint them. So is up to me so yah

Interviewer: So did you feel like there is pressure from people or not really

Hlelo: Oh yes, especially my mom[1], oh my family if should say. Because from my mom's family no one, I mean no one literally dropped out from schools. So they would tell me is your matric year you need pass with distinctions, you need to go to varsity. Everyone studied or everyone is studying or something like that.

Interviewer: [m] okay

Hlelo: So they did

Interviewer: What is your vision for your life?

Hlelo: [1]

Interviewer: Maybe you can start small in 3 years

Hlelo: [1]

Interviewer: Years and maybe in 10 years

Hlelo: In 3 years, okay I'm not planning to fail any modules, so by 2015; by the end of 2015 I'll expect my qualification, my degree. But I see myself as a future leader, like I'm more concern about developing communities,

Interviewer: [m]

Hlelo: I'm more concern about coming up with NGO, NPO. I see myself as one of those people

Interviewer: [m]

Hlelo: Having NGO all over the country, in 9 provinces or 11 including Mozambique or Botswana. But I see myself as a future leader; I don't know what to say, yah.

Interviewer: Okay that's cool, yah I mean many people who studied business would say, yah I want to be successful and have lots of money. So why do you think for you is a different thing, that you wanna, u don't want necessarily to be a big fat capitalist? [l]

Hlelo: [l] what can I say; when I was in matric I was encouraged to go to extra lessons that would somehow enhance my level of thinking or my educational background. So me obtaining a degree in finance. I love accounting I'll be doing something I love but yes again I'll be passing knowledge that was passed on to me by other people so I'll be passing it on to other people. It's not necessarily about earning a big salary or driving a fancy car is about doing what you love and knowing that what you're doing you're actually reaching out to people

Interviewer: Okay, okay and is that how you define success, so how you define success is that it?

Hlelo: For me success is more than qualification the certificate that you just get, Is about what you love doing how does it impact people Like, what can I say when you look at me, what you are gonna say, is she successful in doing this or doing that yes the changes I make. The life's I impact what's so ever.

Interviewer: Okay, okay so is not just an individualistic thing where you put your money in the bank is actually about touching other people's lives

Hlelo: Yes, is a not just about academic record yes

Interviewer: That's like a stepping stone he!

Hlelo: [l]

Hlelo:

Hlelo:

Interviewer: Did you do well at school; it sounds like you were a leader and whatever yeah! yah I did physics, life science and accounting, I got a distinction in accounting like I told you I love accounting. I used to be one of those; I was never in the top ten but I had good grades I obtain good grades always from grade 8. But yah like people don't expect me to fail and I don't think I'll fail either, that's about

it

Interviewer: Okay, yah we don't want to hear you failing [1]. So what do you think will help you succeed?

I'm self-disciplined and I used to tell my fellow leaders back in high school that leadership is man management, if you can lead yourself in a good way ultimately you leading other in a good way, perpetuating good leadership in the end, so if I can tell myself that Lesego don't do this do that, don't do that do this in that way I think that is my recipe [1] in succeeding

Interviewer: Cool [p], so did you experience any difficulties or obstacles getting into the university?

Hlelo: No

Interviewer: So it was quite straight forward and easy?

Hlelo: Oh yes it was, cause I was born on the fourth of January, we got our results on the third of January, a day before my B- day after going to school like getting my certificate and all that I got an sms from UJ hey congratulations on your good results welcome to university of Johannesburg, so it was quite easy for me

Interviewer: Wow!

Hlelo: [1]

Interviewer: What a nice birthday present

Hlelo: I know in advance [1]

Interviewer: Yah very cool

Interviewer: Okay so it was not challenging?

Hlelo: Not at all

Interviewer: And financially it hasn't been difficult?

Hlelo: Nope

Interviewer: Cool, [p] so has anything has happened this year or made worried or anxious about your progressor that made you feel discouraged?

Hlelo: Not really

Interviewer: What was like shifting from high school to varsity? Was that difficult?

Hlelo: Jah for the first few months I could say because back at school I was one of the people in the spotlight so coming here being over a thousand in class it was quite difficult like it lowered your self-esteem you don't if you should answer in class or u shouldn't but ultimately at the end I told myself that I'm here for me not about people so should I take part and should i want to take part it should be my decision. I shouldn't care what people had to say, but it was quite something else because you have to sit there in the lecture room with everyone and think what am I going to say are they going to laugh at me or my question or think that I'm stupid or something but at the end I adapted and jah is okay now

Interviewer: Jah I think and for me was also a case suddenly you like this little fish in this big pond and you kind of think like who can even do this is quite scary but yah it just take a little while to supposed to adjust. So on the positive side is there anything makes you feel excited about the degree that you chose and where going with your life and how things are happening academically?

Hlelo: My tutors, okay let me say one of my tutor she doing B Com econometrics, she was like guys I'm doing my Honours I hope one of you guys would get there one day. Is quite exciting it showed me that is all about you and is about determination, it's not impossible people who say that are people who won't succeed but is up to you is not impossible. If she can do it why can't I exactly, so in that way it drives me, at the same time it motivates me. So I'm quite excited about this

Interviewer: Jah is nice to have to be able see is possible he! Almost like a role model in a way

Hlelo: yes [1] yes

Interviewer: Okay so you spoke a lot about u know is up to me, up to my own self-discipline do you think that you are in control of your success at the university?

Hlelo:

Hlelo:

Oh yes I am, I am, I can say that I am cause you know when I go home for a weekend people would be like Lesego we haven't see u for a while can we hang out. And I'll be like no guys I came home to do things at home that I should do and when I'm this side they'll be like can we come visit it at your place want to see where u live whatever, whatever. And I'll be like u guys you need to understand; yes I might be far from home, I might not be with my parents anymore but I need to study I need time for me also, I can't do things that you expect me to do. And for the mere fact that there is no parental guidance I'm getting anymore I need to tell myself and or do whatever that I should do. And it worked for me; because I told myself that imagine if I was a parent and my child is in varsity what would I expect from my child, my son or my daughter.

So it does work for me

Interviewer: So do you find that challenging balancing the personal and that kind of work staff?

Hlelo: Not at all [1]

Interviewer: Not at all, yeah, you quite strict with yourself

Hlelo: [1]

Interviewer: And your friends, by the sounds of things

Everything has its own time. Work with time, manage your time wisely

Interviewer: Okay so obviously you do go out, you do have a social life and whatever. So how do you make that work?

Hlelo: I don't know like is two weeks, three weeks before exams. I told myself I'm not gonna to stress about exams I'm gonna prepare now and by the time of end off exams, I know I have time to hang out and watch movies, to chill with friends. So I think when you plan in advance and actually sticking to your plan. That works quite better'

Interviewer: So is like prioritising and that social time comes like a reward

Hlelo:yes [1]

Interviewer: [m] so yah you said you don't have any worries there is nothing that's like crime in the campus hasn't been an issue for you

Hlelo: No even where I leave like I hear stories once in a week, ah there is some breaking but it never happened to me. But yah, like it doesn't affect me at all

Interviewer: Doesn't make you feel unsafe or anything

Hlelo: No not at all

Interviewer: Okay alright just going back to your background you mention that, you coming from quite an interesting high school, a multiracial high school where there's no black teachers only white teachers, so how do you think that your racial identity has affected your life?

Hlelo: [p]

Interviewer: or maybe your opportunities and things in life

Hlelo: I for one I wouldn't say I fall under the stats, you should see here on campus when applying for student finance or what's so ever. Majority of people are standing in queues are black people it shows that we are fighting for liberation it shows that we as blacks we want to succeed. But I for one I believe that I was born in the democratic time, So I'm not fighting for anything I was born where everything was set out for me, I just have to use those opportunities, I might be black or you might be white it doesn't define me, or my future or where I'm going or coming from.

Interviewer: So for you is never been a factor, you mention earlier that going to multiracial school people had expectations, saying you think you better than us. What is that?

Hlelo:: When you come from Soweto your expect to do what people from Soweto do, expected to wake up in the morning go buy fat cakes chill by street corners. And when you don't do that they give a certain identity and then some of us it breaks us and some of us it makes us to be who we are today, so at the end day like what can I say people are gonna talk crazy like they are gonna have something to say, but it shouldn't define you as a person.

Interviewer: Jah that kind of more like in a way class or socio economic thing hey where that they expect you to now stay and do kind of things and when you move and do beyond that, then you sort of getting into cubic or that sort of ting

Interviewer: In terms of being a woman how is that or what part is that play in your life, do you think

Hlelo: [m] [l]

Interviewer: Maybe if you can think from the kind of community that you're coming from

Hlelo:

Hlelo:

are there the same kinds of opportunities for woman and man or woman are expected to behave in a certain way. That maybe disadvantages them or

[m] [l] that quite a tricky one [l] I don't know but what I can say, [p] is stereotyping. People expect only male to do or female to do this, whereas we are given the same opportunities and if you can prove yourself why then aren't supposed to do it like what can I say, I don't know really, but, I don't know [l]what to say.

Interviewer: I mean been going into business doing a B Com I suppose now in your class are quite few woman, but having is quite people will associate that with man he!
Man going into business so

Hlelo: Like initially

Interviewer: In a way you're breaking that

Hlelo: [l] initially I wanted to do BSc engineering the building environment and people would be like no man we only see guys or males working under whatever like buildings and land scape what so ever is not the female thing to do, but I think we must welcome the new era of life and stop stereotyping cause yah I think that's about it.

Interviewer: So what change your mind then?

Hlelo:: Oh my marks [l]

Interviewer: [l] so you could have done it, you would have

Hlelo: I don't think so, because I actually love my degree now, I don't know [l]

Interviewer: So you're happy with the choice you made

Hlelo: Yes

Interviewer: Okay [m], and the next lot of questions are really about your social support networks, so if you're struggling if you've got a problem. [m] Who do you go to for help?

Hlelo: Like what kind of problems

Interviewer: Jah is a good question hey; I suppose is about academic problem do you know within the uni-, if you have academic problems, would you go to someone in the university or would you go to someone, in your family, if you have personal problems who do you go to

Hlelo: Within the University right now, should I encounter a problem I believe that I'm given the opportunity to speak out we've got tutors, we've got consult sessions. We've got consultation hours, if I feel the need to ask about a certain chapter firstly I would [I] I don't know I would consult or go to my tutors cause the tutors are here to help us twenty for seven and also have consultation hours of the lecture so I'll consult my lecturer or my tutor within the university.

Interviewer: Okay and you feel you can go and speak to them

Hlelo: I can actually do that, but if I'm outside if it happens that is during holidays the campus is closed or something I'll go to my friends doing something related to what I'm doing or that might have an idea of what is happening yes

Interviewer:: Okay and when you have personal issues, I know that universities got like counselling centres would you go to them or you think would just go to your friends?

Hlelo: I'll go to my friends

Interviewer: [m], and your mom last? [I]

Hlelo: [I] you can't tell your mom everything,

Interviewer: no you can't [I]

Hlelo: [I] yes

Interviewer: [m], so I mean I don't know have you ever access any of the universities support things or not okay

Hlelo: I only went to the writing centre in February, March Interviewer: Okay and what was it like?

Hlelo: They just teach you how to write a proper essay how to substantiate your argument in a written essay what so ever. They just teach you the basics of what it is that you should do and what you shouldn't do it was quite nice

Interviewer: But I mean you have to go and seek those things out they don't hand them out, you have to get up and find those things, [m] have you ever been or ever you helped another students or do maybe have study groups. Or something like that or?

Hlelo: I don't work well in teams [1]

Interviewer: [1]

Hlelo: [1] I don't know why but

Interviewer: Jah I hear you

Hlelo: But if you should come to me ask for help I'll be more than willing to help you but sitting in a group with people working together collectively seems to be a problem for me because you find people who are reluctant to work together so you have to push them you have to do all the work becomes too much for me but personally I don't mind helping people,. Last year my friend and she's doing law now LLB here at UJ we opened a study group for other matriculates helping them I helped them with accounting and she was did in History and is was quite nice. And

Interviewer: Yeah what made you, you two want to start that?

Hlelo: In class will be like, like what can I say, I knew from grade 10 that I am gonna get distinction in accounting I knew it from grade 10 and people kind of knew also. So they'll be like Lesego help us with this, Lesego help us with this or they would come to me on the corridors, what so ever Lesego do you have time I need you to show me how to calculate this and it showed me that people actually believe that I can make them understand, so why not reach out to them. So I actually did at the end

Interviewer: So using your talent?

Hlelo: [1] yes

Interviewer: Nice, okay so [p] I guess there's two questions they are the same questions just the one is, is there anything that can be done to help students to do well at university? and the other questions is anything cannot be done or stop to prevent to help student from do well at university? Maybe just from the university, maybe broader the government I don't know, just in general

Hlelo: No [1], I think no, no [1] I think there shouldn't be anything that must be done cause thinking about it, everything is done for us. Yes is different from high school the teachers don't have time for us they don't even check you here don't even check academic register, but I think everything is done for us like you know that like I know, I'm writing my exams on this day . I know that since January is up to you if you are gonna prepare for them because you know already. Like what can I say I think everything is just perfect for us, we got tutors we've got

consultation hours we've got lectures so should you not be afraid to ask in class go to the consultation hours go to your tutor one on one

consultation but everything is just fine for us

Interviewer: So I mean it sounds like there's a lot in place, people just need know how to access that,

Hlelo: yes

Interviewer: Do you think that is the same for the student maybe from rural areas, people from poor background maybe kids who don't speak English very well. I mean I don't know if you know any students like that in this place?

Hlelo: I don't know [1]

Interviewer: Cause I spoke to a the students yesterday and he said he was struggling with English and the one of the students said one had friends was excluded cause he couldn't understand the lectures in English I think maybe for some students it is, there are challenges I don't what the universities will do about that I mean cause the lectures are in English they can't have fourteen lectures in different languages, I don't know

Hlelo: I don't know, like my fellow student last year they would complain that our high school is English and Afrikaans, I would say to them you went to that school knowing same here at UJ they make a provision for Afrikaans student to actually learn in their home language

Interviewer: Oh they do okay

Hlelo:: Yeah they do, so some people complain that no why can't be taught in our home language but I think you go to a place knowing yes you can complain about it but you knew initially that is English and Afrikaans they make a provision for Afrikaans so you can't expect them to make a provision for SeTswana. And your level of understanding I think you can reach out you can ask for help.

Interviewer: Okay yah

Hlelo: Somewhere somehow yes

Interviewer: Maybe they need to have just tutors or whoever who speak various languages to help

Hlelo: Yes

Interviewer: Okay I suppose just in closing, just a kind reflection of how you feel how the year is going so far [m] UJ what is it like, yah are you happy are you getting where you wanna go

Hlelo: [1] I'm happy, I'm very happy I just so glad that nothing will act as an obstacle and I'm really happy where I am right now. And I actually believe that I'm gonna make and yes

Interviewer: What do you think might be an obstacle, what do you think could potentially trip you up or what might be a challenge at some point.

Hlelo: I don't think finance might be a problem should maybe my mom passed away. I don't think is gonna be a problem because we've got access to NSFAS, to student loans, but I don't know or maybe should I change [1] somehow maybe that might be a problem

Interviewer: Or get lazy maybe

Hlelo: [1] yes

Interviewer: Well that's all for me I don't know if there's anything you want to add or ask

Hlelo: No, not at all

Interviewer: Well I appreciate your time

Hlelo: Thank you

APPENDIX 6: GATE KEEPERS LETTERS

RESEARCH SITES ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVALS

University of Fort Hare

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

Alice (main) Campus

Private Bag X1314, King William's Town Road, Alice, 5780, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 40 602 - 2501 • Fax: +27 (0) 40 602 - 2577
Email: rmabindisa@ufh.ac.za



April 25, 2013

Dr. Cuth Bass
Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (ccrri)
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban 4041
South Africa
+27 (0) 31 260 3902

Dear Dr. Bass

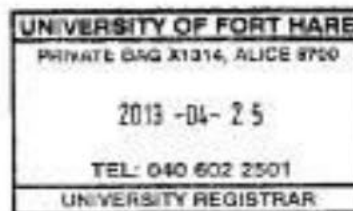
Approval from the Registrar's Office to conduct research

Having consulted the Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee, I hereby grant permission to conduct the research.

Kind regards



N Mswinyana (PhD)
REGISTRAR



Aliwalde Campus:

P. O. Box 1153, KWT 5900, Independence Avenue, Bisho, 5800, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 40 608 - 3487 • Fax: +27 (0) 40 608 - 3408

East London Campus:

Private Bag X9053, EL 5200, 93 Church Street, East London, 5201, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 43 704 - 7000 • Fax: +27 (0) 43 704 - 7090
VIC D&W Lpt: +27 (0) 43 704 - 7143/7144

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HEALTH AND WELLNESS SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HW-REC)

Registration Number NHREC: REC- 230408-014

P.O. Box 1906 • Bellville 7535 South Africa
Symphony Road Bellville 7535
Tel: +27 21 959 6917
Email: sethn@cput.ac.za

1 September 2016
REC Approval Reference No:
CPUT/HW-REC 2016/H18

Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences

Dear Prof Relebohile Moletsane

Re: APPLICATION TO THE HW-REC FOR ETHICS CLEARANCE

Approval was granted by the Health and Wellness Sciences-REC to Professor Moletsane from the University of KwaZulu-Natal for ethical clearance. This approval is for research activities related to research for Prof Moletsane at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

TITLE: Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the high-education-and-training sector in South Africa.

Comment:

Approval will not extend beyond 2 September 2017. An extension should be applied for 6 weeks before this expiry date should data collection and use/analysis of data, information and/or samples for this study continue beyond this date.

The investigator(s) should understand the ethical conditions under which they are authorized to carry out this study and they should be compliant to these conditions. It is required that the investigator(s) complete an **annual progress report** that should be submitted to the HWS-REC in December of that particular year, for the HWS-REC to be kept informed of the progress and of any problems you may have encountered.

Kind Regards



Mr. Navindhra Naidoo
Chairperson – Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences

8th April 2016

Professor Relebohile Moletsane
Principal Investigator: Education and Emancipation
c/o Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity
2nd floor, George Campbell, Howard College Campus
UKZN, Durban, 4041
South Africa

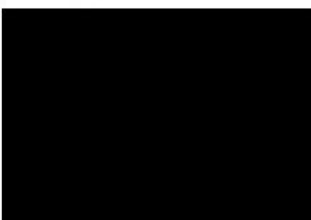
Dear Professor Moletsane

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research Committee (IRC) has granted further permission for you to conduct your research "Education and Emancipation" at the Durban University of Technology.

We would be grateful if a summary of your key research findings can be submitted to the IRC on completion of your studies.

Kindest regards.
Yours sincerely



PROF. S. MOYO
DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom,
South Africa, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee

Tel: +27 18 299 4849
Email: Ethics@nwu.ac.za

2016-04-21

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF AMENDMENT REQUEST OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Based on approval by the **Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EC-EMS)** on 12/04/2016, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby **approves** amendments made to your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the higher-education-and-training sector in South Africa: First Year Intake Study.		
Principal Investigator:	Prof R Moletsane	
Project Coordinator:	Vuyiswa Mathambo	
Ethics number: NWU-HSS/0773/012		
Application Type: Amendment Request		
Commencement date: 2016-04-12	Expiry date: 2019-05-12	Risk: N/A

Special conditions of the approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the EC-EMS (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the EC-EMS. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC via EC-EMS:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
 - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the EC-EMS. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC via EC-EMS and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC and EC-EMS retains the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EC-EMS or that information has been false or misrepresented,
 - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC or EC-EMS for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof LA

Digitally signed by Prof LA Du Plessis
DN: cn=Prof LA Du Plessis, o=North-West University, ou=Campus Noord

19 July 2016

Prof R Moletsane
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban
4041

Dear Prof Moletsane

Permission to conduct Research at the University of Venda

The Directorate of Research and Innovation has hereby granted you permission to conduct research at the University of Venda.

Project titled: **Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the higher-and-training sector in South Africa.**

The conditions are that all the data pertaining to University of Venda will be treated in accordance with the Ethical principles and that will be shared with the University. In addition consent should be sought by you as a researcher from participants.

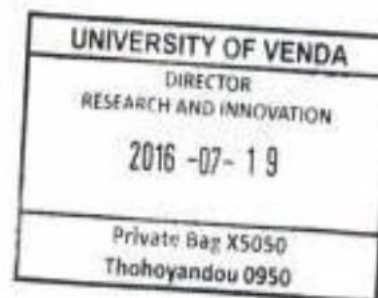
Attached is our policy on ethics.

Thank you

.....
Prof. G.E. Ekosse
Director Research and Innovation

Cc: Prof JE Crafford (DVC Academic)

Cc: Prof AE Nesamvuni (Registrar)





CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

PD Hahn Building, North Lane, Upper Campus
Postal Address: Private Bag Rondebosch 7701
Telephone: (021) 650-5027
Fax No.: 650-5045

15 April 2016

Professor Relebohile Moletsane
The Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI)
University of Kwazulu-Natal

Dear Prof Moletsane

Application for an amendment - Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the higher-education- and-training sector in South Africa

The Research Ethics Committee of the Centre for Higher Education Development has reviewed the documentation you submitted to it in respect of the above proposed inter-institutional research project. We note that this study forms part of a research project for which we granted ethics approval in 2013, and 2014.

I am pleased to confirm that the REC has approved the amendments to proceed at the University of Cape Town, on the terms specified in your submissions to the committee. Should the research focus and process change in any substantive way, you are requested to make a new submission to the Committee.

We wish you all the best with the research.

Yours sincerely



Cheryl Brown

Chair, CHED Research Ethics Committee
(on behalf of the Committee)



ETHICS CLEARANCE

Dear R Moletsane

Ethical Clearance Number: 2016-021

Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the higher-education-and-training sector in South Africa

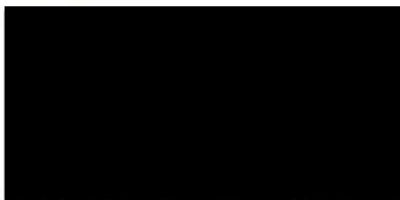
Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student to submit a new application.
- It remains the student's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to

- Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
- Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
- Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Sincerely,



Prof Geoffrey Lautenbach

Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

15 April 2016



18 February 2016

Professor Relebohile Moletsane
The Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRI)
Howard College Campus

Protocol Reference Number: HSS/0773/012

Project title: Education and Emancipation: A critical, intervention-oriented investigation of obstacles and opportunities within the higher-education-and-training sector in South Africa.

Dear Professor Moletsane

Full approval notification- Amendment

This letter serves to notify you that your application for an amendment dated 15 February 2016, has now been granted Full Approval.


1. Study sample
2. Questionnaire

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully


Dr Singh (Chair)

/px


cc Ms Vuyiswa Mathambo (Project Coordinator)

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587  Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4809 Email: singhsc@ukzn.ac.za / svmanm@ukzn.ac.za / mturcp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Appendix 7: EDITOR'S LETTER

KEMIST SHUMBA

LANGUAGE EDITOR

CONTACT

Researcher
University of KwaZulu-Natal

shumbak@ukzn.ac.za or
kemishumba@gmail.com

27 June 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: A critical exploration of student integration and attrition of Black African undergraduate students from selected South African universities

I write to confirm that language editing was performed on the above doctoral thesis.

Technical changes on spellings, grammatical expression and scientific writing were made.

The editor shall not be held liable for errors imported in later versions of the thesis.

Sincerely,

Kemist Shumba (PhD)

PhD in Health Promotion: University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)
Master of Social Science in Health Promotion (cum laude): UKZN
Bachelor of Social Science Honours in Cultural & Media Studies: UKZN
Postgraduate Certificate in Education: Great Zimbabwe University
Bachelor of Arts (English): University of Zimbabwe

APPENDIX 8: TURNITIN REPORT

Document viewer

Turnitin Originality Report

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[Thierry M. Luescher, Angelina Wilson Fadji, Keamogetse Morwe, Tshireletso S. Letsoalo. "Rapid Photovoice as a Close-Up, Emancipatory Methodology in Student Experience Research: The Case of the Student Movement Violence and Wellbeing Study", International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 2021](#)

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[Mike Lewis, Andrew Castley. "Factors affecting student progression and achievement: prediction and intervention. A two-year study", Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 2008](#)