Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry

by

Nirashnee Muthusamy

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Supervisor: Professor D. Hlalele

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DECLARATION

I, Nirashnee Muthusamy (student number 204519973), declare:

1. This thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

2. This thesis has not been submitted for degree purposes or examination here at the University of KwaZulu-Natal or at any other tertiary institution.

3. All the sources consulted have been duly indicated and acknowledged by means of in-text referencing and in the reference list.

4. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs, or other information, without the other person being duly acknowledged or referenced.

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Researcher: [redacted] **Date: February 2022**

[redacted]

Supervisor: ……. **Date: February 2022**

DEDICATION

- To my parents Mr Ronnie Muthusamy and Mrs Connie Muthusamy, without your love, support, and guidance I would not be the individual I am today. You have made many sacrifices for me and have always taught me that the only way to prosper is through education and hard work. I owe a large part of my success to you'll.
- To my husband Darishan Padayachee, I could not have done this without your constant love, support, and guidance. I am thankful for your understanding and patience. This journey would not be possible without you.
- A special thanks to my grandfather and late granny who gave me the inspiration to persist and to be the best. I have progressed this far because of the teachings and values that you have ingrained in me.
- To my nephew, Cruz who will one day be inspired to pursue a career in education.

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"Success is a journey, not a destination". (Arthur Ashe)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution through an appreciative inquiry approach. This investigation was intended to unearth strategies to enhance student engagement at a higher education institution, and to understand how and why such strategies enhance student engagement. A qualitative case study was deemed to be suitable to explore lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement. The study was informed by an appreciative interpretivist paradigm in conjunction with an appreciative inquiry theoretical framework. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select participants consisting of eight lecturers who facilitate compulsory modules pertaining to the Bachelor of Education (Foundation and Intermediate Phases) programme at one higher education institution in KwaZulu-Natal. The data generation methods utilised in this study were appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and an open-ended questionnaire. All participants were subjected to all three data generation methods. The study's data generation methods were designed in accordance with the principles and phases of an appreciative inquiry (AI) which focuses on what is working, rather than what is wrong. Findings revealed that lecturers at a higher education institution understand student engagement as active participation which entails being interactive in lectures. Further, active participation involves collaboration, co-constructive relationships, interaction, and metacognition. More importantly, the study revealed strategies that encourage active participation such as immersing oneself in the module, humanising content, creating interconnectedness, using a variety of resources, being positively involved in class activities, applying content to real-life situations, utilising interactive teaching aids, ensuring thorough lecture preparation, authenticating the learning experience, creating opportunities for critical-thinking, providing quality feedback, facilitating smaller groups and tutorials, creating a supportive learning environment, encouraging work-integrated learning and innovative models, and reviewing content and pedagogical practices. The study also revealed that the enhancement of student engagement through active participation is fulfilling and linked to success. This was assisted by effective lecturer-student cooperation, application, and reflection of knowledge, practicing acceptable societal values, preparation of students for the 21st-century world-of-work, and giving positive and expeditious feedback to students. Based on the conclusions and findings, I have suggested further research on the topic but focusing on digital pedagogy that could provide further insight on student engagement. Due to Covid-19 protocols, the institution chosen for this research migrated to online learning, hence

lecturers experienced challenges when engaging students on digital platforms. It is also recommended that future research explore in-depth the challenges that impede the enhancement of student engagement at higher education institutions so that barriers to learning could be eradicated.

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Keywords

Active participation

Affective

Appreciative Inquiry

Authenticating

Behavioural

Co-construction

Cognitive

Collaboration

Complex

Content

Digitisation

Engagement

Enhancement

Facilitation

Humanising

Interaction

Interconnectedness

Involvement

Metacognition

Multi-faceted

Pedagogy

Work-integrated learning

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Appreciative inquiry
BEd	Bachelor of Education
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FP	Foundation Phase
HEI	Higher education institution
IP	Intermediate Phase
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
PGCE	Postgraduate certificate in education
Q & A	Question and Answer
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TA	Thematic Analysis
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WIL	Work-integrated learning

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Student engagement is a widely researched subject in the field of education due to its association with success and academic achievement; therefore, it has become an integral process of teaching and learning which should be prioritised in higher education (Alli & Hassan, 2018). As such, student engagement has been currently highlighted nationally and internationally (Witowski & Cornell, 2015). Recent research alludes to student engagement being widely recognised as an important component regarding achievement in academic performance in higher education institutions (HEIs); and as a result, it has been widely theorised (Kahu, Picton & Nelson, 2017). However, we need to consider that with the changing times and with the development of technology, the concept of student engagement is evolving, and therefore it is necessary to engage in continuous research and explore the current trends to enhance student involvement in lessons or lectures. According to Quaye, Harper and Pendakur (2019), the concept of *engagement* has travelled across the landscape of higher education for many decades. Researchers, institutional leaders, and policymakers have included student engagement as the main characteristic of academic success in colleges (Quaye et al., 2019).

While it is evident that student engagement plays a major role in success and achievement, it has also become redefined many times with the changing landscapes in education. In the past, student engagement pertained to mainly participation and involvement in lectures; however, as current research findings emerged, the concept has now become multi-dimensional, multifaceted, and complex (Azvedo, 2015). DuVivier et al. (2018) add that the concept of engagement has continually been redefined as new research comes to the fore to make it simple and more understandable. Hence, student engagement has been defined in the past as "students' willingness, need and desire to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). Similarly, Matthews (2016) states that student engagement is based on the constructivist perspective that learning is influenced by the participation of the individual in educational activities. Thus, it is evident that past definitions include the term involvement and participation interchangeably when defining student engagement. For example, it is argued that student engagement is not only multi-dimensional, but also fluctuating, context-dependent, and interactive (Heflin, Shewmaker, & Nguyen, 2017). Since there is no consensus concerning the

definition of the concept of student engagement, there is a need for ongoing research to reach some finality or common ground on this topic.

1.2 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study was to explore lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution, and to gain insight into how such understanding enhances student engagement through an appreciative inquiry (AI) lens.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale for this study emanated from three fundamental angles:

Firstly, as a professional working in a higher education institution, there is much need to design creative and innovative strategies of engaging students which is a major driver for higher academic performance. Hence, student engagement, persistence, and retention are key predictors to enhance academic performance (Maguire et al. 2017). According to Osborne et al. (2018), the ongoing challenges of managing and engaging students during lectures are especially demanding since the continual annual increase in student enrolment. Additionally, Healy (2016) posits that with the advent of technology becoming an increasingly permanent part of higher education, landscapes are changing fast, thus adding pressure on teaching personnel. Accordingly, colleges and universities are racing to prepare their staff efficiently and effectively so that they can engage students in innovative ways. Cronin (2019) adds that we live in a rapidly changing world with diverse student populations, and this gives rise to new demands and challenges to be prepared to use a plethora of creative and innovative techniques when lecturing and teaching students of different cognitive levels and backgrounds.

Secondly, as a current lecturer, I have noticed that different students engage differently because of their diverse backgrounds and advancements in technology which demands multi-dimensional approaches. In other words, it is important for lecturers to remain as lifelong learners and find new ways of engaging students in a world that is changing and advancing rapidly. Hence, the need to reach consensus on the definition of student engagement for clarity and uniformity purposes which should foster innovative ways of engaging students to attain higher levels of academic performance. While this is imperative, it is also important to remain focused on what is working by highlighting and sustaining the positives. Thus, engaging in research from the appreciative inquiry lens advantages the higher education institution to share their best practices and engage in strategic innovation to enhance students' performance.

Thirdly, as a researcher I agree with Quaye et al. (2019) assert that student engagement is largely misunderstood which results in inadequate measurement and observation which leaves educators and lecturers ill-equipped and confused to gainfully engage students. An appreciative inquiry (AI) approach which underpins this study, seeks to inductively gauge an organisation's inherent strengths (Richards, 2016) in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions. This study may provide the opportunity to identify the gaps in lecturers' understanding to enhance student engagement which could possibly precipitate alternative strategies to take academic performance to a higher level.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study intends to provide a current understanding of the enhancement of student engagement and seeks to discover its strengths at a higher education institution through an appreciative inquiry approach. The results generated from this study may also lead to the enhancement of current practices at higher education institutions by motivating lecturers to adopt innovative strategies to uplift student performance. According to Alba and Barnacle (2017) there are always efforts needed to evaluate and improve student engagement in higher education institutions (HEIs). Further, this study may encourage among others, relevant stakeholders, institutional leaders, and lecturers to re-evaluate present support structures by brainstorming, collaborating, and strategising to unearth new and creative ideas to support lecturers and students regarding enhancing student engagement. In support, Kuh and Lingenfelter (2017) claim that data collected from research on student engagement can be used to improve teaching-learning environments to yield positive results when adapted appropriately to an institution's aim, objectives, culture and context.

In addition, this study may benefit lecturers from other institutions as the information generated focused on the peaks, strengths, and positives of student engagement. As such, other teaching personnel may be able to gain insight into strategies of best practice. Moreover, this study may benefit students as it may stimulate their development of creative ideas, innovation, problem-solving strategies, and improvement in support structures; hence, leading to the improvement of academic achievement and success. Lastly, this study is beneficial for higher education institutions in order to promote and support the practice of critical-thinking strategies.

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Educators have generally migrated from traditional approaches to modern methods of teaching; however, literature reveals that there is still much room for improvement as mindsets still have to shift towards creating an environment that stimulates student engagement (Oyler et al., 2016). Since the landscapes of education are constantly changing, the way in which students engage in lectures is also changing. Research shows that student engagement is associated with academic achievement (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

It can be seen that student engagement is a complex and multi-faceted concept that is continuously changing and becoming redefined; hence, the need for ongoing collaborative research to reach consensus on the elements of student engagement as a concept in education. The planning of academic activities depend on the expected quality of student engagement which contributes to the overall success of the lesson and to students' academic performance at HEIs. However, the elements that influence positive student engagement with regard to classroom educational activities remains largely blurry (Xerri, Radford, & Shacklock, 2018). Given this scenario, it is imperative to retain what is effectively working and contributing positively to student engagement, while efforts are being made to unpack strategies that enhance student engagement in lectures at HEIs, in addition to circumventing prevailing challenges that hinder quality delivery of lectures (Collaco, 2017). It is evident from the research presented that efforts are made to unpack new strategies and examine elements that influence positive student engagement, however as a researcher engaging in research, I have not come across studies that examine and sustain what is already working in terms of enhancing student engagement. Methodologically this study departs from other studies in the sense that it uses appreciative inquiry (AI) approach which is a strengths-based approach which searched for the best in people and organisations.

1.6 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.6.1 Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the affirmative topic lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution, and to gain insight into how such understanding enhances student engagement through an appreciative inquiry (AI) lens.

1.6.2 Objectives

The following objectives are aligned to the aim of the affirmative topic and research questions:

1.6.2.1 To explore lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution;

1.6.2.2 To explain how lecturers' understanding prepares them to enhance the quality of student engagement at higher education institution; and

1.6.2.3 To gain insight into why lecturers' enhance student engagement at a higher education institution the way they do.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.7.1 What are lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution?

1.7.2 How do lecturers' understanding shape their enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution?

1.7.3 Why do lecturers' enhance student engagement at a higher education institution the way they do?

1.8 DELIMITATION

According to Simon (2011) delimitations are defining the limits of a study. The delimiting factors in this study included geographical, theoretical, methodological, time, and population boundaries. The study was confined to one higher education institution located in Durban, KZN, RSA. The institution is well resourced and has sound support structures in place for teaching and learning. Blended learning and digitisation are an integral part of the lecturing process at this institution. Another delimititation of the study included the theoretical and methodological framework. The study took on a positive approach through the use of AI which focuses on what is working rather than what is wrong.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODS

1.9.1 Research Paradigm

The appreciative interpretivist paradigm which underpins this study is also referred to as qualitative inquiry, post-positivism, qualitative research, naturalistic paradigm, and constructivism (Dean, 2018). As such, interpretivist paradigms reflect both subjectivity as well as inter-subjectivity. Additionally, interpretivist paradigms acknowledge that there can be multiple realities in the world (Kelly, Dowling, & Millar, 2018). The researcher found this paradigm to be suitable as it lends itself to a qualitative analysis technique which is aligned to

an appreciative inquiry approach to examine how lecturers understand and enhance student engagement in higher education institutions focusing on what is working well.

1.9.2 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach which implies the use of words instead of numbers (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). A qualitative study focuses on the experience, understandings, and interpretation of people in the social world (Ibid). Qualitative approaches are referred to by various names and descriptions which often include field study, case study, interpretive, symbolic, ethnographic research and plain descriptive (Bresler & Stake, 2017). Further, qualitative methods are applied to seek answers to questions about experiences, meanings and perceptions which emanate from participant' responses (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016). The researcher found this approach to be appropriate because it allows one to focus on exploring lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution through an appreciative inquiry process that provides insight into the topic under investigation. This was elicited from participants who were encouraged to share the peaks, positives, and strengths of enhancing student engagement at a higher education institution. This sharing of information gives participants a voice, while allowing for probing in terms of elaboration and clarification concerning issues that lie beneath the surface of the original responses (Cohen et al., 2018). Hence, the participants are at liberty to become unrestricted agents of generating qualitative data that fosters an incisive comprehension of the phenomenon under study.

1.9.3 Research Design

Tight (2010, p. 337), cited in Cohen et al. (2018) states that a case study examines "a small sample or group in-depth" and "analyses the complexity of a given, real-life project, institution, policy, program, or system from various or multiple perspectives in order to understand it". Research involving case studies seeks to investigate real-life phenomena in-depth within their specific context (Ridder, 2017). The various types of cases involve individuals, groups, organisations, problems, or anomalies (Ibid). Hence, the case study research design was relevant to this study because the researcher investigated the subject of student engagement at one HEI through appreciative enquiry and from gaining an understanding of multiple perspectives. Case studies come in many forms - this study was conducted by using a descriptive case study design.

1.9.3.1 Descriptive case study

This kind of case study is descriptive and uses real-life experience to elicit data (Baxter, 2008). Consequently, descriptive case studies involve narrative accounts that lend themselves to appropriate data collection methods the researcher used (discursive conversations and discussions, narrative interviews, and open-ended questionnaires). Since this case study followed interpretive research traditions, it narrated the story from the perspective of the individual (Cohen et al., 2018). Accordingly, this study explored the understanding and enhancement of student engagement from the perspective of lecturers in order to produce descriptive and narrative data. As such, it was well-suited to the descriptive case study nature of this study. As the objective of a descriptive case study is to interrogate a sample comprehensively, it benefits the reader who can dissect the topic while considering the perspective of the researcher (Mills, 2010).

1.9.4 Sampling Techniques

This study's sampling techniques included purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgment sampling, is the intentional choice of a participant due to certain and specific qualities that participant may possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). That is, as Mason (2002) explains, that the logical basis for employing purposive sampling is that the researcher assumes, based on the existing theoretical understanding of the topic being studied, that certain categories of individuals may have a different, unique, or significant perspective on the phenomenon being studied, and their presence in the sample should be made certain. In this study the researcher explored lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a HEI as they possess the knowledge and experience required to provide the researcher with rich and relevant information; hence, the researcher selected participants who are involved or responsible for enhancing student engagement. According to Etikan and Bala (2017), this sampling method is based on the discernment of the researcher as to who will provide the best information to realise the objectives and purpose of the study, as well as to answer the research questions. The other sampling method that this study adopted was convenience sampling which is employed by researchers when selecting individuals or groups who are willing and available to participate in the study at the said time (Omona, 2013). Convenience sampling, which is also referred to as volunteer sampling or accidental sampling (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), was also adopted as a method of sampling for this study as it was conducted at the HEI where the researcher is employed, and therefore the participants were easily accessible.

1.9.5 The Sample

The lecturers chosen for this study were based on the purpose of the study which is to explore lecturers' understanding of enhancing student engagement at a higher education institution. The researcher selected participants who facilitated modules that are compulsory on the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme for the Intermediate and Foundation Phases. Also, choosing lecturers who taught compulsory modules was because they serviced the full complement of students. At the outset, a consent form was emailed to possible participants who taught compulsory modules and were chosen on suitability and their willingness to participate voluntarily in the study. Although all lecturers who taught compulsory modules were emailed, only the first eight participants who responded and who were willing to voluntarily participate in the study, were selected. The reason for selecting eight participants was due to the fact that the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme (Foundation and Intermediate Phases) is of four-year duration for each phase, so four lecturers from the BEd Foundation Phase and four lecturers from the BEd Intermediate Phase were chosen. A first, second, third, and fourth-year lecturer was chosen for both the Foundation and Intermediate Phases - a total of eight lecturers.

1.9.6 Data Generation Process and Methods

Data generation methods are crucial as they determine the quality of the collected information and the type of descriptions (Paradis, et al., 2016). For the purpose of this study, the researcher opted to use discursive conversations and discussions, appreciative interviews, and open-ended questionnaires. The data generation processes followed the phases of the appreciative inquiry (AI) approach. The three data generation methods are outlined below:

1.9.6.1 Appreciative Interviews

Life is full of dialogic interactions and continuous experiences, and one way of recording such experiences into meaningful units is to construct a narrative (Moen, 2006). Appreciative interviews were used as one of the three methods used to generate data in this study. Appreciative interviews are different from traditional interviews as it focuses on what is working in an organisation rather than what is wrong. Appreciative inquiry interviews are a narrative approach to generating and representing data and constructs reality through the use of storytelling (Cockell &McAthur Blair, 2020). This method of data generation was chosen as it is strongly interpretivist which aligns itself to the research paradigm. It also engenders fresh insights of often familiar situations. In the case of this study the researcher hopes to make-sense of lecturers' understanding of student engagement in order to enhance academic

performance at a higher education institution. This data generation method motivates the participants to narrate their personal experiences and observations in a natural way. Through these narratives, the researcher was able to indulge in sense-making regarding lecturers' understanding of student engagement and how such knowledge may lead to the enhancement of academic performance at a higher education institution. Designing or crafting appreciative interviews should adhere to Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) appreciative interviews should adhere to the 5-D framework which includes, define, discovery, dream, design and destiny. As indicated in figure 1.1 all data generation methods were designed in accordance with the 5-D cycle.

1.9.6.2 Discursive informed conversations and discussions

According to Mary (2014), a discursive informed conversation or discussion takes place spontaneously (and is unplanned) between the researcher and participants. Discursive conversations allow for flexibility, but at the same time they foster a rich and deeper understanding of the topic. This method of data generation facilitates in gaining an in-depth insight into lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution through an AI lens. Such insight includes reflections and experiences that are authentic and deeper which promotes the enhancing of student engagement. These reflections and conversations were prompted by the researcher in accordance with information gleaned from narrative interviews which expanded the exploratory nature of this study.

1.9.6.3 Open-ended questionnaire

Open-ended questionnaires are appropriate as they are designed for research that includes smaller groups or to elicit information of a personal, honest, and spontaneous nature from respondents, in addition to ticking numbers and boxes (Cohen et al., 2018). Open-ended questionnaires allow respondents to answer questions in their own words which promotes spontaneity (Popping, 2015). According to Cohen et al. (2018) an open-ended questionnaire provides a window of opportunities for respondents to freely shed light on an issue. The researcher has chosen this method of data generation for participants to feel free and comfortable to respond to questions on student engagement in a HEI through appreciative inquiry. Moreover, when participants are comfortable in a non-threatening environment, they describe their experiences in an in-depth and detailed manner which engenders rich authentic data. The questionnaires were populated using the 'google forms' application and then distributed electronically to the selected participants. This assisted the researcher in getting the completed questionnaires quickly returned from the respondents which saved much time.

The analysis of the responses provided incisive insight into what was working in terms of student engagement as participants shared the positives, peaks, strengths, and successes on the topic under investigation. Once the discovery phase was completed the dream phase highlighted the best of what had been identified in the discovery phase which will assist the researcher to distinguish common themes. The dream and destiny phases of AI provided insight into how students could engage effectively in class activities (lectures/lessons) which triggered creative and innovative ideas to enhance student engagement at a HEI for the future. The data generation table 1.1 below demonstrates how the phases of AI were followed:

Table 1.1 Data generation grid with the phases of appreciative inquiry (AI)

AI Phases	**Description**	**Appreciative Inquiry (AI) principle(s)**	**Methods of Data Generation**	**Research Question**
Define	Clarifying the focus of the topic. (Student Engagement)	Constructionist-Reality is created through language and conversations. The focus of the topic was student engagement. This enabled participants to share their understanding of student engagement which was based on their interactions with students and lecturing experience.	Appreciative Interviews Discursive Conversation Questionnaire	RQ1
Discovery	Appreciate and value the best of what is. (The best or peak student engagement experiences)	Simultaneity – Creating change by starting to ask questions. Through the principle of simultaneity participants shared the peak or best experiences of student engagement.	Appreciative Interviews Discursive Conversation Questionnaire	RQ2

Dream	Imagine and envision what might be. (Sharing ideas and stories of what lecturers envision for the future in terms of student engagement).	Poetic principle is demonstrated in the stories that people tell each other every day. Words are important as they invoke and express sentiments and understanding. The words in AI seek to enliven and inspire the best in people. Using appreciative interviews, discursive conversations and questionnaires allowed participants to share their stories through rich conversation and language. From this the researcher was able to extract gems of what lecturers imagine and envision for the future in terms of student engagement.	Appreciative Interviews Discursive Conversation Questionnaire	RQ2
Design	Co-construct how it might be in the future. (Lecturers' shared how they aspire to create positive student engagement).	The anticipatory principle uses artful creation of positive imagery on a collective basis to refashion anticipatory reality. Through the anticipatory principle and the design phase the direction of the conversation allowed lecturers to feel hopeful and competent about student engagement and think of it as fulfilling.	Appreciative Interviews Discursive Conversation Questionnaire	RQ3
Delivery or Destiny	Learn, empower, improvise, and	The positive principle suggests that the driving force and sustainable change	Appreciative Interviews,	RQ3

	sustain it. (Lecturers shared ideas and opportunities about student engagement for the future)	requires positive effects and social bonding. Excitement, hope, inspiration, camaraderie and joy increase creativity. Openness to new ideas and people, and cognitive flexibility. Through the use of positive questions in the appreciative interviews, discursive conversations and questionnaire the researcher was able to share lecturers' positive ideas for change and possibilities.	Discursive Conversations, Questionnaire	

1.9.7 Data Analysis

During the data analysis process which applied the thematic analysis (TA) tool, findings emerged which increased understanding, and provided rich explanations and interpretations of the phenomenon under study (Cohen et al., 2018). Thematic analysis assisted to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the bank of collected data (Braun et al., 2019). In comparison to other methods, TA considerably organises and describes data in detail (Ibid). Thematic analysis helped to identify research themes which included attributes, descriptors, elements, and concepts to answer the research questions (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

1.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

There degree of trustworthiness of a study refers to the level of credibility of the data, its interpretation, and the procedures that were used to ensure its authenticity and quality (Pilot & Beck, 2014). The establishing of trustworthiness of a research study is based on four aspects: credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Solutions, 2017). These four aspects of trustworthiness were applied to ensure the validity and authenticity of the study.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to protect all individuals involved in the research process, researchers must ensure the protection of the integrity, dignity, right to self-determination, confidentiality, and privacy of all personal data. Artal (2017) identifies autonomy, human rights, harmony, freedom from physical or psychological risks, beneficence, and justice as the cardinal principles of ethics. Ethical clearance was granted to conduct this study from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In order to collect data, permission was requested from the authorities of the higher education institution where the study was conducted. Informed consent forms were disseminated to all selected participants informing them of the study's purpose and details. By providing individuals with all information (written and verbally) about the study, informed consent was obtained (Biros, 2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured for all participants as well as the higher education institution where the study was conducted. Identities and information were protected by assigning pseudonyms/codes.

1.12 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

This chapter provided the background information about the study, the rationale for conducting it, and its significance. It also presented the focus, objectives, critical questions, and aim and objectives of the study. Also included were a brief description of the methodology and design of the research study, as well as an outline of the chapters.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviewed the literature on student engagement in higher education institutions by using an appreciative inquiry approach. The literature which was reviewed related to the aim, objectives, and research questions which unpacked the concept of student engagement, its dimensions, and the factors that contribute to its challenges and successes.

Chapter Three: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter explained the relevance and importance of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

A description of this study's design and methodology was presented in this chapter. The research design, the research approach, and the research paradigm used were also outlined.

Also described were the methods used in generating data, sampling procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical issues, limitations, and conclusions.

Chapter Five: Analysis of Data and Presentation of Findings

The chapter presents findings generated from lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a Higher Education Institution through the appreciative inquiry approach. The three main themes as well as the sub-themes were explained. Participants' verbatim responses from narrative interviews and discursive informed conversations were provided to support the findings.

Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

The findings of this chapter emanated from the data analysis. The chapter was organised based on the main themes that emerged from the collected data which also addressed the study's objectives. This chapter discussed lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution, how this understanding prepared them to enhance the quality of student engagement. A summary of the contributions of this study is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Seven: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarised the key findings and conclusions of the study. Recommendations were suggested for future research regarding student engagement in light of the limitations of the study.

1.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

As a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, student engagement in higher education was presented as the focus in this chapter. Also, outlined are the focus, rationale, and significance of the study. In addition, the aim and objectives, the research questions, and the study's location were elucidated. In addition, the study's design and methodology were briefly described. Chapter two provided the literature review on why student engagement is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, in addition to the factors that enhance student engagement in higher education institutions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provided an overview of the study which focused on lecturers' understanding of enhancing student engagement. This chapter explored relevant literature pertaining to enhancing student engagement by unpacking the concept of student engagement, which consisted of different dimensions and contributing factors that enhance student engagement. Angelle (2018, p. 38) clarifies that "the most critical shift during the past twenty years has been a move away from a conception of learning as passive absorption of information, to a conception of learning as the active engagement of meaning". As such, research has highlighted that there has been a critical shift in learning, and as a result this impacts the way students have been engaging over the years. However, even though it is a widely researched phenomenon, one must consider that the landscapes of education are always changing and as a result student engagement has become redefined over time. Furthermore, the growth of digital teaching technologies and the increasing diversity of tertiary student enrolments from non-traditional backgrounds are some of the aspects that are constantly reminding institutions to review their teaching and learning strategies for contemporary relevance in order to effectively engage students (Arjomandi, Seufert, Brien, & Anwar, 2018). As a result, the subject of student engagement has evolved over time to become a complex one.

Accordingly, it is beneficial to first unpack the term *engagement* which is frequently related to agency, commitment, and reciprocity, which are synonymous with involvement and participation (DeVito, 2016). Furthermore, 'engagement' is interchangeably used as a synonym for active, attentive, interest, motivation, and effort (DeVito, 2016). The implication is that it entails best practice in teaching and learning (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). Hence, engagement has been defined in different ways in literature but basically and commonly refers to the active commitment and purposeful effort expended by students towards all aspects of their learning, including both formal and informal activities (Boulton et al., 2019). In other words, effective student engagement encourages students to play a more active role when it comes to learning which enriches the educational experience. Furthermore, engagement is a crucial construct for researchers in education to understand as it encapsulates those moments of a student's assimilation and concentration in a learning activity (Wiseman, Kennedy &

Lodge, 2016). Moreover, if we can better understand *engagement*, and the environment in which it occurs, we may be able to enhance teaching and learning processes by providing support systems to foster effective and sustainable student engagement. In short, it is beneficial for lecturers to consider that students are unique and have different needs; and so different students will engage in different ways. Part of being inclusive is engaging students in diverse and creative ways to enhance better academic performances.

According to Schindler et al. (2017), student engagement is a complex phenomenon which engenders many interpretations which are grounded in psychological, social, and cultural factors. Consequently, Boulton et al. (2019) contend that student engagement at higher education institutions (HEIs), is difficult to measure because of its variety of forms (e.g. attendance of lectures, self-study, the use of online platforms etc.). Therefore, the discussion of the literature review in this chapter was intended to unpack the complexity of this phenomenon, specifically focusing on student engagement as a multifaceted, multidimensional, and complex phenomenon with different dimensions and contributory factors that enhance it.

2.2 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: MULTIFACETED, MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND COMPLEX

Varga (2017) contends that student engagement reveals a student's interest and attention in academic-related activities through independently working on subject assignments, contributing to discussions during lectures, collaboratively working on a learning task with peers, and a student's disposition and desire to participate in the learning opportunities as a whole. Similarly, Bowden, Tickle and Naumann (2019) affirm that student engagement is a multi-feature construct that includes resiliency, efforts and persistence while facing obstacles (vigour). This involves passion, inspiration, and pride in academic learning (dedication). Peters et al. (2019) state that over the past decade, there has been increasing attention toward a more comprehensive understanding of student engagement, adding that student engagement is also associated with the interaction between time, effort and other closely connected resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes. Hence, it is apparent that literature provides ample evidence that student engagement is associated with positive educational outcomes which is beneficial in HEIs as it raises the status of the institution in terms of higher levels of academic performance.

Additionally, student engagement involves desirable student behaviours such as regular attendance, undivided concentration, and active participation; this includes the psychological experience of establishing mental states that one is being cared for, respected, and part of the institution – a sense of ownership (Olson & Peterson, 2015). It has been observed that most lecturers use these observable indicators to gauge whether students are effectively engaging or not. The concept of student engagement also refers to the quality of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students demonstrate when they are learning or being taught, which extends the level of motivation to progress in education (Dary et al., 2016). lecturers tend to focus on the students who exhibit enthusiasm but also look for certain indicators like expressions, students who are eager to respond to questions, students who respond to your direction, and students who ask in-depth questions. Pather et al. (2017) suggest that when students are engaged, they are able to work autonomously, have positive constructive peer relationships, feel competent to achieve success, and they are able to make legitimate knowledge claims. Research studies have alluded to many indicators - some are observable, whilst others are not. Based on the variety of indicators for student engagement it has been maintained that this phenomenon is a multifaceted one. In table 2.1 below the various indicators of student engagement which are categorised into three dimensions, are ooutlined.

Table 2.1: Indicators of student engagement (Bond & Bendlier, 2019, p. 3)

Cognitive engagement	**Affective engagement**	**Behavioural engagement**
Purposeful	Enthusiasm	Effort
Integrating ideas	Sense of belonging	Attention/focus
Critical-thinking	Satisfaction	Developing agency
Setting learning goals	Curiosity	Attendance
Self-regulation	Sees relevance	Attempting
Operational reasoning	Interest	Homework completion
Trying to understand	Sense of wellbeing	Positive conduct
Reflection	Vitality/zest	Action/initiation
Focus/concentration	Feeling appreciated	Confidence
Deep learning	Manages expectations	Participation/involvement

Learning from peers	Enjoyment	Asking teacher or peers for help
Justifying decisions	Pride	Assuming responsibility
Understanding	Excitement	Identifying opportunities/challenges
Doing extra to learn more	Desire to do well	Developing multidisciplinary skills
Positive self-perceptions	Positive self-perceptions	Positive self-perceptions
Preference for challenging tasks		
Teaching self and peers' positive attitudes about learning and values	Teaching self and peers' positive attitudes about learning and values	Teaching self and peers' positive attitudes about learning and values
Use of sophisticated learning strategies		Time on task/staying on task/persistence
Positive perceptions of teacher-support		

While it is evident that most research on this topic refers to multi-aspect constructs when defining student engagement, other definitions allude to the dimensions of this phenomenon. The variety of definitions for student engagement reaches a sense of consensus when emphasising the three interrelated facets of student engagement; that is, cognitive, behavioural, and affective engagement (Alcine, 2019). The emotional or affective dimension of student engagement pertains to interaction with teachers, school staff, other students, and the institution; the behavioural dimension pertains to the involvement of students in both academic and social activities; and the cognitive dimension involves the psychological and cognitive processes of students (Ibid). Angelle (2018) contends that although a comprehensible and uniform definition of student engagement does not prevail, it is often described as a complex psychological concept of different dimensions (behavioural, emotional, and cognitive) including feelings of belonging, enjoyment, and attachment.

Since student engagement is difficult to quantify and define, researchers have agreed that there are many aspects to consider when it comes to measuring student engagement. In other words,

student engagement is a construct that is widely used in teaching and learning to justify different behaviours that students exhibit in the learning environment, and researchers have indicated that the meaning of student engagement is still broad and there is no consensus on its meaning, measurement, and definition (Nguyen, Cannata, & Miller, 2018). Therefore, researchers find the dimensions as useful tools to recognise that students engage in different and complex ways. However, the concept of student engagement has become blurry for lecturers, educators, and researchers, in terms of the ongoing conversations about its nature and evolution. Therefore, it is advisable to investigate this phenomenon on an ongoing basis due to its complexity. To understand the dimensions, the researcher unpacked the characteristics of each one (below).

2.3 DIMESIONS AND INDICATORS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The common dimensions of student engagement evident in literature involve the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural domains. The emotional and affective are terms that are used interchangeably, while cognitive and psychological are also synonymous. It is also important not to lose sight of the unique nature of each dimension, and to recognise that an individual may choose to engage in one or more of these dimensions (Pickford, 2016).

Since each dimension has its own distinct nature, it is necessary to clearly describe each of the dimensions that emerge from the literature.

2.3.1 The Cognitive Dimension

Cognitive engagement is considered to be an active process and one of the most fundamental forms of engagement (Redmond, Abawi, Brown, Henderson, & Heffernan, 2018). The cognitive dimension is the first component of student engagement. In order to understand the cognitive engagement dimension, it is necessary to first unpack the term *cognitive*. Cognition involves the mental processes of thinking, memorising, problem-solving, reasoning, planning, and processing which can be considered as elements of human intelligence (Anstey, 2016). Therefore, cognitive engagement can involve everything from memorisation to strategic learning strategies that can promote deep insight, understanding, and expertise (Conner, 2016). By going beyond the minimum requirements or even redefining the parameters of assignments, cognitive engagement is a sign of genuine interest in learning (Pentaraki & Burkholder, 2017). Additionally, cognitive engagement is driven by the elements of investment which include thoughtfulness and willingness to make the necessary effort to understand complex texts and

to master difficult skills (Law et al., 2017). As such, cognitive engagement can be divided into two categories: investment of time in thinking about learning and developing learning experiences using strategic skills (Ibid).

According to Casimiro (2016), cognitive engagement involves describes ways in which students think, how they make sense of the content or material presented to them, and how they use metacognitive and self-regulated strategies to master academic or learning content (Casimiro, 2016). Also, cognitive engagement is crucial because it influences students' academic and behavioural engagement; and students cognitively engaged are more likely to regularly attend classes and achieve high scores academically **(**Pohl, 2020). It must be borne in mind that students are more likely to invest time in academic aspects that interest them; hence, they become motivated and so easily understand the learning objectives of a particular unit of study (Pickering, 2017). Thus, it is beneficial to consider students' interests when planning lectures or lessons.

Additionally, Manwaring (2017) defines cognitive engagement as the active use of cognitive learning strategies combined with self-regulatory strategies. The use of self-regulated learning can be seen to be a common component of cognitive engagement definitions. A student who self-regulates learning requires a degree of effort to manage such learning. Sometimes, rather than listing each component of cognitive engagement, cognitive engagement is simply defined as "students' self-regulation or use of self-regulation strategies" (Wolters & Taylor, 2012, p. 641). Motivation is also necessary for students to develop self-regulated strategies of learning (Ariani, 2017) which can be understood by examining the psychological investment by students, especially goal-orientated and intrinsic motivation (Casimiro, 2016). However, it is difficult to assess cognitive engagement because it can only be done through observation (Ibid).

According to Obery (2018), it is possible that cognitive engagement and motivation are interrelated - motivation is considered to be intent (internal), and engagement as action (observable), both of which involve self-regulated strategies to enhance learning (Ben-Eliyahu et al., 2018).

2.3.2 The Behavioural Dimension

The second type of engagement is behavioural engagement. It is important to understand behaviour before we understand behavioural engagement. Neenan (2018) states that behaviour can be divided into two components which include action tendencies (how you may or may not act in a situation) and clear actions (what you did in a situation). According to Zhoc et al.

(2019), many HEIs approach student engagement from a behavioural perspective. The behavioural approach of students allows for the exploration of a wide range of variables. (Ibid). Students demonstrate engagement behaviourally by attending classes and participating in activities (Konold et al., 2018). Actions concerning behavioural engagement emanating from participation is vital to the achievement of positive outcomes, whether in academic endeavours, extracurricular activities, or social activities (Sahin, 2019). These explanations indicate that behavioural engagement leans more towards observable behaviours in different domains and educational settings involving a learning task which requires students' persistence, effort, and contribution towards their own learning (Al Mamun, Lawrie, & Wright, 2016). According to Wang et al. (2016), domain-specific engagement entails asking and answering questions, participating, persisting, or giving up easily and not paying attention. Lui et al. (2014) add by mentioning several indicators of students' level of engagement: positive body language, consistent focus, verbal participation, confidence, interest, and enjoyment.

However, behavioural engagement does not only entail participation, but also interaction. According to Schinlder (2017), interaction with others is an important part of behavioural engagement. Nguyen et al. (2018) state that behaviour can be divided into three categories: how students interact with their teachers, how students interact with their classmates, and how students interact with the academic content of modules. Students who actively respond to learning tasks, ask relevant questions, solve task-related problems, and participate in relevant discussions are examples of students who are behaviourally engaged (Conner, 2016). Moreover, relationships between students and teachers are extremely important as developing a strong, positive, and cordial relationship is crucial for increasing teacher-student engagement (Nguyen et al., 2018). Further, there are different levels of engagement that can lead to different levels of performances, depending on the demands of behavioural tasks (Carcea, Insanally, & Froemke, 2017). However, interaction is not merely limited to the lecturer/teacher and student, but also includes interaction with texts, peers, and the lesson/lecture.

2.3.3 The Emotional Dimension

Another important dimension of student engagement is affective engagement, also known as the emotional dimension. In the context of engagement, emotional states include excitement, joy, sadness, anger, or pity experienced by individuals when completing an activity (Sakr, Jewitt, & Price, 2016). According to Manwaring (2017), emotional engagement encompasses enthusiasm, interest, pleasure, satisfaction, hope, pride, and vitality. Activating or deactivating

energy emotions can be distinguished as positive or negative emotions (Ibid). Various emotions such as happiness, excitement, boredom, anxiety, frustration, and sadness are considered to be the main components of student engagement (Conner, 2016). When students display either positive or negative emotional reactions to learning or learning activities, they demonstrate emotional engagement (Conner, 2016). Engaging students emotionally exposes their feelings of connection or disconnection in relation to learning or learning tasks (Conner, 2016). The emotional state of learners impacts on the learning process, affects what is learned, and influences what is retained. According to King and Chen (2019), there are numerous studies which dissected the importance of emotions in learning processes across multiple disciplines such as neuroscience, psychology, and education. Despite their importance in learning and their universality, emotions are influenced by culture and society in the way they are experienced, expressed, perceived, and regulated (King & Chen, 2019).

Furthermore, affective/emotional engagement refers to the student's attitude and feelings toward learning in addition to emotional engagement (Redmond et al., 2018). However, Davis, Summers, and Miller (2012) assert that emotional engagement is rather more about the pleasant and unpleasant feelings students experience in their relationships with teachers, peers, and the school, as opposed to what they experience when they participate in learning activities. It is evident that the common theme amongst all definitions of emotional engagement is interest and enthusiasm as for one to be emotionally engaged there needs to be a response, and that response can be either positive or negative. In other words, students can also be connected or disconnected about a learning experience or activity. From the researcher’s experience, it is evident that students’ responses to learning activities indicate that they are engaged.

According to Redmond et al. (2018), there are four indicators of emotional engagement: managing expectations, articulating assumptions, recognising motivation, and committing to learning. Figure 2.1 below is a circumplex model which can be divided into positive and negative spheres to illustrate emotions in an academic environment. Activating positive emotions (located in the upper right quadrant) according to Pekrun and Garcia (2012), is considered equivalent to emotional engagement since it is the energy that these emotions provide that fuels engagement.

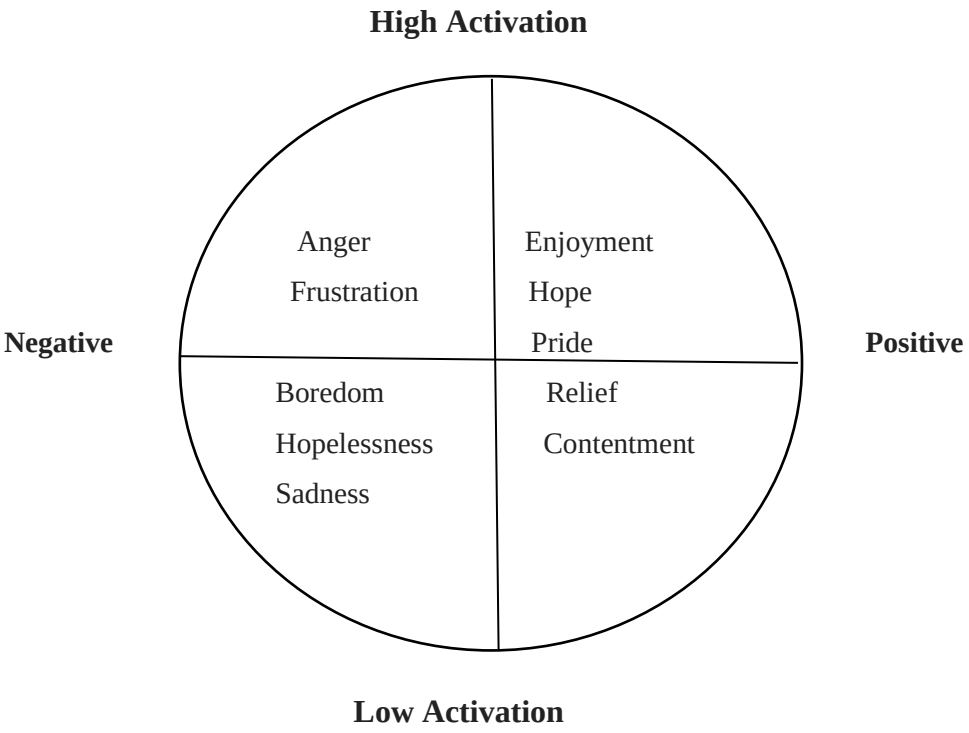

Figure 2.1: Academic emotions circumplex model (Adapted: Pekrun & Garcia, 2012, p. 7)

Emotional engagement has many pedagogical benefits considering that students who are interested or intrigued by the material or teaching methodologies will be expressing positive or negative feelings. Research has shown that emotional engagement is associated with positive outcomes for student success which raises academic achievement levels (Beale, 2018). Research highlighted that there are two main feelings that students express when it comes to emotional engagement: either feelings of boredom or feelings of enthusiasm, which can be classified as positive or negative. According to Zepke (2014), emotional engagement refers to students' reactions and relationships that foster an interest in learning when engaging with teachers, classmates, and administrators. These experiences can either lead to disinterest, or a love for learning.

2.4 FACTORS ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In order to understand the factors that contribute to enhancing student engagement, it is beneficial to unpack the term *enhance*. The term *enhances* or *enhancing* in education refers to persuing intentional steps to improve learning opportunities (Troelsen, 2016). Enhancing is also a process of raising the quality of work (Rickman, 2018). According to Osadebe and Highes (2017), it is also about increasing the effectiveness or achieving better success in some

endeavour. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on enhancing student engagement; in other words, this study basically explored the factors that improve and increase student engagement. Understanding the key factors that contribute to enhancing student engagement will assist academics in improving student motivation, attaining overall success, and raising the standard of academic achievement. There are various factors that contribute to enhancing student engagement in a higher education environment, and these include availability of relevant resources, vibrant social networks, better learning techniques, thorough and creative preparation of lectures (Barua et al., 2018). According to Groves, Sellars and Barber (2015), when dissecting student engagement, the factors that have the greatest impact are student motivation, student-lecturer interactions, student-to-student interactions, institutional support, and active citizenship. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on lecturer preparation, pedagogy, interaction, resources, support, learning environment, and motivation; these were common factors that emerged from literature.

2.4.1 Lecturer Preparation

Several studies have revealed that adequate preparation and support can help lecturers' deal with the challenges of teaching and learning (Gaikhorst et al., 2020). According to Suryani (2018), students' perceptions on lecturers' professionalism included thorough preparation, punctuality, and incisive knowledge of the subject matter. The most highly valued attributes were innovativeness, responsibility, meeting tutorial schedules, punctuality, and timeous feedback (Martín, 2019). Although lecturers are in charge of teaching students, they must also actively indulge in research activities to keep abreast with the modern trends in education to upgrade teaching skills and knowledge of their subject areas (Bentley, 2013). There is no doubt that students will highly value a lecturer who is committed to teaching excellence (Xiao & Wilkins, 2015). It is evident that preparation is an essential part of a student's perceptions on lecturer professionalism. A thoroughly prepared and creative lecturer (or teacher) promotes maximum engaging with students who now display a better understanding the subject matter.

Further, student satisfaction surveys have to consider significant aspects of lecturer preparation, which should include organisation and planning (Carvajal, 2016). Generally, the students mentioned that their lecturers should prepare the semester schedule, module materials, and instructional resources in advance, in addition to being punctual in class (Suparma et al., 2019). Since lecturers are essential in higher education institutions, they should be in a position to efficiently fulfil their roles, tasks, responsibilities, have a boundless knowledge of their

subjects, and prepare lessons thoroughly in order to guarantee a sound quality of teaching-Planning and research are important elements of a lecturer's daily task, and one needs to consider that the landscapes of education are changing, hence it is beneficial to exploit innovative and best practices in one's pedagogical endeavours.

2.4.2 Pedagogy as an Enhancing Factor

According to North (2016), teachers and lecturers should effectively engage students in order to facilitate high-quality learning while ensuring the attainment of learning outcomes. The definition of pedagogy according to Youngman (2018) is that it refers to the theory, method, and application of teaching, as well as the assessment and feedback associated with it. These pedagogical theoretical frameworks of how learning works, shape lecturers' instructional decisions and relate to how they interact with their students (Brown & Thomas, 2013). Pompea and Walker (2017) mention that from an educational improvement perspective, pedagogy is an important part of enhancing student engagement. Moreover, pedagogy refers to a dynamic relationship between learning, teaching, and culture which has a great impact on achievement, success, and student engagement (Nicu, 2018). All learning opportunities need to be engaging and motivating to stimulate students to learn, and pedagogy plays an important role when it comes to enhancing student engagement. There are many pedagogies when it comes to teaching and learning which range from the traditional teaching styles to the modern digital or online strategies. I, as a lecturer engaging in research, found that the common methods that emerged from current literature included online teaching, blended learning, flipped classroom techniques, and groupwork - which I focused on (below).

2.4.2.1 Online Learning

Shenoy, Mahendra and Vijay (2020) assert that the traditional lecture style has been criticised for not engaging students; they suggested and emphasised more contemporary pedagogical practices like online learning. Online learning and technology have created a paradigm shift in education and has changed the way knowledge and skills are acquired. Moreover, online platforms in education can be arranged to form learning communities of geographically scattered students throughout the world. There has been a dramatic increase in online education practices in recent years which provide a viable option for learners who are unable to access traditional education due to geographic location, financial, or other limitations (Ramesh et al., 2014). Further, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and its lockdown protocols forced the introduction of digital teaching and learning. According to Kim and Whang (2013), the current

teaching-learning situations at tertiary level have been replaced by interactive multimedia modes – the chalk, blackboards and papers have become outdated.

Significantly, online learning is gaining popularity especially with the current Covid-19 pandemic that we are facing. Institutions are able to engage students through online learning platforms. Wong et al. (2019) mention that online learning, web-based learning, distance learning, e-learning and computer-based learning are terms that are used interchangeably. Ko and Rossen (2017) state that online learning allows students the freedom to use the internet to search for courses, resources, classes, and instructors that fit their needs. Moreover, students can read articles, books, listen to lectures, and submit assignments online. This is a convenient, flexible, and a personalised approach to teaching and learning.

While teething problems concerning digital education and online learning are being attended to, many HEIs and their academic staff are strategising on how to design materials to keep students engaged through online platforms. Shenoy et al. (2020) mention that student engagement is a challenge online or offline; however, in a recent study in Bangalore India, when a faculty started engaging in online sessions student attendance was twenty times better than regular classroom teaching as students enjoy the flexibility of online learning. Also, as the new technological generation, students are able to relate to online learning as they find it engaging. Migrating to online teaching and learning platforms has many benefits; however, for online learning to be effective meticulous instructional designing and planning are required (Hodges et al., 2020).

Tanis (2020) confirms that interactive multimedia and online learning are means of promoting active learning which makes a course to be interesting, effective, and alive. As part of a study, students who had unlimited access to online lectures obtained higher grades than students who did not have such access (Ibid). Such presentations provide students with study aids and offers a measure of control over the learning process (Tanis, 2020). It has also become an efficient and effective way of learning and engaging students (Pechevsky-Font & Dunbar, 2015). Students have indicated that online learning allows them to academically interact in an environment that is conducive and comfortable to them, whether it is their home environment or the library. According to Panigrahi, Srivastava and Sharma (2018), online learning has provided a better outcome for student engagement and accelerated a learning momentum worldwide, thus reducing the temporal and spatial problems experienced with traditional teaching and learning.

Providing students with choices and flexibility enables them to have a more personal experience when it comes to teaching and learning, and this can contribute to enhancing student engagement. Online learning environments have many tools available for instructors to gather informal data about student participation (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). These informal tools to collect data empowers a lecturer to even conduct surveys in a time-efficient way to get feedback from learners regarding, among others, academic activities and course evaluations. Technology is constantly evolving and expanding so the possibilities and opportunities that exist within online learning are also expanding. It includes visual, auditory, and written components which encompass different learning styles (Shipovskaya & Klyukina, 2019). This is very beneficial as different components will engage different types of students depending on which stimuli appeals to them, and this can also be an inclusive method as there is a variety of stimuli that is being used (Ibid). Online learning also allows the students to process information at their own pace when working with a variety of online resources as they so many different learning components at their disposal that help to keep them fully engaged and interested in academic activities.

Matthew and Ebelelloanya (2016) state that many African universities are eager to adopt more technological innovations. Over the past few years, higher education has been transformed into a world that primarily uses tablets and social media for both teaching and learning (Ibid). Using technology for teaching and learning has proven to be beneficial to the educational process; especially enhancing the engagement of students. This migration to digital teaching-learning has created active participants who are encouraged to take ownership of their learning.

2.4.2.2 Blended Learning

Blended learning combines online and face-to-face learning to develop new skills and gain new knowledge that can be applied to the workplace (De Klerk, 2019). Blended learning involves integrating educational technologies with (and not replacing) face-to-face contact, thus maximising both the strengths of face-to-face interaction and online engagement (Ibid). This combining with online instruction can be delivered synchronously and asynchronously so that people can learn in different locations at different times (Panda & Mishrad, 2020).. Castro (2017) found that the adoption of a blended learning approach at West Chester University of Pennsylvania improved overall student engagement and academic achievement. According to Castro (2017), blended learning was also effective in increasing student engagement,

something that is somewhat difficult to achieve by using traditional lecture formats. Hence, globally, blended learning has become the norm (Hilliard, 2015).

The potential for pedagogical variety and technology-enhanced didactics, as well as the increase in access to knowledge anywhere and anytime, are all reasons why HEIs should employ and invest in blended learning (Mozelius & Rydell, 2017). Further, older students tend to enjoy asynchronous online activities due to their flexibility, and easy-to-follow steps for older students (Ibid). It is evident that there are many benefits associated with blended learning, in addition to enhancing student engagement (Fox, 2016).

Young people today are growing up with more technology devices than ever before to adapt to the shift in communication patterns. It is expedient of teachers and lecturers to adapt to these changes as trends and landscapes of education are speedily evolving. Moreover, by combining traditional teaching methods with technology allows teachers and lecturers to be inclusive in their approach. A study by Fox (2017) revealed that blended learning provides three distinct advantages over fully online courses: greater time flexibility, ability to meet different learners' needs, time for reflection, and a lower dropout rate. In addition, students with family responsibilities and/or students working full-time, will benefit from the flexibility of the blended learning course design. However, it should be noted that blended learning is not only suitable for students who prefer face-to-face interaction, but also for students who prefer online learning.

2.4.2.3 Flipped Learning

Seery (2015) describes the flipped classroom as a teaching method that removes much of the 'transmission of knowledge' from the classroom and replaces it with active learning where students assimilate the knowledge during the process of learning it. It is an approach where students develop their own knowledge, as well as participate actively in the process of learning and teaching (Ozdamli & Asiksoy, 2016). Flipping the classroom allows students and teachers to engage interactively in teaching-learning opportunities which allow students to be more communicative with their teachers. The students are at the centre of flipped classroom methods and they are more in charge of their own learning than their teachers, as they are able to experiment much more freely (Danker, 2015). The term *flipped classroom* refers to a flexible method of teaching where lectures are conducted outside of the classroom, and formal class time is then dedicated to instructional activities (DeLozier & Rhodes, 2017). As part of flipped classroom learning, the teacher guides the students as they work with the content matter from

the group to individual learning spaces, applying concepts and interfacing creatively with the content matter (Chellapan & Van der Meer, 2016). Due to the use of technology to enhance the teaching and learning process, flipped classrooms combine behaviourism with constructivism, allowing students to interact with teachers and peers both during and outside of class time (Limniou, Schermbrucker & Lyons, 2018).

Studies reveal that flipped classrooms improve student achievement and satisfaction (Chellappan & Van der Meer, 2016). In support, Singh et al. (2017) found that student achievement in flipped classrooms was higher than that of traditional classrooms. There is overwhelming evidence in the literature that students learn most effectively when they are actively engaged in meaningful learning activities that include cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements (Cronhjort, Filipsson, & Weurlander, 2018). In a flipped classroom approach, three elements are present: the teacher's contribution to students' learning, the learning activities designed by the teachers, and the learning material made available by the teachers to students (Limniou, Schermbrucker, & Lyons, 2018). Moreover, the flipped classroom students were found to perform better in exams than their traditional lecture peers, especially when it came to problem-solving aspects (Heuett, 2017). In addition to their increased confidence about their abilities and their knowledge of the course material, the flipped classroom students attribute their understanding primarily to the in-class activities that the design of the flipped classroom makes possible (Ibid)..

2.4.2.4 Groupwork

One of the effective strategies used to enhance student engagement is groupwork, also known as cooperative learning or collaborative learning. Groupwork, cooperative learning and collaborative learning are used interchangeably. Groupwork gives students an opportunity to collaborate and share ideas. According to Forslund and Chiriac (2018), groupwork is one of the most generally practised and intensely studied teaching-learning strategy which is beneficial to members of a group who come from diverse backgrounds with different experiences but have a significant contribution to make. Kwon (2014) sees groupwork as being consistent with the sociocultural approach to education which views learning as a social process that takes place through interaction among students in a social context. Further, learners can fill the roles of experts and novices in groupwork based on the fact that they all have different strengths and weaknesses. It is evident that as a result of groupwork, students learn and

socialise among their peers; this is one of the ways in which learning can be enhanced through interaction.

Additionally, Nagro et al. (2018) affirm that groupwork remains the most commonly used instructional model in inclusive teaching and learning. In terms of inclusivity, it can aid students with learning disabilities to integrate into the learning community by providing opportunities for peer interaction and active participation. Also, by working in groups students have more opportunities to practise using language for communication purposes (Karrim, 2015) which is more effective than traditional language teaching. Across a range of disciplines and schools, instructors often use small groups to engage and teach students, whether it is to increase content understanding, or to build transferable skills, or a combination of both (Brame & Biel, 2015).

Forslund and Chiriac (2018) emphasise that the effects of learning in groups are considerably enhanced if students are guided in groupwork strategies or receive structured groupwork experiences as working in groups is essential for organisational learning (Gil & Mataveli, 2017). One can conclude that shared learning objectives are achieved through group learning. Studies have shown that it improves students' performance, persistence, attitudes, and the sense of self (Wilson, Brickman, & Brame, 2018).

Using groupwork to enhance student engagement and develop transferable skills is important in encouraging collaboration, communication, problem-solving, planning, time-management, negotiation, conflict resolution, critical-thinking, and leadership (O'Neill & Jennings, 2012). In addition, research indicates that students are more likely to engage with the content, ask incisive questions, and provide meaningful explanations when working in groups (Backer et al., 2018). As such, groupwork or cooperative learning, is associated with higher individual achievement than when students work alone; and it is associated with enhanced communication and professional development skills (Jackson, Sibson, & Riebe, 2014). Accordingly, groupwork increases student achievement levels and success because it promotes student engagement since students participate actively, share ideas, and brainstorm topics to achieve successful learning outcomes.

By developing collaborative, lifelong-learning, and critical-thinking skills through groupwork, students become active rather than passive learners (Jackson, Sibson, & Riebe, 2014). Establishing a supportive and trusting environment is essential to meaningful learning and student achievement (Ibid). It is a significant in groupwork tasks for students to receive

formative feedback from their peers in order to shape their learning, while acquiring communication and teamwork skills that are critical tools for scientific collaboration and career advancement (Wilson, Brickman, & Brame, 2018).

According to current studies, students who participate in groupwork activities benefit from improved management and communication skills, the development of a clear vision of the group culture, an understanding of various group roles, and increased flexibility at an individual and group level (Seric & Pranicevic, 2018). It is possible for both high-flyers and underachievers to benefit from working in a group, as they are afforded the opportunity to learn from each other by listening and compare different perspectives, ideas, and thoughts. Besides groupwork being a contributing factor to enhancing student engagement, it is also an inclusive strategy as it also allows students with barriers to learning to feel like they belong to a learning environment. In sum, it allows them to become more confident by indulging in interactive ways to enhance learning.

2.4.3 Interaction as an Enhancer

Education and learning have always been discussed as being crucially dependent on interaction which can be defined in different ways (Anderson, 2008). It is imperative to unpack the term *interaction* in order to understand the different types of interactions. In technical terms, interactions are "reciprocal events involving at least two objects and two actions and occurring when those objects and events are mutually influencing one another" (Anderson, 2008. p. 12). In other words, interaction refers to students “actively working with people when they observe, do, communicate, and reflect” (Bamber & Stefani, 2016, p. 242).

Student-instructor interaction, student-student interaction, as well as student-content interaction, can be grouped into three categories (Spilka, 2015). Student-content interaction is the internalised discussion between the participants about what they encounter and learn, student-student interaction is when students share knowledge with their peers and receive feedback, and student-instructor interaction is when the student interacts with the expert who prepared the subject materials or any other learning resource (Luo & Zhang, 2017). Alhih, Ossiannilsson and Berigel, (2017) state that there has been extensive research conducted on how interactions occur in education settings as they play an integral part in teaching, learning, and educational activities.

2.4.3.1 Lecturer-student interaction

As learning occurs through interaction with others, the characteristics of teachers' interactions and relationships with learners can significantly influence the effectiveness of learning (Schut et al., 2020). When teachers and students interact harmoniously in the classroom, they will be able to build positive relationships which is so crucial to improving students' engagement and development (Pianta, 2016). Therefore, teachers' personalities are largely responsible for the quality of interaction in the classroom (Ahmad, Shakir, & Siddique, 2019) which can positively affect their engagement in inclusive classrooms (Yildiz, 2015). Inclusivity is an important aspect of engaging students; therefore, it is evident that positive and cordial interaction is necessary to engage students in all three dimensions.

In educational settings, interaction between teachers and students offer a unique opportunity for educators and others to improve the social and learning environment (Wang, 2017). Teacher-student relationships and interactions have consistently been linked to various student outcomes such as high achievement, positive behaviour, and interactive engagement in the classroom. Conversely, low levels of achievement result from adopting negative work habits in the classroom (Wang, 2017). When the lecturer interacts with students, knows their names, and makes a concerted effort to promote engagement to make students feel valued, then positive outcomes are attained. Lastly, to accomplish meaningful tutor-student interaction, modern teaching strategies must take into account the student's goals of learning, the competencies to be developed, and the desired level of cognition (Krasnova & Popova, 2016).

2.4.3.2 Student-student interaction

The terms *student-student interaction* and *peer interaction* are used interchangeably. Peer interaction contributes to learning and development (Lin, Justice, Paul & Mashburn, 2016). According to Rudsberg, Östman and Östman (2017) students learn from each other when they collaborate and share ideas. It is also beneficial to note that there are diverse students in higher education institutions today, and they also learn about each other’s culture, language and values. Student-student interaction has revealed that certain interactional behaviours (e.g. receiving corrective feedback and engaging in collaborative activities) assists with learning.

Additionally, students construct their knowledge more effectively when they have the opportunity to communicate with each other. There has been a significant amount of research conducted in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) to demonstrate how second language learning occurs through interaction between students (Saeed, Khaksari, & Ghani,

2016). Several studies have highlighted the importance of interaction among students and have examined the effects of training in interaction strategies on students' ability to effectively engage in group discussions (Saeed et al., 2016).

It has become increasingly common in higher education to apply student-student interaction and collaborative learning methods, and universities are making attempts to motivate students to support their peers in order to boost the quality of learning outcomes (Aghaee & Keller, 2016). This type of interaction is becoming popular in providing support to distance-learning students. I, as a lecturer, employed a buddy system where students are able to interact and help each other - this seems to support students who are new to the institution in terms of protocols and procedures. Student-student interaction is an inclusive way of providing support to students to learn effectively when collaborating (Biggs, Carter, & Gustafson, 2017).

2.4.3.3 Student-content interaction

The content refers to the material that is to be learned (Madland & Richards, 2016). Neslihan and Mustafa (2016) state that for centuries, learning and teaching activities have been conducted face-to-face; however, as the world changed in the second half of the 20th century, educators had to develop modern methods to address the demands of the new era. Madland and Richards (2016) assert that students are increasingly engaging with subject-content, and that the interaction between the content and students is a primary reason for formal education systems. Higher education institutions have increasingly diversified their content offerings. Human-computer interaction in a learning environment is based on the principle of student-content interaction. This is beneficial for students to interact with the learning content, since it gives them an opportunity to reflect on the content and apply what they read to their own lives (Krudysz & McClellan, 2017). There should be effective organisation of the content, and guidance on how students should interact with the learning materials. Students expect their lecturers to know the syllabus, resources, and support systems in order to answer their questions. Hence, identifying alternative delivery methods requires resourcefulness, planning, and creativity.

Video lessons (e.g. using video-conferencing methods) may be the most effective method of learning a subject for some students, while participating in a discussion forum may suit others. It is ultimately up to the teacher to turn each student into an active participant in the classroom by converting him or her from a passive receiver of information to one who is actively engaged in the lesson. Each new lesson or concept can be introduced by using various mediums such as

video, text, and visuals, among others (Buckley, 2019; Alhih, Ossiannilsson, & Berigel, 2017). Multimedia tools like video files, photographs, social media, two-dimensional or three-dimensional models, and text files about course content are considered important tools for interaction (Alhih, Ossiannilsson, & Berigel, 2017). Research has shown that content remains a key component of student engagement. It is also beneficial to consider that different types of stimuli appeal to different students, and this is dependent on their learning style which should be considered when designing content and other academic materials.

2.4.4 Resources

A resource is a type of information or material that is available in an educational environment to aid the administration of the school and simplify the teaching and learning processes (Usman, 2016). Resources include the principal materials and procedures to make teaching simple, learning meaningful, and content comprehensible as possible (Ibid). Resources for education cover the materials used in teaching and learning processes, whether they are human or non-human, drawn or photographed, constructed manually or electronically operated, books, and all kinds of related teaching-learning materials (Usman, 2016). In other words, resources are tools in education which include videos, flipcharts, whiteboards, overhead and data-projectors, PowerPoint, texts, smartphone devices, and computer software (Ibid). As a result of the availability of relevant and modern resources, students are afforded with valuable opportunities to advance their knowledge and skills, explore ideas, and collaborate together in order to solve problems. In order to be inclusive in the teaching and learning process it is necessary that a variety of resources are available to cater for the diverse student population that we have in HEIs. The researcher categorised the resources into two groups: online/digital resources, and service learning - these two types of resources were popular in terms of enhancing student engagement.

2.4.4.1 Online resources

It is apparent that students today live in a world where technology (internet, smartphones, and media) are part of daily living. As a lecturer and teacher, I've noticed that many students bring laptops and cell phones to their lecture-rooms. The devices can be used to record salient points in the lecture, supplement traditional study resources, and promote active learning. In Dhanani, Chavda and Patel's (2016) study it was found that these devices give students a personal learning environment to bring to the classroom to promote effective student learning, as well as equipping students with a new mode of transferring content. In addition, there are various

online or e-learning tools and resources such as Wikipedia, MOODLE, and Blackboard (Aljawarneh, 2020) which are electronic resources that include, among others, online forums, videos, video conferences, and instant messaging (Celiku & Pema, 2017). These tools work well for small group tutorials and seminars where students are geographically distributed (Celiku & Pema, 2017). Furthermore, these tools have served as powerful catalysts in helping the students achieve the dual-goal of learner autonomy, as well as collaboration with fellow students. According to Castañeda and Selwyn (2018), there are various benefits in the use of online tools and resources such as the fostering of reliability, authoritativeness of data, authenticity of materials, opportunities for the achievement of multidimensional objectives, and increased motivation. Technological resources and online tools are certainly proving to be a driving force for 're-inventing' higher education (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018).

McDermott (2016) observes that students develop a positive attitude towards online resources and tools as they (electronic sources) enhance the quality of lesson-delivery and eliminates teaching-learning barriers. They promote better communication among students and lecturers via presentations or videos, social-media interactions with each other, and engagement with resources in groupwork (Ferriman, 2017). From my experience of using online tools, I found that even without physically lecturing, I am able to turn my MOODLE page into a flipped or virtual classroom where students are able to watch a series of recorded lectures, join live streams, and participate in online discussion forums, among others. I have also noticed from my experience that students prefer to learn in an environment that is conducive and comfortable for them, and at their convenience. By providing these various online resources and tools they are able to watch a lecture in the comfort and convenience of their homes, as they are able to 'pause it' and replay it should they miss any key information, while still being able to interact with peers and lecturers through online discussion forums.

However, with new technology comes new diverse methods of pedagogy. Some technology-driven approaches involve whole-class instruction while others are student-centred, face-to-face, one-on-one communication, inquiry-based, or application-based learning resources (Arabie, 2016). In HEIs, instructors are using technology for direct instruction, remedial teaching, feedback, assessment, as well as to explore and discover new concepts – hence creating a more engaging learning environment (Dhanani et al., 2016). However, materials and resources provided to students should be astutely designed, user-friendly for all levels of techno-literacy, effective, and meaningful when it comes to enhancing student engagement (Musthafa & Purnawarman, 2019)

2.4.4.2 Service Learning

Billig (2019) claims that service-learning is an educational approach that is widely adopted in HEIs throughout the world where participants are engaged in structured learning experiences tailored for the social needs of the community. It involves participants identifying a community need, organising and implementing planned actions, reflecting on personal development such as academic learning, and solving societal issues associated with the need (Billig, 2019). Additionally, students can make-meaning out of community-based activities by regularly completing structured reflection exercises (Bringle et al., 2016). Bland and Boman (2017) add that service-learning is an approach that is being used in higher education courses around the world as it combines theoretical knowledge with experience gained in the community in such a way that it has particular real-life authenticity concerning the subject-content where instructors wish to engage students in advancing their knowledge of diversity in communities. In addition to assisting students in gaining practical experience, this is an effective way to draw them into their classroom with their theoretical knowledge which they can apply practically in the real-world.

Service-learning, which Bandy (2016) describes as community engagement, combines learning objectives with community service in ways that can benefit students and society as a whole. Service-learning further enhances students' ability to apply what they have learned in the real-world which improves their understanding of concepts such as complexity and ambiguity (Ibid). In HEIs, service-learning is widely used as a pedagogy that helps to improve academic performance because it involves experiential learning, reflection, and reciprocal learning. Reflection, in particular, is beneficial for developing critical-thinking and social awareness among students (Brown & Schmidt 2016). Hence, by combining service-learning with classroom learning, students gain valuable experience to improve their learning and development (Whitley et al., 2017).

Furthermore, service-learning is an effective pedagogy to increase students' engagement in class and improve their problem-solving abilities (Guo et al., 2016). Accordingly, undergraduate education utilises mainly the pedagogy of service-learning, partly due to the fact that students learn better when they apply new knowledge in practice (Lowrey, 2020). As such, service-learning has produced positive academic outcomes, and enhanced student engagement. The focus of service-learning is on the group rather than on the individual, which makes it unique from more traditional pedagogical approaches (Yusof, Harun, & Doulatabadi, 2018).

Considering our society's diversity and the African philosophy that emphasises community-building (Ubuntu), as opposed to Western views that prioritises the individual and competitiveness, it is noteworthy to consider the context of South Africa and the tenets of service-learning which have a positive impact on student engagement.

2.4.4.3 Learning Environment as Enhancing Student Engagement

Learning environments are significant for enhancing student engagement, achievement, and satisfaction. According to Young, Williamson and Egan (2016), students value safe environments as they find them conducive to learning. Young et al. (2016) add that students who feel relaxed in their learning environment cope better with challenges and can learn effectively. A safe and stimulating learning environment is beneficial not only for students, but also for lecturers. Everyone who is involved in the learning process should be able to have a safe space where mistakes can be made, and where conversations and effective learning can fruitfully take place. In classes with sound lecturer or facilitator support, students' self-esteem is higher which leads to enhanced interaction (Brejc & Širok, 2019).

To ensure that students excel to their full potential, researchers recommend that inclusion, caring relationships with peers, and supportive environments be developed in order to ensure academic success (Idsoe, 2016). Inclusion is a significant part of fostering a positive learning environment as all students should feel included and equal in the teaching and learning process as this would contribute to positive student engagement. In other words, students with learning barriers also need to feel that they are able, safe, and in a positive learning environment that is free from discrimination that allows them to attain their full potential. (Lah, 2020).

Additionally, consideration of religious beliefs and ethnic diversity for fostering a positive and safe learning environment to create an inclusive non-discriminatory institutional climate which has been overlooked historically, is of utmost importance (Hailu, Collins, & Stanton, 2018). In other words, a diverse culturally engaging environment should be instituted as this correlates with a positive sense of belonging, engagement, and motivation (Hailu et. al., 2018). Inherent in providing a safe, positive, and inclusive learning environment is installing adequate support structures in place, not only the infrastructure support of the higher education institution, but also peer, family, and community support to enhance student engagement.

2.4.5 Support Structures to Enhance Student Engagement

Dary et al. (2016) emphasise that students in a supportive community excel in an environment that encourages them and offers resources to overcome hurdles which is an important aspect of

engagement. I have noticed personally as an educator that many students who do not have proper support structures find difficulty in staying motivated and engaged. In South Africa, this is a reality mainly due to the legacy of apartheid in terms of socio-economic status and the roll-on effects of bantu education, it is predictable. Although community support is vital in stimulating active student engagement, the support of peers, lecturers and the institution itself plays a critical role in improving student academic performance and their psychological wellbeing.

2.4.5.1 Institutional support

Institutional support has a significant impact on the quality of engagement of students in lectures or lessons (Abdullah & Primus, 2020). Institutions should have a nurturing and supportive environment that engages students to flourish cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and to become functional citizens. Intuitional support includes a whole host of aspects that entail resources, counselling facilities, libraries, administrative and financial assistance, and technical support (Myatt et al., 2018). A positive correlation has been identified between institutional support and the development of scientific skills in students as a result of the availability of resources and support given for research activities (Felisberti & Sear, 2014). Studies indicate that institutional support-structures provide critical resources to enhance student engagement and academic success as they connect students to university services, provide high-quality information on courses and programmes, and deliver quality instruction and guidance (Pather et al., 2017). In assessing the needs of college students with autism spectrum disorder, researchers found that university disability service-centres, counselling services, and academic staff should work as a team to develop a system of coordinated support (Accardo, Kuder, & Woodruff, 2019).

2.4.5.2 Peer support

A sound peer support programme can assist students in their all-round development. Previous studies indicate that peer-interaction between students at different levels facilitates a successful and smooth transition into higher education (Ryder et al., 2017). A common finding is that peer support among lecturers can be utilised for the sustainable implementation of innovative teaching methods (Anto & Coenders, 2019). Peer support among students fosters an active and self-directed learning process by encouraging them to be both the ‘examiner’ and ‘examinee’, which stimulates social interaction and reciprocity (Peiffer, Flaig, & Schneider, 2020).

However, according to Muslem and Abbas (2017), peer support may constrain development as it is the responsibility of an expert (e.g. the teacher) or a more capable and knowledgeable peer of managing the interactions because peer mediation may not always be effective. Many HEIs have been introducing peer support programmes as a means of addressing the lack of curriculum integration of student learning (Copeman & Keightley, 2014). Overall, peer support has been found to be an important component in enhancing student engagement since it stimulates active participation in the learning process by enabling students to interact and engage with each other.

Student facilitators can benefit from peer support and mentoring programmes by promoting their own development, and that of their mentees (Crisp et al., 2020). Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom have implemented peer support schemes that train more experienced students to assist and guide those who are less experienced (Keenan, 2014). In the United States of America, various types of schemes are used where 'high-performing' students reteach subject material to struggling students through voluntary after-class studies (Dawson, 2014). Peer support offers a number of benefits such as increased student performance, retention, better graduation rates, confidence, and cohesion; whilst improving mentors' own subject expertise and transferable skills (Keenan, 2014). These initiatives can also be used as vehicles for student partnerships to boost student engagement and support first-year transitions (Warren & Luebsen, 2017).

Idris et al. (2019) contend that one of the concerns in international higher education is that international students may feel isolated and may find it difficult to adapt to their new environment, which may result in mediocre academic performance. Hence, peer support can be an effective strategy of addressing issues of isolation and adaptation among international students in a way that would improve their learning outcomes (Ibid). This is a valid point since moving to a new country can be trying as one will have to adjust to the new culture, language and surroundings.

Researchers in language teaching and learning have conducted studies to measure how peer support can improve a person's language skills (Da Becker, 2016). Such language research has revealed that peer support provides an important opportunity to prepare new (entry-level) students for university life in addition to providing them with a positive role-model to accelerate their success (Tangwe & Rembe, 2014). Topping (2015) notes that in recent years there has been much emphasis on equal-opportunity, peer support, and active engagement of

all higher education members regardless of background. Peer mediation, peer befriending, and reciprocal tutoring have also gained more attention (Ibid). Support from peers can be seen as a social process within which peer interactions are critical for knowledge acquisition and success (De Backer, 2015). During their peer-learning sessions they learn how to organise and plan learning activities, work collaboratively with others, imbibe better and effective learning methods, give and receive feedback, and evaluate their own learning. Consequently, peer learning in a variety of contexts in many countries has become an important part of academic life.

2.4.5.3 Family support

Support means having people to consult when adapting to higher education environments which can be stressful for students and therefore the family plays a significant role in student engagement (Tayfur & Ulupinar, 2016). Psychological wellbeing and increased student engagement are both promoted by a family's emotional support (Roksa, & Kinsley, 2019). In almost every student's life, the support they receive from friends and family is one of the biggest contributing factors to their success (Williams & Emerson, 2019). It is essential for human development and academic success that the family serves as an emotional hub which is so crucial to enhance student engagement (Fernández et al., 2016).

In Ghana, it was found that family expectations, financial support, and monitoring of academic performance influenced students' time and effort spent on their learning (Asare, Nicholson, & Stein, 2017). The level of self-efficacy and the engagement of students from supportive families were significantly higher than those from non-supportive families (Stubbs & Maynard, 2017). Studies confirm that the importance of family support (parental encouragement and the mother's emotional support) leads to enhanced academic performance and increased student engagement (Patterson et al., 2017).

2.4.6 Motivation as a Contributor to Student Engagement

A motivating force can be defined as a cognitive and affective driver that initiates, sustains, and directs engagement behaviour (Reeve, 2012). Wood (2019) confirms that it is accelerated by a psychological stimulation that leads to action (i.e. engagement behaviour). Buckley and Doyle (2016) add that the motivation concept has been defined as a theoretical construct that can be used to explain behaviour initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality; hence, the role of motivation in motivating and sustaining students' learning behaviour is crucial. The two types of motivation are extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (Hanus & Fox, 2015).

A motivation that is intrinsic describes the motivation that is fuelled by internal rewards and is evoked in the individual as a result of interest or enjoyment in the task itself (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012). In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is influenced by factors other than oneself, such as money, grades, and punishment (Buckley & Doyle, 2016). Additionally, Riswanto and Aryani (2017) define motivation as the process of investigating and sustaining goal-directed behaviour which consists of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Motivation refers to a combination of one's attitudes, desires, and willingness to exert effort toward achieving a particular goal (Kaveh, 2020) which influences varying performance levels of students in education. However, keeping students motivated throughout the teaching and learning process is paramount and a challenging endeavour. Consequently, lecturers need to be astute and creative to plan lessons that maintain students' interest and hold their attention (Khikmah, 2019). An inherent positive attitude and enthusiasm in a lecturer can cascade to students developing positivity and enthusiasm when interacting with the subject content (Wood, 2019).

While it is important for lecturers to be motivated and enthusiastic, it is also imperative to find out what motivates students. Motivating students involves identifying and tapping into their inner emotions via dialogue, and this can be done by utilising instructional tools that promote motivation to excite students about learning and encourage them to become self-taught, lifelong learners (Kendall & Williams, 2017). Developing a love for learning and a sense of enjoyment in academic endeavours is valuable for student success. As such, Augustyniak et al. (2016) note that students are motivated primarily by their own interests and curiosity, and these intrinsic motivations can foster passion, creativity, and effort toward learning.

Further, in a study on motivation, it was revealed that subject content, accessibility, and interactivity were significant factors to impact student motivation, while navigation, learning, and support were marginal factors (Deshpande & Chukhlomin, 2017). A substantial amount of research has demonstrated the interrelationship between motivation and positive educational outcomes as students who are motivated view learning activities as being valuable, engaging, and important. An alternative way to produce such motivation is through administering appropriate assessment techniques as it offers both a greater opportunity for learning success and a more consolidated learning experience; however, before effecting student assessments, lecturers should first improve student motivation (Caruth, 2018). Clearly, motivation has a

positive impact on student engagement which is associated with better learning outcomes and success.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

It was evident from the discussion on student engagement that this concept has become complex and multi-faceted. The common dimensions that appear in the literature are the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional dimension. There are a variety of factors that contribute to enhancing student engagement. These factors mainly deal with pedagogy, resources and the kind of support that students receive. It is also beneficial to understand that as research has developed over time, it became evident that the way students engage in academic activities has changed. The next chapter conceptualises the literature to map out the dimensions and indicators of student engagement.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the review of the literature related to student engagement. In this chapter, I discussed the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpinned the study. In order to understand both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that guided this study, it is beneficial to understand what conceptual and theoretical frameworks entail. Hence, a detailed discussion of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks was provided in order to understand this study concerning the subject of student engagement.

According to Adom, Hussein and Agyem (2018), theoretical and conceptual frameworks guide a study by laying the foundation for establishing the credibility of the research. Although they appear as similar terms, they have dissimilar roles in research inquiry (Ibid). A conceptual framework is "a structured way of representing the entire research project by utilising logic and connections that describe all aspects of the research including your thoughts, structures, plans, practices, and implementation" (Kivunja, 2018, p. 47). In other words, it is a network of interlinked concepts that provide an understanding of a phenomenon under investigation (Tamene, 2016). I**,** as one engaging in research, noticed that the different ideas and beliefs that individuals have vary and therefore there is a plethora of diverse theories. Whether implicit or explicit, a conceptual model is beneficial in determining behaviour and practice as they guide actions; for example, nurse scientists organised nursing practice in accordance with established models (George, 2009). Moreover, the use of a conceptual framework in research allows researchers to build upon one another's work thereby building a body of knowledge (Ibid). Similarly, Stember (2015) maintains that a conceptual framework assists in attaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon over time and emphasises the importance of appropriate application of conceptual framework in research. Stember (2015) provides clearly defined steps in the application of a conceptual framework in research:

- Conducting a literature review to identify theoretical approaches and evaluating them to determine which might be appropriate for the investigation of the research problem;
- In order to guide and direct your research, you will also need to make a decision about which theory to adopt and the best way to determine whether a theory

has been utilised in a particular study would be to conduct a comprehensive literature review;

- It is crucial to describe how to determine the hypotheses and questions that will be tested through the use of theories and propositions derived from theories;
- It will be necessary to choose the appropriate instruments to evaluate the concepts using a framework that includes the study's variables;
- Explaining the findings of the study in terms of the theory.
- Applying the theory to the results in order to draw inferences;
- Analysing the results of the study in order to determine whether they are consistent with the theory; and
- Finding links between the results and the theory by using the results as a basis.

It is important to note that conceptual frameworks include an arrangement of interconnected thoughts and concepts that provide a picture of how notions in various studies relate to each other within a theoretical framework (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). It is not only a list of concepts, but also a method that allows readers to define the epistemological and ontological approaches and worldview associated with a particular topic (Ibid). There is also the possibility of specifying and defining concepts within the problem structure as part of the conceptual framework. Moreover, it is important to identify the conceptual framework of a study so that one can start planning how one is going to conduct and record one's research (Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012).

Further, a theoretical framework is based on theories that have been formulated by experts in a particular field. This provides the framework from which all the knowledge associated with the study is utilised and moulded to suit the aim, structure, rationale, problem statement, purpose, and the significance of a study (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). Moreover, as stated by Sinclair (2007), theoretical frameworks can be compared to maps - when planning a trip to an unfamiliar place, people rely on previous experience and accounts in order to understand how to handle particular situations. This analogy is particularly important in the context of the researcher's plans to gain an in-depth understanding of student engagement.

For researchers to choose a theoretical framework, their choice should reflect their beliefs and perceptions. In order to base one's study on a particular theoretical framework, one must consider such beliefs and perceptions. Besides serving as a guide to construct and support one's

assertions, it provides the framework that will help you determine how you will approach it from a philosophical, epistemological, methodological, and analytical perspective. According to Eisenhart (1991), a theoretical framework is a framework of theories that is used to guide research on certain phenomenon, and relationships based on well-defined, coherent explanations. As part of this study, the researcher utilised a conceptual framework as well as a theoretical framework. While they may have some similarities, each one has its own unique approach provide an incisive insight into a subject.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: TYPES AND INDICATORS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

As discussed in the literature review, there are three common dimensions mentioned on student engagement: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional. Each of the dimensions has its own defining characteristics, however Schindler (2017) mentions that while each dimension of student engagement has distinct features there are common elements. The conceptual framework in Figure 3.1 indicates the types of indicators for identifying each of the dimensions. Figure 3.1 below is one of the recent student engagement models, which explains behavioural, emotional, and cognitive indicators and how each has been conceptualised, with each dimension having specific indicators that correspond to the type of engagement (Schindler et al., 2017). It is evident that due to student engagement being broad and complex with a variety of indicators, it is beneficial to conceptualise this phenomenon which assists in gaining an overview and a better understanding of the topic. Hence, this conceptual framework was a precursor for gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

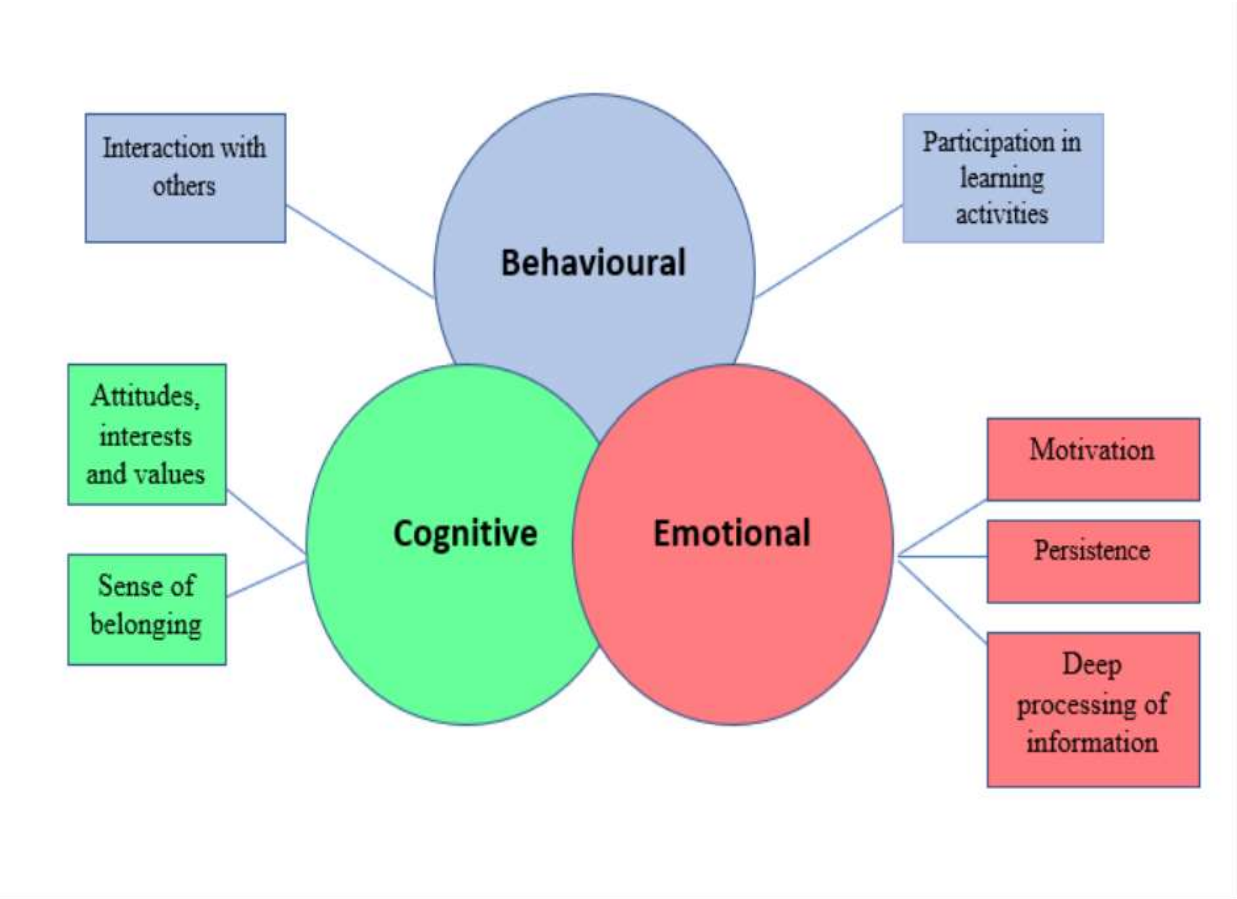

Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework of types and indicators of student engagement (Schindler, et al., 2017, p. 27)

Schindler (2017) mentions the following characteristics for each of the dimensions in Figure 3.1**:**

3.2.1 Behavioural Dimension and Indicators

Behavioural engagement is the degree to which students are involved in learning activities as observed in their interaction and participation (Schindler et al., 2017). From the literature gathered it was evident that most teachers or lecturers measure student engagement based on behavioural engagement as this is more observable, which makes the interaction and participation to be viewed as positive student engagement. Although behavioural engagement is observable, student participation and interaction require cognitive and emotional involvement for students to achieve their aims and objectives (Frymier & Houser, 2016). Therefore, it is evident that there are some similarities across the dimensions of student engagement.

3.2.2 Emotional Dimension and Indicators

There is a link between emotional reactions and learning, which can be noticed in the attitudes, interests, and values (Schindler et al., 2017). Emotional engagement is largely determined by the motivation and persistence of the student. For a person to determine which goal in their life is activated and receiving attention, there needs to be some mechanism or method used. One's goal is activated when one wants to learn more about a new topic, and then one attempts to reach the goal and begin learning. The motivation of an individual is influenced by a variety of factors, including the choice of their pursuit, the intensity of their effort, and the persistence in their efforts. Motivating people to learn not only influences what they learn, but also their level of intensity and length of engagement in learning activities (Vollmeyer & Rheinberg, 2000).

3.2.3 Cognitive Dimension and Indicators

Cognitive engagement is the degree to which students invest in their learning through mental effort and the enthusiasm to master the prescribed content (Schindler et al., 2017). In terms of indicators this could include motivation to learn, ability to overcome challenges, critical-thinking, and self-regulated learning.

Schindler (2017) also mentions that even though there are indicators allocated to each of the dimensions, there are instances where an indicator could correspond with more than one dimension. An example of this can be seen in attitudes, interests and values that can correspond with the behavioural and emotional dimensions as attitude and interest can be observed by the way a student responds to a specific learning activity. Since literature has only mentioned the dimensions that are evident in the conceptual framework, this study envisaged finding other dimensions that may possibly appear in the research findings. As mentioned in the literature review, the landscapes of education are always changing, hence the way students engage is also evolving. By engaging in research on student engagement, the researcher intended to further explore each of these dimensions as student engagement is always fluctuating. While it is important to gain a deeper understanding through the conceptualisation of student engagement, the theoretical framework also lays the foundation for how this knowledge and deeper understanding will be attained.

3.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (AI)

Perhaps our inquiry must become the positive revolution we want to see in the world (Albert Einstein).

This section presented the theoretical framework guiding this study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. According to Lewis (2020, p. 117), "Appreciative means to value or recognise the best in people or the world around us, affirm strengths, successes and potentials". Appreciative inquiry as a term is derived from the verb *to appreciate,* in the sense of valuing, to cherish, to recognise the positive aspects in people and the world around them, affirming present and past strengths, identifying potential, and noticing elements of excellence and value (Ponea & Sandu, 2010). According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations, and the relevant world around them. As such, AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential (Ibid). Similarly, Hall and Hammond (1998) affirm that AI is a way of thinking, seeing, and acting for powerful and purposeful change in an organisation. It works on the assumption that whatever you want already exists in all organisations (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). Accordingly, AI is based on the power of positive inquiry, so unlike behavioural approaches to change AI does not focus on changing people but invites people to build organisations and communities that they want to live and work in (Mohr & Watkins, 2002). According to Van Brabant (2015), its basic principle is simply to inquire into and value the positive in the past and the present, and to encourage the key stakeholders that one is interacting with, to discover the energy and commitments in themselves to drive positive change. It is evident from the definitions provided on AI that the common concepts that appear in describing this inquiry are positive change, positive inquiry, value and heighten. From these definitions, one can conclude that the nature of this inquiry brings about positive change that seeks to strengthen an organisation.

Positive practices and aspirations within a social system are promoted through the use of appreciative inquiry (AI), which takes into account the values and perspectives of users which leads to necessary changes (Tripathi, Arnoff, & Sripad, 2019). The AI practitioners use affirming questions and encourage participants to focus on what works (Cram, 2010). As such, AI is associated with identifying the positives of an organisation and focusing on what is working in order to add strength and engender meaningful change. According to the nature and

purpose of AI, it suits the objectives of this study, as the study focused on what is working in terms of enhancing student engagement. As part of the study, the researcher intended to highlight lecturers' best practices to increase student engagement. In order to improve and strengthen current practice, the focus must be on what is working, and improving what was previously weak. An AI approach can be helpful, not only for organisational culture, but also for instilling quality in programmes and practices. In contrast to focusing on what is wrong and trying to fix the problem, appreciative inquiry allows participants to focus on what is going well when they are doing their best (Judy & Hammond, 2006).

Whilst AI focuses on what is going well it is significant to acknowledge the changing landscapes of higher education, especially in the context of Covid-19. Similarly, Cockell McArthur-Blair (2020) states that higher education is in a time that is undergoing significant change with many challenges. They argue further that as research is being written technology has formed the cornerstone of how higher education interacts with students which places further emphasis on the role of innovation in higher education (Ibid). The above-mentioned argument is a clear indication that there is a need to reflect and inquire into what is working especially in the current context where teaching and learning have transformed and the manner in which students engage has changed and become even more complex. Through the us of AI the researcher was able to reflect on the current context and explore the affirmative topic of student engagement which lecturers are continuously exploring through new methods and strategies.

For the purpose of this study the researcher intended to focus on what was working regarding enhancing student engagement. The researcher focused on the best practices of enhancing student engagement by unpacking lecturers' understandings and how they shape their practice of enhancing student engagement. Focusing on the positives strengthens current practices and promotes ongoing improvement in terms of enhancing student engagement. The AI approach is grounded in identifying and building on what works will contribute to strengthening the programme, the organisation, or the community (Fynn, 2013). Known as an alternative to traditional problem-focused improvement models, Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based approach to organizational improvement.

Appreciation means looking for the positive core of an organisation and seeking to use that as a foundation for future growth. Rather than focusing on how to improve performance by identifying and addressing causes of poor performance, AI focuses on how to leverage

strengths (Knox et al., 2003). With regards to student engagement, it is best to focus on the changing landscapes of education that regard student engagement as being beneficial which could lead to the overall academic success of students. It is no secret that in higher education the problem-solving paradigm is a dominant one and is significant and should not be abandoned, however, it is beneficial to also examine how we can enhance, ignite, and institutional futures (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2018, 2020**).** In this particular study the researcher has shifted the phenomenon of student engagement to examine and explore the factors that are contributing to the enhancement of student engagement. The researcher further examined why these factors that enhance student engagement are working. A comparison between AI and traditional problem-focused approaches is outlined in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Appreciative Inquiry compared to traditional problem-focused approaches (Knox et al., 2015, p. 5)

Problem-focused	Appreciative Inquiry (AI)
Felt or identified "need" or problem	Appreciating the "best of what is"
Identifying root causes underlying problem	Imaging the "possible"
Use of quantitative performance data with limited attention to personal stories	Use of storytelling and personal narratives
Developing solutions to problems	Determining what "should or could be" and pursuing this; spreading positives to other topics/areas
Inclusive process involving individuals from all over or small groups	Inclusive process involving individuals from all over
An organisation is a problem to be fixed	An organisation is an asset to be appreciated and engaged

It is evident that the appreciation factor and best practices are integral parts of appreciative AI, and that these are aligned to the methodology and the objectives of the study. It is important to note that the main difference between appreciative inquiry and traditional problem-oriented approaches is the type of questions asked and the focus of the inquiry. Traditionally, data is used to identify obstacles, diagnose problems, and discover appropriate solutions to issues,

while AI facilitates the collection and analyses but focuses on determining what is already good and right about the team, the organisation, or both (Chauke, 2014). Similarly, McAthur-Blair et al. (2018) affirm that AI helps people see challenges as opportunities and reframes problems into possibilities. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, 2010) contend that topic-choice is usually a function of fate, as human systems tend to gravitate towards topics of interest. According to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2002, 2010) some of the benefits of AI are that:

- It enhances relationships, enabling people to be known for who they are rather than for their roles.
- It gives people an opportunity to have their voices heard.
- People feel recognised, respected, and their morale increases when they feel heard.
- It gives people the opportunity to dream, and to share their dreams.
- It creates an environment where people can choose how to participate, and the support they want since positive choices are encouraged and made easier to execute.
- It is important to note that one of the benefits of AI is that it could be easily adapted to any particular culture, context, and environment.

Whilst we focus on the benefits of AI which is to focus on what is working well, we must not ignore the misconceptions. Armstrong et al., (2020) state that AI is not about staying positive all of the time; however, the primary function is about generativity. It is the quest for new ideas, images, theories, and models that liberate our collective aspirations, alter the social construction of reality and, in the process, make available decisions and actions that weren't available or didn't occur to us before (Bushe, 2007, p. 30). Applying an AI approach can make an enjoyable research process for all involved as participants are encouraged to value the positive reflection that the AI oriented interviews and conversations encourage (Aziz, Hashim & Awang, 2018, p. 7).

According to Giles and King (2010), the use of the AI approach rejuvenates lecturers' professional practice through the use of stories that are recalled. For the purpose of this study the researcher intended to do this by engaging lecturers to share stories of their peak or best student engagement experiences which opened up opportunities to explore

best practices with regard to enhancement of student engagement. Whilst AI has many benefits it is imperative to emphasise that AI serves as a theoretical and methodological framework. AI comprises of four or five distinct phases that occur in sequence, the 4D cycle representing the phases of discovery, dream, design, and destiny or the 5D cycle representing the phases of definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p.16). A 5D cycle in figure 4.1 is one way of applying this framework of appreciative inquiry, but there are other ways to approach this. The methodological application of the 5D cycle is discussed in more detail in chapter four. Whilst the methodological application of AI is significant the principles form the foundation for this theory and guide the implementation of the phases (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 82). Watkins et al. (2011 further suggest that the principles of AI provide support for the implementation of the 5D cycle.

3.4 Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

In the view of Kessler (2013), there are five basic elements that comprise an appreciation-based inquiry method. As a fundamental tenet, AI is based on the premise that in every organisation something works, and that by focusing on that which works and using positive thinking, imagery, and language, the organisation can create a positive and successful future (Howieson, 2011). Godwin, Tjepkema, Verheijen and Aitken (2020) highlight the flexibility of AI as a theory of practice which many have taken and made their own, while staying rooted in the fundamental principles (Constructionist, Simultaneity, Poetic, Anticipatory and Positive), which have been complemented by emergent principles (i.e. Wholeness, Narrative, Enactment, etc.). It is exciting to reflect on the myriad ways our AI models and methods have evolved over the years. Originally, there were 4Ds (Dream, Design, Discover, Deliver) as a framework for applying AI, which then became 5Ds with the addition of Define at the outset of a process Godwin et al., 2020). Others introduced the 4Is into our shared vocabularies (Initiate, Inquiry, Imagine, Innovate) (Ibid).

3.4.1 Constructionist principle

This research inquiry aimed to generate new ideas, stories, and images that will create new possibilities for the future (Howieson, 2013). By undertaking this study, the researcher intended to share the stories and ideas lecturers possess that can contribute towards enhancing student engagement via innovative approaches. The quality of human interaction within the organisation also contributes to individuals' ability to create more meaningful realities together,

while promoting a self-fulfilling prophecy of beliefs about the work conducted and the organisation in which it takes place (Lehner & Hight, 2006). Based on the constructionist principle, Cooperider (1999, p. 12) asserts that in order to avoid "absolutist claims or the final word, we can replace them with the collaboration between individuals seeking to learn and construct better ways of living.

The constructionist principle is the most fundamental principle in AI and is based on the premise that understanding and meaning of the world are socially constructed (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2020). They further argue that the most significant aspect of social constructivism is language and conversation, and higher education institutions are a good example of people constructing their worlds through the process of teaching and learning (Ibid). The principle of constructionism is aligned and significant to this study as the researcher examines the understanding that lecturers have of student engagement which is constructed through the teaching and learning and interactions that take place with students. As noted in the literature review student engagement is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon as the landscapes of education are changing and therefore the understanding of this phenomenon is changing. It was also evident that there has been a shift in the understanding of student engagement from passive learning to active participation.

In the constructivist approach to science and practice, knowledge is conveyed via language, metaphors, narratives, and how word-choice makes a difference in our understanding of reality (Cooperider, 1990). In line with the constructionist principle, what a person focuses on becomes their reality; and likewise, the language they use becomes their reality. Hence, AI focuses on promoting positive attitudes while encouraging the use of positive language in order to promote the development of a positive future that everyone can share (Seel, 2008). It is evident that the constructionist principle is guided by the notion that “words create worlds” (Barette & Fry, 2005, p. 42).

According to social constructionist theory, our social world is a by-product of coordination among people in which meaning, and actions are understood as constructed, as opposed to viewing meaning and action as universal entities or objective, neutral and empirical truths (Gergen, 2009). The categories we use to refer to objects and ideas are circumscribed by culture, history, and social context, and do not exist outside that context (Bodiford & Camargo-Borges, 2014, p.5). “Language” here is not taken as a picture of the world, but rather constructs

it as we coordinate and interact with each other, making meaning and enacting new realities (Ibid). Social processes, therefore, are fundamental in this approach for continuing to validate, sustain or change what we agree to be knowledge (McNamee and Gergen, 1998). These assumptions bring important implications for designing and engaging in research – about how to frame, engage and make meaning in research which is significant in AI. These constructionist assumptions are an invitation to comprehend how aspects of the world that are often taken for granted are socially constructed, thereby opening space for alternative constructions to be forged and for new ways to be crafted to engage people in research (Bodiford & Carmago-Borges, 2014, p. 5).

It is evident that the inspiration from social constructionism invites us to foreground AI practices as a relational activity by being aware of the use of language. Our language is seen at the forefront of this theory and the way we engage in terms of language shapes our reality. This puts a strong focus on doing AI with a relational reflexivity – seeing and hearing focused on the richness and multiplicity of ideas and possibilities (Bodiford et al., 2014, p. 5). This principle aligns well with the nature of the study as the researcher used positive language by examining what is working in terms of student engagement. This was evident in the stories constructed by participants. The use of positive language allowed the researcher to elicit the positives with regard to understanding and enhancing student engagement. The constructionist principle implies that the reality of an organisation or situation is constructed through social discourse, conversations between persons in the organisation or situation and the formation of an agreement about how they see that reality (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 72). It is important to note that the main aim of a constructionist principle is to generate and stimulate new stories, ideas and possibilities (Kessler, 2013). As emphasised in this study student engagement is a complex phenomenon that is changing continuously so this principle enabled the researcher to generate rich narratives which stimulate new understandings, ideas and possibilities for student engagement in higher education.

3.4.2 Simultaneity

This principle highlights that “inquiry creates change” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p.54). Questions are never neutral; they are fateful and social and move in a certain direction (Zandee & Vermaak, 2012). In this study, the questions were intended to highlight the positives, high points, and new possibilities with regard to enhancing student engagement at a

higher education institution. If you ask with genuine curiosity and interest why one does something in a certain manner, you may discover that it has a thought-provoking effect (Mishra & Jyotsna-Bhatnagar, 2012). The principle of simultaneity also recognises that change and inquiry do not happen apart from each other, but that change is irrevocably linked to inquiry and happens with the asking of the very first question (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 72). According to Cockell & McArthur-Blair (2020) research was traditionally done for different reasons which included curriculum development, academic planning, policy creation, etc. Once research is done and the data is gathered this is then used to plan and design for the future so that change can happen, however, AI, on the other hand, emphasises that change begins when we reflect on what is working (Ibid).

For the purpose of this study the researcher allowed participants to reflect on their peak and positive experiences with regards to student engagement. It was evident that participants reflected on their best experiences and were able to tell stories through their narratives on what strategies and factors contributed to positive study engagement. This is in line with what the simultaneity principle as this principle focuses on the curiosity and interest of why one does things in certain manner. It is significant to also mention that the questions that underpinned the study highlighted the high points and possibilities for enhancing student engagement. By reflecting on such experiences positive organisational change tends to spread (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2018).

3.4.3 Poetic

According to the poetic principle, the life of an organisation is shown in the stories that people tell one another every day. Words are important as they invoke sentiments and foster understanding (Watkins, Dewar, & Kennedy, 2016). Hence, AI's words are meant to enliven and inspire the best in people by drawing them out of themselves. For the purpose of this research, I sought to highlight and share the stories that may inspire other institutions to meaningfully engage students by sharing best practices. The importance of storytelling in gathering information about an organisation encourages co-authorship which engenders creativity and innovation (Lehner & Hight, 2006).

Additionally, storytelling has the ability to hold behaviour patterns about individuals, organisations or events (Lewis et. al, 2016). Stories are the key to positive change in organisations, however, they are not always accessible and require a certain degree of skill and inquiry (Ibid). As a researcher adopting an appreciative inquiry stance in order to access the

stories of participants required crafting positive questions in the appreciative interviews. The questions were aimed at highlighting how lecturers understand student engagement and how this understanding then shapes their enhancement of student engagement. Through the use of narratives and storytelling lecturers shared their best or peak experiences of student engagement which aligned with the poetic principle of AI. It is evident that through the use of the poetic principle opportunities for participants to be heard are created and the roles are shifted by giving power to the participant.

Additionally, it is significant to highlight the poetic principle states that we can choose what we want to study (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p.54). Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2020) emphasise that in higher education people can choose what to focus on, however, in many cases the research done in higher education spheres focuses on what is wrong with the institution. As a lecturer with personal experience, I agree with this statement as higher education institutions seem to be problem focused as appose to appreciating and valuing best practices. Therefore, with this particular study the researcher chose to focus on what is working with regards to student engagement in higher education. It is also beneficial to mention that AI does not mean ignoring the problems that exist but rather shifts the focus (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2020**).**

3.4.4 Anticipatory

Through artful creation of positive images, the anticipatory principle lends itself to a method of refashioning anticipatory reality through positive imagery (Watkins et al., 2016). As part of the study, I focused on applying the anticipatory principle to highlight innovative and creative concepts for the future of student engagement at different stages of the dream and destiny phases. When we anticipate the future in a positive light, we increase the likelihood of a positive outcome (Lehner & Hight, 2006). Lewis, Passmore and Cantore (2016, p.28) further emphasise that when we change our conversation patterns or the way we speak we change the world and that talking about our understandings, feelings, ideas and thoughts makes us feel hopeful and competent about the future.

The anticipatory principle posits that what we do today is guided by our image of the future. Human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilising agent (Kessler, 2013, p. 1). The anticipatory principle holds that the most important sources to our disposal to affect organisational or situational change lie in the images that we can form of our future (Pretorius

& Junqueira, 2019, p. 19). Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2020) affirm that the more positive and hopeful we are about the future the more positive the present-day action. In higher education this means focusing on the strengths and successes to inform the actions we take (Ibid).

3.4.5 Positive

The positive principle underpins all the previous principles discussed in AI (McArthur-Blair & Cockell, 2018). It states that "positive questions lead to positive change" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 54). The achievement of momentum and sustained change is dependent on both positive effects and social bonding which includes hope, excitement, inspiration, camaraderie, and joy – all are positive emotions that encourage creativity, cognitive flexibility, and an openness to new ideas (Fynn, 2013). According to Mohr and Watkins (2002), questions of a positive nature in a change process promotes change that lasts longer which is more effective. In order for the positive principle to work, the goal must be set in a context of positive emotions such as encouragement, personal support, and other forms of positivity which significantly influence how people change (Mishra & Jyotsna-Bhatnagar, 2012). Aspects of positive action are consistently using appreciative language in AI, encouraging, and supporting those who participate in the process, helping members of the organisation express the good things they have experienced, and establishing virtuous circles instead of vicious ones (Seel, 2008).

An AI's purpose entails five principles designed to help organisations generate constructive growth or improvement by discovering and developing the distinctive, life-giving characteristics of their organisational culture (Marzluft, 2009, p. 50). Although other sets of AI principles have been proposed (Kelm, 2005), the five outlined by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) have been accepted by the vast majority of researchers (Bushe, 2011). It is evident that each principle in AI has its own unique purpose, so it is beneficial to have an overview of the five principles. Table 3.4 below outlines the five principles and captures the essence of each principle so that one is able to gain a better understanding of them.

Table 3.2: A positive revolution in change: Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999)

Principle	Summary	Details
Constructionist Principle	Words create worlds	Positive questions lead to positive change
Simultaneity Principle	Inquiry creates change	The moment we ask a question, we begin to create a change. "The questions we ask are fateful".
Poetic Principle	We can choose what we study	Teams and organisations, like open books, are endless sources of study and learning. What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes – even creates – the world as we know it.
Anticipatory Principle	Images inspire action	Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future. The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action.
Positive Principle	Positive questions lead to positive change	Momentum for small or large-scale change requires large amounts of positive effects and social bonding. This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core

3.4.6 Wholeness, enactment, and free choice

Whist the Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) highlight the five basic principles of AI it is also significant to add that they have added three more principles to this theoretical framework of AI. The additional three principles are wholeness, enactment and free choice. They further argue that wholeness brings out the best in people and organisations while enactment indicates that people act as if the change they want has already happened (McArthur-Blair & Cockell,

2020). According to Whitney et al. (2003) free choice liberates power. Power through an AI lens allows participants to influence change individually and within organisations. This is significant to the nature of the study as the researcher engaged participants through an AI lense to share their best and peak experiences of student engagement which may inspire other lecturers and institutions. AI provides a means for participants to engage and share their stories which is evident in this study.

3.4.7 Narrative and awareness

Additionally, McArthur-Blair and Cockell (2020) also mention the principle of narrative and awareness principle. The narrative principle captures the importance of storytelling and further suggests that when people with different perspectives are able to tell their stories of their best experiences this allows us to see what is common rather than the differences (Barette & Fry, 2005). This resonates with the nature of the study as the researcher was able to demonstrate common understanding, shared ideas and strategies for enhancing student engagement. Kelm (2005) also suggests that the narratives expressed by individuals are as a result of their day-to-day experiences

Additionally, another significant aspect of AI is the ability to be aware. According to Stravos and Torres (2005) awareness is mandatory in order to implement the five fundamental principles of AI. McArthur-Blair et.al (2020) further suggest that in order to experience AI one must practice through self-reflective awareness. This is significant as one of the key principles of AI is the use of positive language. As a researcher engaging in research, it is imperative that when engaging in AI research that researchers are aware of the language they use and how they engage participants. It is evident that AI is also a self-reflective tool that can be used to promote awareness. Kelm (2005) further states that researchers may not always engage objectively and therefore reflexivity is necessary in order to be aware.

3.5 Relevance of AI to this Study

Judy and Hammond (2006) state that AI is a powerful tool for facilitating organisational development and change. By using AI, this study explored the potential of enhancing student engagement at a higher education institution. Based on AI principles, assumptions, and characteristics, this study conformed to its intended objectives. Chauke (2014) defines appreciative inquiry as a collaborative inquiry that involves interviews and affirmative questions in order to collect and celebrate good news stories about a company, organisation, or community that enhance their cultural identity, spirit, and vision. In appreciation inquiry, one

notices, affirms, and observes the best and highest qualities of a system, a situation, or another person (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2000). Appreciative inquiry is clearly conducive to innovation and creativity. The process of AI creates a shared vision that fosters collaboration. Thus, AI was suitable for this study since it focused on positive outcomes. However, some have criticised the method of being unbalanced, focusing only on the positive, and obscuring potential issues (Chauke, 2014). Despite some criticisms of AI, other researchers are of the opinion that it has sufficient potential to be beneficial for empirical research, and as an appropriate tool for change management (Ibid). AI provides opportunities for us to shift and re-align our thinking and the way in which we engage to help us in strategic innovation, and resilience in the future so that we may facilitate positive and sustainable change; and in doing so, emerge as better individuals (Armstrong, Holmes & Henning, 2020, p. 4)

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an outline of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this study. Although the literature review described the features within each dimension, the conceptual framework distinctly emphasised the dimensions which revealed that there are several similarities. This chapter also described the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry and its principles that support the study's topic. It describes the framework and outlines the core principles that support it. The aim of this study was to generate data from the process of appreciative inquiry so as to gain deep insight into lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution. An examination of the guiding principles of the AI approach, as well as its relevance to the study, was also presented. In the next chapter, the research design and methodology, in line with the principles and phases of AI, are discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As outlined in the previous chapter, this study is conceptually and theoretically grounded. A detailed discussion of the research design, methodology, and paradigm is presented in this chapter. In addition, it discussed sampling techniques, data generation methods, and measures for ensuring validity, reliability, and credibility. Lastly, ethical considerations are addressed.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The appreciative interpretive paradigm formed the foundation of this study. Those who support interpretive paradigms are committed to a deep understanding of concepts as well as a clear understanding of the world in which they live (Rahi, 2017). Rahi (2017) points out that the interpretive paradigm is subjective in terms of participants' experiences, and that true knowledge and understanding can only be obtained through deep interpretation. As the researcher explored the lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution, this study suits the interpretivist approach because this study illustrates that people's understandings of a phenomenon are subjective and that there are multiple realities within the phenomenon. As a result, interpretation focuses on understanding the meaning of experiences from both participant and researcher perspectives, while recognising that cognition has a central role in analysing data or findings (Marhayati, 2020).

As in ethnography and case studies, interpretive researchers typically collect qualitative data from participants over an extended period of time (Rehman & Alhathi, 2016). Researchers who use interpretive methods generate qualitative data, which includes open-ended interviews with varying degrees of structure, semi-structured open-ended interviews, informal conversational interviews, observations, field notes, personal notes, and documents (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The interpretivist approach was ideal for this study as it aligned cohesively with the applied qualitative data generation methods.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) explain that this paradigm attempts to grasp what the subject is thinking and interprets the meaning by analysing contextual aspects by getting 'inside' the participant's head. The observer should always try to understand the subject being observed

from the subject's viewpoint, rather than from his or her own (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Understanding a particular phenomenon requires understanding the participants and their view of it, therefore reality is constructed socially within the interpretivist paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm draws from the principles of the AI theoretical framework. The constructionist principle allows for telling of stories, imaginings, ideas which generates new possibilities; hence, the interpretive paradigm is associated with constructivism which is relevant to this study. When we examine the poetic principle of AI, words are important as they express sentiments and understanding. This aligns itself with the study's aim as the researcher sought to explore the lecturers' understanding of enhancing student engagement. The essential elements of a research paradigm comprise of epistemology, ontology, and axiology. These aspects are the beliefs, norms, and values that (Dean, 2018) will guide the research.

4.2.1 Ontological Assumption

Ontology is the belief that something makes sense or is real based on the premises we make (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In other words, ontology refers to the essence of reality. Since this study was based on lecturers' interpretations, the reality is subjective. There are a number of questions relating to ontological assumptions such as "what can we know"? (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). Thanh and Thanh (2015) maintain that interpretivism focuses on social constructions of reality which is supported by Hussey and Hussey (1997) who noted that people could interpret their own actions more readily when they responded within their natural societal milieu. This is significant to the constructionist principle of how knowledge meaning, and understanding is derived in AI.

4.2.2 Epistemological Assumption

According to Mooney (2013), epistemology is concerned with the bases of knowledge and how knowledge is acquired or experienced. For the purpose of this study, the knowledge acquired was through the experiences and narratives of lecturers, therefore it is underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which allows participants to share stories which generate new ideas and possibilities. This is confirmed by Thanh and Thanh (2015) who affirm that the primary assumption of interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed which aligns with the principles of AI.

4.2.3 Axiological Assumption

Axiology is related to ethical issues that need to be considered in the research process. (Voevoda, 2018). The researcher considered aspects such as beneficence and nonmaleficence. Since the study was framed using an appreciative inquiry lens, it highlighted the positives and strengths of the higher education institution. The study may be beneficial in the sense that it envisages improving current pedagogical practices while allowing the institution the opportunity to share best practices with other institutions which could lead to the unearthing of innovative ideas to enhance student engagement.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was used in this study in order to answer questions gleaned from participants' experience, meaning, and perspectives (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & Lacey, 2016). The researcher aimed to explore lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement through an appreciative inquiry approach. It is through dissecting the lecturers' perspectives that the researcher was able to make-sense of understanding what enhances student engagement at a higher education institution. Hence, a qualitative study was deemed to be suitable as it fosters an in-depth analysis of a social phenomenon, such as how individuals and groups perceive the world, how organisations function, and how interactions influence relationships (Teherani, et al., 2015). Teherani et al. (2015) further mention that in qualitative research, it is the researcher who collects data, and it is the researcher who investigates why events occur, what happens, and what those events mean for the participants.

According to Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative research involves the collection and interrogation of assorted empirical materials such as case studies, introspective life-stories, interviews, observations, histories, and interactive and visual texts which describe routine and contentious issues in people's lives. Rahi (2017) adds that qualitative methods are used to collect in-depth and rich data on a particular subject or individual or group, whereas quantitative approaches ignore the feelings and emotions of an individual. In most cases, qualitative approaches are used when researchers are observing or interpreting an environment in order to develop a theory (Rahi, 2017). Cohen et al. (2018) postulate that qualitative research serves a number of purposes: description, explanation, reporting, creating and describing key concepts, and developing theories. The purpose of this study was to answer the research questions through rich descriptions and explanations; therefore, the study fits well within the qualitative approach. Barrett and Twycross (2018) state that reality consists of multiple

complexities, not single truths, and that reality is constructed in a holistic way, allowing multiple interpretations to exist, including those of each of the parties involved. As such, we can better understand participants' experiences through qualitative research methods which allows us to gain insight into how decisions are made, and how interventions might change participants' lives (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). By applying this approach, lecturers were able to amply to describe their experiences.

Qualitative research has many benefits that provide researchers with the opportunity to collect detailed data. However, there are also inherent limitations to this approach as qualitative approaches can be applied only to a small population; therefore, they cannot be assumed to represent the whole population. Among the critics of qualitative research are De Clercq et al. (2018) who assert that it is not empirical, and the methods used in qualitative research may not be reliable. In this study, we used the qualitative approach to advantage by gaining a rich in-depth understanding of student engagement which mainly included positive experiences and appreciative perceptions of lecturers.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A case study design was used for this study as it provided the most vivid and inspiring analysis of the research inquiry. Thomas (2021) states that a case study is not a method but instead a focus, which is an in-depth analysis of a single issue seen from multiple perspectives where the researcher utilises different methods to investigate the issue or subject. The case study design was suitable for this study since its aim was to investigate the understanding and enhancement of student engagement by lecturers at one higher education institution using an appreciative inquiry approach. Through the case study design, the researcher was able to examine this phenomenon from different perspectives to gain an in-depth insight into lecturers' understanding of student engagement.

The case study method can be applied to a range of topics or purposes, but its primary use depends upon the researcher's motivation to illuminate the understanding of complex phenomena (Harrison et al., 2017). In this study, the literature review revealed that student engagement is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, hence a case study design was used to dissect this phenomenon in an educational environment that is constantly changing with students using different techniques to engage effectively with learning.

In addition to its versatility and flexibility, a case study design can be used in conjunction with any philosophical perspective (e.g. positivist, interpretivist, or critical), and can even combine qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (Udhin, 2019). Explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive case studies are the three types, according to Yin (2009). The researcher utilised a descriptive case study technique for the purpose of this study to describe the phenomenon under investigation in the context in which it occurred (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

4.4.1 Descriptive Case Study

The descriptive case study involved conducting a systematic study and analysis of the phenomenon; that is, lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution in a real-life context (Yin, 2003). The descriptive case study successfully triangulates such experiential data in an all-encompassing manner using multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative evidence (Yin, 2003). In this study, the researcher used a descriptive case study method, which offered a more integrated, structured approach for a more holistic, descriptive outcome (Glen, 2016). A descriptive case study analyses how interpersonal events have unfolded after a certain period of time has elapsed (Dudovskiy, 2018). It has been shown that descriptive studies can provide rich data leading to valuable recommendations (Nicole, 2016). Additionally, Nicole (2016) points out that a descriptive case study can also produce a narrative account that provides new insights to the researcher (and their readers), along with as much explicit detail as possible. In this study, the researcher intended to provide new insights through narrative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires.

4.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

An example of sampling is when a researcher selects a relatively smaller number of representative items from a predefined population in order to serve as subjects (data sources) for observation or experimentation according to the goals of the study (Sharma, 2017). Bhardwaj (2019) adds that sampling refers to a process of choosing individuals from a large population to assist in research. The researcher chose lecturers for this study who teach compulsory modules, and they have full complements of students in their classes.

There are two major categories of sampling methods: probability sampling methods and non-probability sampling methods, each of which selects the sample population in a non-systematic way that does not guarantee equal chances for all subjects within the target population (Elfil &

Negida, 2017). It is unlikely that researchers will be able to collect data from all cases to answer the research questions. It is, therefore, necessary to select a sample. We refer to the entire set of cases from which samples are drawn as the population. To reduce the number of cases, researchers use sampling techniques since they do not have time or resources to analyse the entire population (Taherdoost, 2016). During the research process, two sampling techniques were used: purposive sampling sometimes called judgment sampling, and convenience sampling also referred to as accidental sampling.

4.5.1 Purposive Sampling

Using purposeful or judgmental sampling means selecting settings, people, or events consciously in order to obtain important information that could not be achieved through other means, where the researcher includes people or cases in the sample because they believe they deserve inclusion (Taherdoost, 2016). Purposive sampling is also defined by Sharma (2017) as selective or subjective sampling and represents a set of selection procedures that depend on the researcher's judgement when it comes to selecting the units (people, organisations, cases, events, data) to be studied. Bhardwaj (2019) mentions that deliberate sampling is also considered to be purposeful sampling as it is based on the purpose of the study.

Based on the study's purpose, this sampling method is aligned appropriately with the purpose of the study which is to examine lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution. Consequently, lecturers who demonstrated high levels of student engagement, as well as those who deliver compulsory modules, were included within the sample in this study. Hence, the purposive sample is the one in which characteristics are defined for a specific purpose related to the study (Andrade, 2020). Sample design is determined by the researcher who will judge who best will provide rich and elaborate information necessary to support the objective of the study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Accordingly, in order to conduct purposive sampling, it is necessary to identify and select individuals or groups of individuals who have experience and expertise concerning the phenomenon under study, in addition to their availability and willingness to actively participate (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In this study, participants were identified according to the above criteria, thus purposive sampling was the most appropriate to elicit incisive information.

4.5.2 Convenience Sampling

As the name suggests, convenience sampling is choosing participants from a sample based on ease of accessibility. It is also called accidental sampling as it is simple to implement, and

inexpensive to create samples (Bhardwaj, 2019). Rahi (2017) adds that convenience sampling is a process of collecting data from a population that is in close proximity to be easily accessible which allows the researcher to conduct interviews or collect data in a cost-effective manner. Research participants in this study were selected from the institution where the researcher works, so they were readily available and convenient for the researcher to use during the study. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), most researchers use convenience sampling methods since it is practical as participants meet certain appropriate criteria such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a particular time, or willingness to be part of the study. These criteria were consistent with the researcher's criteria for selecting a convenient sample.

4.5.3 The Sample and Size

The sample in this study consisted of eight lecturers who facilitate compulsory modules at the higher education institution. The rationale for choosing eight lecturers was that the Bachelor of Education Degree is of four-year duration, hence one lecturer from each cohort was used. The Bachelor of Education Programme is also offered for those specialising in the Intermediate Phase, and the Foundation Phase. So, four lecturers from each phase were chosen as these phases have different compulsory modules. Lecturers who teach compulsory modules were chosen as they receive the full complement of students. The participants were recruited via email and a request letter (consent form attached) stating the objectives and details of the study, and what their role would entail. Each participant was also emailed information on the AI process as the data generation process followed the stages of AI (Appendix B, C and D)

Table 4.1: The sample

Role	Cohort	Phase	Gender	Years of Experience
Lecturer 1 (L1)	First year	Intermediate	Male	5
Lecturer 2 (L2)	Second year	Intermediate	Male	6
Lecturer 3 (L3)	Third year	Intermediate	Female	6
Lecturer 4 (L4)	Fourth year	Intermediate	Female	5
Lecturer 5 (L5)	First year	Foundation	Female	3
Lecturer (L6)	Second Year	Foundation	Female	14
Lecturer (L7)	Third Year	Foundation	Female	9
Lecturer (L8)	Fourth Year	Foundation	Female	6

4.6 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND SETTING

The Researcher conducted the study in a HEI in Durban, RSA. The institution is situated in a middle-class suburb, is well-resourced, and offers many blended learning opportunities to students. The student and lecturer population comprises various race groups. The Institution has approximately 40 lecturers on their Durban campus.

4.7 DATA GENERATION PROCESS

According to Chauke (2014), data generation is a systematic method of gathering information aligned to the purpose, research objectives, and research questions. In other words, data collection can be visualised as a series of activities the researcher engages in during this phase of their study. For this study, various data generation methods were used to elicit qualitative data. The data generation methods included appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and an open-ended questionnaire. Each data generation method followed the phases of AI.

Figure 4.2 (below) indicates the four stages in the 5D process of AI: Define, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny or Delivery. A 5D cycle is one way of using the process of appreciative inquiry, but there are other ways to approach this. This approach to innovation can be described as an initiation, inquiry, imagination, and innovation process. According to Casey (2018), the AI model is a series of discovery steps (appreciating and valuing the topic), Dreams (imagining the future) and Designs (collaborating to design a sustainable future) that start with selecting the topic. The researcher followed the five phases of AI in the methodology, and the answering of the questions through data generation methods will be guided by the phases of AI. According to Knox et al. (2015), each step of the 5D cycle has a particular focus:

- Define: Affrimative topic
- Discovery: Determining “best of what is”;
- Dream: Imagining what “could” be;
- Design: Co-constructing what “should” be; and
- Destiny: Empowering, adjusting, and innovating to bring the “should” into reality and sustaining it

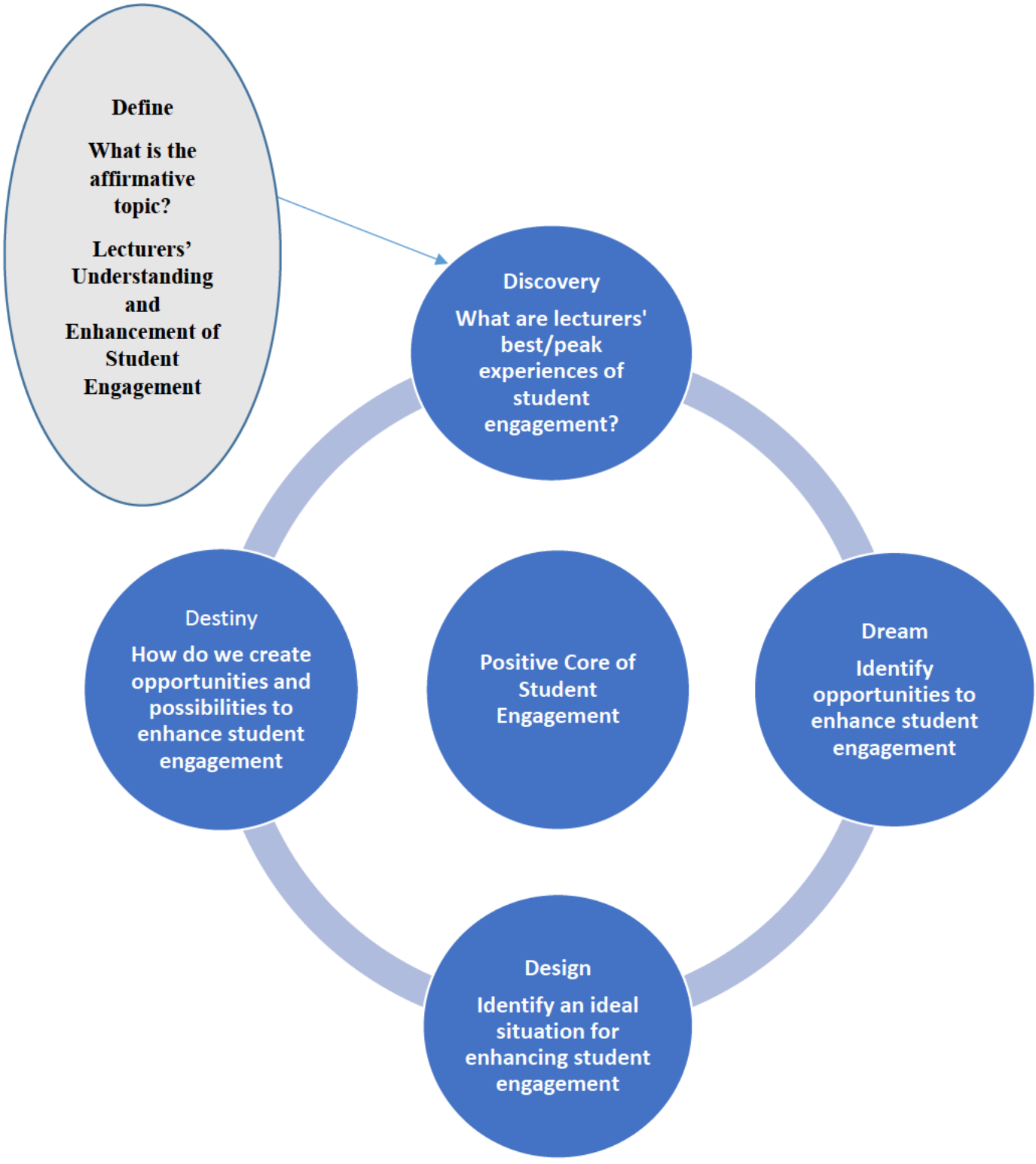

Figure 4.1: Figure 1. The 5D-cycle of appreciative inquiry. (Adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 6, Pretorius & Van Wyk, 2013, p. 496).

4.7.1 Five Phases of Appreciative Inquiry

In order to understand how AI functions as a methodological framework, it is beneficial to unpack each of the phases as outlined by Lewis (2020).

4.7.1.1 Phase 1: Define

In AI, the process begins by delineating the topic of the inquiry or by identifying the focus of the inquiry. The appreciative (or affirmative) topic would be considered as an appreciative topic (Acosta & Douthwaite, 2005). During the definition phase, the scope of the inquiry is specified, or where the study's focus will be (Ibid). The focus of the inquiry is of primary importance as it will determine what kinds of data will be collected, which in turn will determine how participants feel about themselves and the system in general. It is believed that in AI, asking questions reveals details of a system and leads to a process of change (Ibid). As such, the topic under investigation gained a deeper insight by adopting the AI approach.

4.7.1.2 Phase 2: Discovery

During this phase, the aim is to elicit stories related to salient experiences which are related to the topic of inquiry. The researcher often captures such experiences related to the topic of inquiry by paying specific attention to the 'gems or key quotes from conversations and interviews (Acosta & Douthwaite, 2005). A sense of empowerment results from deep connections, unexpected learning, and an opportunity to learn more. In AI, stories are sought rather than opinions, because stories give us raw data from which opinions can be derived in addition to reminding us of the context, who was involved, and the enabling circumstances (Ibid). For the purpose of this study the researcher used narrative reflections and discursive informed conversations to allow lecturers (participants) to share their understanding and experiences of enhancing student engagement. This allowed lecturers to express their deep insights into student engagement. Sharing highpoint experiences also motivated and empowered lecturers to create visions for the future which is what the researcher hoped to achieve in this study. During the discovery phase the highpoints related to the topic of discovery which can be mapped out to appreciate what gives life to the programme or organisation (Reed, 2007). Further, the discovery phase emphasises that a 'narrative-rich' environment is necessary for change to occur, and this means an environment where storytelling and qualitative information are emphasised (Knox et al., 2015). According to Chauke (2014), positive stories generate excitement about the future of an organisation and

what it is capable of, as opposed to merely listing numerical data. In this study, the discovery phase was about discovering and valuing the positive aspects of student engagement.

4.7.1.3 Phase 3: Dream

In this phase, the participants were asked to imagine their group, organisation or community at its best in order to identify and symbolise the common goals of the members of the system (Bushe, 2011). Generally, the degree to which clarity about that common vision is sought differs by application, as the dream phase often results in something symbolic, such as a graphical representation (Bushe, 2011). Participants created a vision for their ideal future during the dream phase based on the discovery phase. This phase explored the positive future that the participant may have for the team, organisation or community since it is very similar to an envisioning exercise (Van Brabant, 2015). Van Brabrant (2015) adds that this phase stimulates positive energy and optimism and creates vision maps that focuses on specific detail. In this study, the researcher intended to unpack these visions and dreams that lecturers may have for enhancing student engagement and hoped that this may lead to unravelling specific details regarding student engagement that will enhance this phenomenon holistically at higher education institutions. Moreover, the dream phase allows participants to work collaboratively to brainstorm ideas of what the future could be as participants are encouraged to think creatively about long-term goals (Fynn,2013). There are seven steps in the 'Dreaming' process according to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 189):

- Reflect on the focal question
- Engage in a 'dream' dialogue
- Clarify the collective 'dream'
- Creatively enact the 'dream'
- Determine common themes
- Create an organisational 'dream' map
- (Optional) document the 'dream'

In the dream phase, participants are introduced to focal questions and given time to reflect on the questions (Collister, n.d.). This id followed by participants engaging in what is known as collaborative conversation where they share hopes, dreams, reflections, and images (Ibid). As patterns and synergies emerge, they represent the collective dream of the group (Bache, 2008). After the collective dream emerges, it needs to be clarified through further interrogation, such as: what does it look like? what do you hear? and how will you know it's there? (Whitney &

Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 189). These entail finding innovative ways to improve the organisation's operations. In the discovery phase, positive questions direct members' attention to the possibility rather than the problem, in addition to preparing them for participation in this phase of the 4D process. At this stage, the focus is on defining the future vision rather than the actual design or implementation (Ludema et al., 2003). Also, Communication strategies should take a creative direction to elicit innovative plans for the future. Accordingly, the researcher used narrative interviews and discursive informed conversations to garner information.

4.7.1.4 Phase 4: Design

The design phase maps out the steps that will bring the dream to life where participants are asked to formulate 'provocative propositions'; that is, what needs to happen to support their vision of the future (Acosta & Douthwait, 2005). The design phase articulates statements about what is going to happen, and this is termed as 'provocative propositions' (Van Brabant, 2015, p. 4). According to Mohr and Watkins (2002), participants articulate the shared image or dreams of the most desired future for the organisation's potential, position, calling, and the contribution it can make to international wellbeing. This is a beneficial way of sharing ideas and making visions come to life as this may contribute to the enhancement of student engagement worldwide. As a researcher, there is evident in my practice that student engagement is associated with success, and therefore it contributes to positive outcomes in the education sector. The researcher envisages that this study motivates higher education institutions to share best practices and visions that may inspire other institutions locally and abroad. A key part of the dream phase is defining and designing the social, administrative, and clinical infrastructure that is needed. This includes defining and designing social norms, values, policies, methods, processes, and procedures in order to realise the vision (Knox et al., 2003). In other words, the dream phase is about effecting a vision by utilising a plan of action. The notion of a 'provocative proposal' is to expand the organisation's conception of itself and to portray the future such that the positive core of the organisation permeates all its daily functions (Chauke, 2014).

4.7.1.5 Phase 5: Destiny

The destiny phase involves planning 'what will be' and involves the stage where the energy moves to the implementation phase (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). Van Brabant (2015) describes this step as the start of the actual process of moving forward. Mohr and Watkins (2002) identify this stage as one of high potential and innovation. Action plans are created in

the destiny phase to put the design into practice, which is also called the "delivery" phase or sustainability phase (Hammond, 1998, p. 24). As a result of the dream phase, the destiny phase is also fulfilled (Lehner & Hight, 2006). The key questions in the destiny phase are: what will we learn from our gains so far? what will be our celebration? how do we organise ourselves for action? How can we self-organise? how will we support success? (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 218). According to Knox et al., (2003), there are five parts to the destiny phase:

- Reflect and celebrate;
- Form innovation teams and start discussions;
- Create implementation plans;
- Encourage collaboration among innovation teams; and
- Promote continued collaboration.

Chauke (2014) advocates that participants personally commit to take action that is consistent with any design element; everyone is authorized to take those actions they believe will contribute to the success of the design. As one of the objectives of this study, lecturers' understandings are needed so that they can create, innovate, and collaborate to improve student engagement in higher education institutions. In the destiny phase, Stavros and Torres (2005, p.11) highlight the importance of "living the principles, staying awake, changing, improvising, being open and agile, practising the principles, and engaging in supportive intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships".

4.7.2 DATA GENERATION METHODS

Three data generation methods were used in this study. Each of the data generation methods were designed in accordance with thephases of AI. The data generation methods included appreciative interviews, discursive conversations, and open-ended questionnaires.

4.7.2.1 Appreciative Interviews

Appreciative interviews are different from traditional interviews as they focus on what is working rather than what is wrong. Designing an AI interview requires careful use of positive language which requires participants to think and reflect on their narratives (Kramer, Fynn & Laher, 2019, p. 358). They must 'touch people's heart and spirit' (Bushe, 2007, p. 4). Probing may be required using statements such as 'Tell me more', 'Why do you feel this way?', 'Describe how this affects you' and 'Tell me, why is this important to you?' (Kramer et al.,

2019, p. 358). This aligned well with the nature of the study as the researcher was able to explore the peak and best stories about lecturers' experiences with regards to enhancing student engagement and through these stories, lecturers were also able to reflect on what is working well. Additionally, this worked in conjunction with the discursive informed conversation as the researcher was able to probe using the statements mentioned in the above literature.

According to Kramer (2019) appreciative inquiry interviews also require active listening and creating a positive non-judgemental space is imperative to the success of such interviews. In this particular study the researcher was able to create a non-threatening and non-intimidating space through the use of virtual platforms. Conducting an appreciative inquiry interview individually with each participant also enabled the researcher to be able to listen actively and the participant to share their stories and experiences freely.

An appreciative interview is similar to that of a narrative interview. The narrative principle which is discussed in chapter three captures the importance of storytelling and further suggests that when people with different perspectives are able to tell their stories of their best experiences this allows us to see what is common rather than the differences (Barette & Fry, 2005). Among the narratives (e.g., storytelling) outlined by Stuckey (2013) are those that illustrate the unfolding of events or actions from a participant's point of view. Accordingly, narratives are represented and interpreted by the participants and therefore, cannot be proven true or false, as they express 'truth' from the participant's perspective (Muylaert et al., 2014). Hence, narrative interviews are appropriate for conducting qualitative research.

According to Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016), narrative interviews situate the participant at the centre of a research study, and thus, these interviews are meant to collect people's personal stories. By conducting narrative interviews, researchers gain a deeper understanding of people's experiences and behaviours (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). As such, it is evident that the participant takes control of the interview and its outcome. Narrative interviews are advantageous in that the participant guides the discussion and may disclose information that one never expected (Stuckey, 2013). In this way, the hidden gems of information are captured spontaneously, which was perfect for this research as taking the lead and guiding the interview allowed the participants to feel comfortable.

Boros (2018) states that a narrative interview is not guided by questions, but rather follows an unstructured approach. Moreover, using narrative interviews generates qualitative data that is

rich in detail, suggestive, real, and vivid (Florentina, 2013). This was the ideal approach to realise the researcher's goal of generating rich data on student engagement. Consequently, the researcher gained a deep understanding of how lecturers understand student engagement and how that understanding shaped their appreciation of the phenomenon through an appreciative inquiry. Accordingly, data generation methods adopted in this study followed the phases of AI (Appendix E). Further, an important aspect of appreciative research is that it prioritises narratives collected from participants to make sense of the business of assigning meaning to lived experiences, which was what the researcher was intending to achieve (Allen, 2017).

4.7.2.2 Discursive informed conversations

A discursive informed conversation was also used as a data generation method in this study. According to Jamshed (2014), a discursive informed conversation is a discourse that occurs spontaneously and is also sometimes referred to as an unstructured interview as they have very little structure and are mainly unplanned. Jamshed (2014) states that this data generation method typically exhibits the following characteristics:

- Participant data can be collected in an extended manner;
- Allows researchers to probe into a participant's experiences in ways an interview might not be able to, in order to get a fuller picture of the experience; and
- It allows the exploration of the experiences of different selected participants so as to reflect a range of experiences.

It is evident that this type of conversation favours the interest of the researcher and is aimed to gather data that is in-depth and rich. From the research one can also gather that a discursive informed conversation does not have pre-set questions. The researcher extended the narrative interviews by using a discursive informed conversation to gain deeper insight into lecturers' understandings and enhancement of student engagement through an appreciative inquiry process. According to Farooq (2018), discursive informed conversations generate qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions as this allows the participants to elaborate on their experiences and opinions in greater depth which assisted the researcher in developing a real sense of the participants' understanding. In applying this data collection technique Via AI, the researcher understood why lecturers enhance student engagement in the way that they do.

According to Galindo (2018), a discursive informed conversation flows like a natural conversation where the researcher modifies the questions to suit participants' specific experiences. Therefore, discursive informed conversations are sometimes referred to as "discovery interviews" and are more like a "guided conservation" (Galindo, 2018, p. 27). It is evident that a discursive conversation is flexible and can be adapted. McLeod (2014) adds that discursive informed conversations also have increased validity as it gives the researcher an opportunity to probe and clarify to gain a deeper understanding, in addition to steering the direction of the conversation. The researcher also conducted all interviews and conversations via video-conferencing as opposed to face-to-face encounters which also helped to create a more balanced distribution of power between the researcher and the participant. According to Volg (2013), this allows participants to talk more freely as it provides some level of privacy to them. Studies have shown that participants, when given the option of face-to-face and video interviews, have voluntarily selected the video option as their preferred interview mode (Holt, 2010). This, coupled with the researcher's promise to ensure data confidentiality, encouraged participants to talk freely and expansively which was what the researcher wanted to achieve in this study (Farooq, 2015). Whilst this is an unstructured way of data collection, the researcher used an AI grid as a guide (Appendix E) to direct the conversation. There were also prompts and probes (Appendix G) to increase validity and to clarify blurred issues to gain a better and deeper insight of the participant's responses.

4.7.2.3 Open-ended Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire can be used alone or in conjunction with other interviewing techniques to explore topics in-depth which may lead to a lengthy narrative (Weller, et al., 2018). Participants who are asked open-ended questions must formulate a response in writing and provide feedback (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). Depending on the question mode, Kronic and Presser (2010) add that either the question was read out and the answer was recorded by an interviewer via telephone, or on a computer screen and the respondent entered it into the text field provided by web or postal surveys. An open-ended digital questionnaire was used for this study, and it was distributed via email. As a result, the researcher was able to distribute the questionnaire to all participants at once, saving much time.

Using an open-ended questionnaire allowed participants to express themselves freely, to elaborate on and qualify their responses, and to avoid the limitations of predefined categories

of response (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). The open-ended questionnaire is a popular technique for smaller-scale research or for sections of a questionnaire that require respondents to answer personally rather than simply ticking numbers and boxes, as these open-ended responses may contain valuable information (Cohen et al., 2018). A wide range of possible answers can be unearthed via an open-ended questionnaire, given that some of the responses may be unexpected (Hyman, Michael, & Jeremy, 2016). In using this data generation method, the researcher gained valuable information regarding lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement, which contributed richly to improving the data generation process to satisfy the study's objectives. In addition, AI phases were followed in the development of the designing of the questionnaire. However, Creswell (2008) cautions that questions must be clear; and ambiguity, jargon or unnecessary words should be avoided to not skew the study's results and to improve the validity of the data generation process.

4.7.4 Data Generation Table in Accordance with Appreciative Inquiry Phases

The phases of AI were evident in all the data generation methods as seen in the table 4.2 below:

Table 4.2: Data generation table and implementation of appreciative inquiry (AI)

Phase	How AI was implemented in the Data Generation Methods	Principles	Research Question
Define: Clarifying the focus.	The topic was chosen by the researcher, and this together with the objectives were evident in the letter that included the data generation methods. An AI data generation grid was constructed to inform interview schedules, questionnaires, and discursive informed conversations. The phase also looked at the current understanding of student engagement at a HEI.	Constructionist: Reality is constructed through positive language and conversation.	**Research Question 1**

Discovery: Appreciating the best of 'what is.	This phase involved participants sharing their stories about the peaks/positives and appreciating the best practices through narrative interviews, questionnaires, and discursive informed conversation. Participants shared their positive experience of enhancing student engagement at a higher education institution.	Simultaneity: Asking questions to create change	**Research Question 2**
Dream: Prompting provocative ideas about a desired future.	In this phase, the participants discuss their visions for the future and explain how student engagement can be enhanced so that HEIs achieve success. Participants also discussed a desired future for student engagement and the visions for an ideal way in which student engagement can be enhanced.	Poetic: Inspiring organisations	**Research Question 2**
Design: Design and co-construct an ideal future.	In this phase, participants were asked to describe an ideal future for student engagement at the HEI. Participants could do this through 'provocative propositions' or drawn images.	Anticipatory: Examining ideas that inspire action.	**Research Question 3**
Destiny: Participants are empowered; they learn, adjust and improvise to create 'what will be'.	In this phase, participants discussed how they would take the design phase forward and implement and sustain it.	Positive: Positive questions lead to positive change.	**Research Question 3**

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis (TA) approach was used in this study to analyse data. The key to understanding TA is interpreting what a theme is. In coding the data set, themes are defined as patterns which capture some significant information about the data set, in relation to the research questions, and in terms of patterned meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In literature, the words *pattern* and *theme* are interchangeable, hence it is logical to conclude that themes and patterns are related concepts. When analysing data, including transcribed talk or conversation, a thematic analysis is used to identify patterns (themes). Once identified, these themes are examined further. For qualitative research, it is an effective method as the goal of TA is to find repeated meanings across data sets, which is the key to understanding phenomena (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Due to the researcher's choice of qualitative approach in this study, TA was suitable since patterns that captured key information, were apparent. In addition to adopting an interpretive paradigm, it is important to note that an interpretive paradigm can depict multiple realities, and this links to TA by demonstrating repeated meanings in the data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish two levels of themes: semantic and latent. Unlike conventional themes, semantic themes do not require anything beyond what has been said or what has been written, while the latent level looks beyond what has been said and starts to see or examine the underlying assumptions, conceptualisations, and ideologies that are theorised to shape or influence the semantic content of the data (Ibid). As part of the analysis, the researcher followed and adapted Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework of the six phases (table 4.3 below) of thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt 2017, p. 3354).

Table 4.3: Six-phase framework of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)

Step	***Detail***
1	Familiarising yourself with your data
2	Generating initial codes
3	Searching for themes
4	Reviewing themes
5	Defining and naming themes

6	Producing the report

Step 1: Become familiar with the data

To conduct any qualitative analysis, reading and re-reading the transcripts is the first step. The researcher consulted and perused all appreciative interviews, discursive conversations, and open-ended questionnaires of the study to become familiar with the data about lecturers' understandings and enhancement of student engagement.

Step 2: Generate initial codes

This phase begins with organising and analysing the data in a meaningful and systematic way. By coding, we reduce large banks of information into smaller units. Coding can be done in various ways, depending on your perspective and types of research questions. This phase of data analysis was initiated by the researcher by organising the data. Highlighting processes were applied to separate and prioritise the data, which was then systematically coded, after which the collection of codes was assimilated. Thus, a number of possible themes and codes were derived from this exercise regarding lecturers' understanding of and enhancement of student engagement.

Step 3: Search for themes

A theme is basically a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question. It is clear that there is no hard and fast rule about what constitutes a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Essentially, themes are determined by their significance. It is possible to observe similarities during the coding stage of identifying preliminary themes when you have a very small data set (e.g., one short focus group). In this study, the researcher explored themes that related to lecturers' understanding of and enhancement of student engagement.

Step 4: Review themes

During Step 3, it is critical that we review, modify, and develop the preliminary themes we identified. Additionally, it is important to think about whether these themes make-sense. At this point, it is advisable to gather all the data related to each of the themes.

Step 5: Define themes

In this phase of refinement, we "determine the essence of each theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). This involves how to interpret the theme, determining the relationship between the main theme and any subthemes, and identifying the connection between them (if any).

Step 6: Writing-up the report

Report-writing is usually the culmination of all research processes of a particular study. It is important to explain how the themes and subthemes interact and relate to each other, and to the study as a whole. The researcher examined which themes corresponded with each of the research questions pertaining to the topic under study. Additionally, Sundler et al. (2019) believe that the researcher should try to understand the meanings embedded in experiences, and describe such meanings textually. Detail and aspects of meaning are explored through the analysis, which requires reading, thoughtful reflection, and authentic recording. Generally, the analysis process can be complex, and researchers need to be flexible. Braun and Clarke (2019) who define TA as a method that is theoretically flexible, as opposed to one that is theoretically informed and constrained, agrees that the constructivist epistemological philosophy (as seen in this study) should resonate with the TA approach.

4.9 VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to enhance the authenticity of a research project, it must prioritise the aspect of validity. In the event that research findings are not being valid, the research becomes valueless. According to Cohen et al. (2018), measuring validity is concerned with the nature of what is considered valid, what validity entails, how to know when one has reached an acceptable level of validity and how validity influences research design, inferences, and conclusions. Cohen et al. (2018) add that other understandings of validity consider it to be a demonstration that an instrument measures what it is intended to measure, or that an account accurately describes or theorises what it is intended to do. Consequently, validity refers to whether the findings of a study are accurate and truthful. Accordingly, research instrumentation for this study was carefully selected to answer the research questions in an authentic and non-manipulated manner.

The concept of trustworthiness is explained and delineated differently by different researchers. Cypress (2017) defines trustworthiness as a quality criterion concerning the degree of trust, or confidence readers have in qualitative research results. It is obvious that validity and

trustworthiness are two of the key factors researchers need to consider before conducting a study, especially when analysing the results, and making judgements or conclusions. As part of this research, it was ensured that the findings of the study were authentic and truthful by requiring all participants to read the transcripts of their responses for authentication.

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are four of the five trustworthiness criteria. These four strategies work cohesively to displace the conventional, quantitative measures of quality such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). In addition to adhering to each criterion's stipulations, the researcher will also clarify how the study was valid through the use of these four strategies.

4.9.1 Credibility

The principle of credibility in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the research findings and conclusions can be deemed credible, or to the extent to which the findings are true and believable (Nassaji, 2020). For this to be attained, Nassaji (2020) emphasises the need for a researcher to ensure that his or her interpretations and interpretations of the data are both accurate and thorough. Similarly, credibility is also called internal validity and is derived from truth value, which is a measure of whether a researcher has developed and articulated a certain level of confidence in the findings based on the phenomenon being examined (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). This study was designed so that the researcher could explain how the participants interpreted student engagement, and how this understanding influenced their enhancement of student engagement. Lemon and Hayes (2020) state that truth is derived from the participants' lived-experiences, which do not directly translate into universal truths, but rather into an in-depth understanding of their unique circumstances. Furthermore, after the findings had been transcribed and represented, the researcher recalled participants to confirm whether responses and records accurately reflect the findings. Research findings are also made more credible through triangulation where researchers seek to determine the correlation between multiple and different sources of information in order to form themes or categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The data derived from discursive informed conversations and appreciative interviews were triangulated in order to increase the study's credibility. The process of triangulation enhanced the validity and credibility of the findings of this investigation since it helped to obtain a more accurate and holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Nassaji, 2020). According to Kalu and Bwalya (2017), there are different types of triangulations: data triangulation, source triangulation, participant triangulation, interview triangulation, method

triangulation, and peer debriefing among investigators. In order to triangulate across data and sources, the researcher used three different methods to gather data from each participant.

Various methods can be used to promote the credibility of a study such as interviews and focus group discussions which can be considered appropriate methods within qualitative research (Padgett, 2016). Therefore, appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and questionnaires have been used by the researcher as methods for gathering data that are situated within a qualitative framework that foster triangulation. Additionally, the researcher conducted, monitored, peer-checked and recorded all information to maintain objectivity throughout the process. As a result of remaining neutral and avoiding giving personal opinions or views during the data gathering process, the researcher was able to generate high-quality data. For researchers to prevent bias during the data generation process, they must be aware that there is the possibility of inherent bias in qualitative research interviews; therefore, the researcher must strive to remain objective (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). Transcribing verbatim appreciative interviews and discursive informed conversations were done via Zoom with the consent of the participants to increase the accuracy of the data. Moreover, a comparison was made between the transcripts and recordings to ensure data accuracy. Credibility, thus, contributes to quality in qualitative research by dealing with validity threats such as distortion, bias, and inaccurate portrayal of participants' views (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

4.9.2 Transferability

The concept of transferability (which replaces the traditional external validity and generalisability) deals with the extent to which the findings from a study might be applicable to other contexts and settings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Researchers should provide a 'thick description' of their research participants and the process of their research, enabling the reader to gauge whether the findings can be applied in their own setting; this is called the transferability judgement (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Nassaji (2020) adds that transferability is about the extent to which a researcher's interpretation or conclusions can be transferred to other similar contexts and that in order to accomplish this, the researcher must provide detailed and rich descriptions of their research activities and the reasons behind their conclusions. This is done by providing a detailed and rich description of research sites, participants, how the interviews occurred, when and where they were conducted, are they described in vivid detail, and other aspects of data collection that enhance the understanding of the research setting so

that outside researchers and readers can assess the quality of the transferability of the information (Ibiamke & Ajekwe, 2017).

In accordance with the above stipulations, a detailed explanation of the research setting, the recruiting process regarding participant-selection, and how and where interviews were conducted were included in this study. There is also a detailed description of the results with in-depth explanations. It is important to provide detailed and in-depth explanations so that readers can identify with the study and understand if they can relate to the findings. The researcher should not use transferability to claim generalisable results but should rather provide sufficient details to make transfer possible, which is what is desired by the researcher (Nassaji, 2020). Although transferability appears similar to generalisability in quantitative research, qualitative research is interpretive, and it is typically small in size, not representative of the whole population, so the findings are not generalisable. In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under investigation, generalisation can be achieved at different levels (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). The researcher should be concerned with ensuring the depth and richness of the data, as well as its validity when applied to other circumstances, situations, or individuals, as that is what this study aimed to achieve.

4.9.3 Dependability

In order to establish dependability, researchers ensure that findings are distinctive to a specific period or place, and that explanations are consistent across the data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). As part of dependability, consistency plays a role, so it is necessary to determine if your analysis process follows the accepted standards for your particular research design (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Nassaji (2020), dependability indicates that qualitative research should be reported in a way that would allow others to draw similar conclusions if they reviewed the data. In order to achieve this, it may be helpful to document all activities and conclusions, as well as any changes that may occur throughout the research process. In this case, outside experts or auditors can review the documentation to evaluate their accuracy and the extent to which the conclusions are supported by the data (Nassaji, 2020). To verify the accuracy of the findings, the researcher requested colleagues to review the research findings. All aspects of data collection and analysis were documented so that other researchers could verify the findings and establish whether the data supports the findings.

In addition to ensuring the dependability of the research findings, the researcher should also account for any changes in the research process of the phenomenon under study; for example, the research design, or the research methodology, among others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Houghton et al., 2013). Silverman (2016) argues that in a changing the social world, dependability is something difficult to predict. According to Kalu & Bwalya (2017), in order to assure credibility, researchers need to provide readers with enough information so they can determine how reliable the study and the researcher are. It was the literature review and results that presented adequate information for this study to demonstrate how the trend of student engagement has evolved over time, and how this has an impact on the way in which lecturers are able to enhance the quality of student engagement.

4.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is a measure of how objective a study is by assessing whether its interpretations and findings have been formed from participants' lived experiences and not influenced by the researcher's own biases (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Nassaji (2020) claims that confirmability can also be defined as the degree to which others can confirm or disprove the researcher's interpretations and conclusions. Additionally, the importance of an audit trail is invaluable; the researcher should keep records of every step taken including decisions made regarding the data coding and analysis, after which these steps and decisions should become accessible for any further review and analysis (Nassaji, 2020). The research process should be described in detail to ensure that the study can be confirmed as credible. By doing so, readers will be able to determine whether the data analysis procedures were performed accurately or not (Kalu, & Bwalya, 2017). The reader is provided with a detailed account of the data analysis procedure for this study in order to confirm that the procedures were followed as expected. It provides readers with an audit trail so that each step of data collection and analysis is recorded and documented. Research is documented through journals and memos, the application of a research log, keeping an updated data collection chronology, and the clear recording of data analysis processes (Ibiamke & Ajekwe, 2017). The narrative account is therefore credible if individuals outside the project (external auditors) review the documents (Ibiamke & Ajekwe, 2017). In order to generate data using AI, the phases of this approach had to be applied, documented, and executed during this process. As such, data analysis processes were meticulously documented at every step during each process.

According to Cohen et al. (2018), qualitative research assumes that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study, and that an audit trail in addition to using triangulation methods is needed to ensure that the validity of an inquiry (Cohen et al., 2018). Researchers must follow certain steps to ensure that the findings of the study are not derived from his or her own viewpoint or prejudices, but rather as result of the authentic analysis of the raw data. Therefore, an audit trail to ensure integrity, accuracy and objectivity in this current study was available to other researchers, participants and academics.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Taking precautions to ensure the safety of the subjects and conducting the research in accordance with ethical standards are among the ethical considerations of research. There are four fundamental concepts that characterise an ethical system - autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice (Pietilä et al., 2020). Whether you are conducting face-to-face interviews with participants or conversing with them, ethical considerations are compulsory. It is the responsibility of the researcher when conducting research to adhere to ethical standards. Arrant's (2020) view is that a researcher's responsibility to protect the rights and safety of the participants increases as they explore phenomena in which human subjects play an important role. In addition, it relates to the rules and regulations that are generally accepted as legal methods for conducting research within the global scientific community (Ajuwon, 2020). Ajuwon (2020) adds that existing guidelines emphasise the importance of four universal ethical principles applicable to all human research: human dignity, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. There has been an effort to increase and expand attention on ethical conduct (actions performed during personal, professional, and research activities) in response to increased expectations of greater accountability (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). In its simplest form, an ethical consideration is the distinction between what is right and what is wrong. This applies to all phases of the research process. From research design to publication, researchers must consider ethical issues at every stage, since any deviation in the ethical code could lead to research misconduct as a result of irresponsible behaviour (Nikravanfard, Khorasanizadeh, & Zendehdel, 2017). For this study the researcher ensured that ethical considerations were adhered to in every stage of the research process. In accordance with ethical principles, the study was compliant with the following:

4.10.1 Ethical Clearance

When the researcher submitted the research proposal to the Humanities and Social Science Research and Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) to obtain ethical clearance to conduct this research, all requirements stipulated by this committee (UKZN) were intended to be strictly adhered to. An ethical clearance certificate granting permission to conduct this study was duly issued (Appendix A). All stipulations concerning ethics of research were strictly followed in this research study.

4.10.2 Informed Consent

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), informed consent is an essential part of ethical research. To provide informed consent, two crucial factors must be present; namely, 'informed' and 'consent' (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). There should be full disclosure to individuals about what they will be asked to do, how their data will be used, and any consequences or risks that may result. Consent should be voluntary, the subject should understand what he/she is being asked to do, and the involved parties should be competent to consent. Arfin (2018) agrees that participants should be adequately informed about the finer details of the research, understand all information, and be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in it before appending their signature to the consent form. Researchers must ensure that the participants fully understand their rights when it comes to access to their information and the right to withdraw at any time. As such, Fleming & Zegwaard (2018) see informed consent as a contract between research participants and researchers.

Researchers use the informed consent process to ensure that potential participants are aware of the possible risks and benefits that may be associated with their participation in a research study (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2018). Among the main assurances relied upon by researchers is written (signed) consent forms. Essentially, this form is part of the research protocol where at the end of the text, the invitation to participate in the study is clearly stated, and a provision is also made that the participant has read, understood, and signed the document (Ibid). According to Ketefian (2015), the following must be adhered to during the process of informed consent:

- *Providing relevant information*. This includes the nature of the research, expected discomforts if any, the type of intervention to be done and what alternatives might be available. If confidentiality and anonymity can be promised and if not, what precautions can be taken. If compensation is being offered, the option to withdraw at any time

should be given. If some information is being withheld for research purposes, debrief the person following the intervention, and offer to answer any questions. The researcher has ensured that all relevant information was provided to the participants in the study (Appendix B, C, and D). All information regarding the topic, purpose and research questions is provided in the request letter and consent form. All expectations of the participant are clearly stated in the consent form (Appendix B and C). The consent form (Appendix D) also states that all precautions will be taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. It is also stated on the consent form that participation is voluntary and that the participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any point without being disadvantaged in any way. Consent was obtained from both lecturers as well as the higher education institution participating in this study. A meeting was held with the institution before recruiting lecturers and all information involving the research design and process was explained to the authorities of the higher education institution. The researcher was granted in principle permission first, but once ethical clearance was granted by the UKZN only then full permission was granted by the HEI to conduct the study.

- *Ascertain that consent information is clearly understood*. Some consent documents are prepared in simplified form to assure that they are easily understood; while this assures that individuals at a variety of levels will understand what the research plan is, we need to guard against oversimplification, otherwise we risk omitting crucial information. The researcher ensured that the participants as well as the heads of the institution understood all the information on the consent form by asking them to read this form twice and then explaining everything before the form was signed. Questions were entertained for clarity purposes. Once permission was granted from the HEI and ethical clearance was obtained from UKZN, the researcher ensured that each participant was provided with a consent form and information sheet that explained the AI process as well as all the expectations of the research. Only then was the participant allowed to sign the consent form which was collected and stored in a secure place. As part of the informed consent process, participants were also made aware of specific aspects of the the research process, where the researcher ensured that the participant is aware of all the potentially positive benefits of the study, as well as the anticipated risks (physical or psychological).

4.10.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Clark-Kazak (2017) maintains that research should ensure that participant information is protected, and that any personal information that might compromise the anonymity of the participants should be withheld from other researchers. In this study, for participant confidentiality, the participant's identity was available to the researcher, but the data was coded to protect identities thus also ensuring anonymity of information (Fleming, & Zegwaard, 2018). It is important that participants in this study remained anonymous so as not to be compromised for their views.

There is a common misunderstanding between the term's *anonymity* and *confidentiality* - they are actually two different concepts. As the word implies, anonymity refers to the fact that the identity of the participant is unknown to the researcher (e.g., when using anonymous surveys, the identity of the participant is unknown to all researchers (a questionnaire that only contains a number instead of a person's name would be an example). The right to privacy is always guaranteed when a situation like this arises. As a result, respondents who complete an anonymous questionnaire that does not provide any identifying elements such as names, addresses, occupation details, or coding symbols can be assured of complete and total anonymity (Cohen et al., 2018).

It is common for the researcher to know the participant during a confidential study, such as when conducting an interview. Interviewers know the participant's name and may have knowledge of their address or other identifying information. A researcher must make sure any personal, identifying information revealed during the interview is altered to protect the participant from harm. For example, researchers assign pseudonyms to the participants. Likewise, when participants refer to other individuals by name, the researcher assigns a pseudonym to them. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants in research are critical to protecting their privacy. Participants may be more likely to complete a survey or participate in an experiment or interview if they feel their information will not be revealed (Coffelt, 2017). We should treat all information as confidential especially that of the participants in a research process. Participants must sign an information protocol that says the data will only be used for the research purposes formally outlined in the protocol. All stages of the research process should take measures to protect the privacy of participants to prevent their personal information from being inadvertently disclosed (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2018). Respecting research subjects throughout the entire research process is important, hence confidentiality and privacy should

be strictly adhered to. Participants should be informed whenever new information becomes available. By allowing subjects to withdraw and change their minds during the research, autonomy can be achieved, and the welfare of subjects can always be respected (Beshir, 2020).

For this study all participants' interviews, questionnaires and discussions remained confidential. Although they were recorded over zoom and questionnaires were digitally distributed, all information was electronically password-protected and safely stored in e-files in the researcher's computer, no identities of participants were disclosed, and only the researcher and the supervisor had access to such information. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants and the research site in this study. Despite the fact that researchers may know who provided the data or identify participants based on the given details, no information about the connection should be made public.

4.10.4 Beneficence and Maleficence

For a deeper understanding of why these two concepts are important in research, we need to dissect each of them separately. Beneficence is defined as the aim of maximising the benefits that research will contribute to society (Beshir, 2020). The concept implies an obligation that will benefit the subjects of research, and it has a direct correlation with the concept of doing good. The principle of beneficence can be observed to be limited not only to obligations towards individuals, but also to the responsibility of a profession towards society, which includes conducting research to improve the quality of care to the public (Ketifian, 2015). To maintain beneficence, one should conduct research that contributes to the building of knowledge as well as providing guidance for interventions that benefit people (Moot et al., 2019). Ideally, the contribution of research to society and future generations will not only create new documented knowledge but will also provide society with solutions such as effective therapies or answers to theoretical questions that society and future generations may have (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2018).

In accordance with philosophy and ethical theory, non-maleficence is placed before beneficence; that is, if it is not possible to do good, it is important not to do harm (Ketefian, 2015). Cohen et al. (2018) contend that non-maleficence requires researchers and participants to carefully consider the possible consequences of the research on participants and on the research (e.g. the negative effects on the participants and the researchers). The research should not harm any participant.

Since this study is underpinned by the AI framework which seeks to highlight the peaks, strengths, and best practices of an organisation, it envisions a bright future for HEIs. The manner in which the research is conducted is in accordance with these five phases and therefore the research aims to uplift institutional competence by empowering lecturers in terms of gaining knowledge concerning enhancing student engagement to improve academic performance. Hence, there were no disadvantages for the institution or the participants – in fact all parties involved in this study gained from sharing best practice.

4.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are many lecturers at HEIs with stories to share; however, the study was limited to lecturers who taught compulsory modules at one institution. The only limitation that is applicable to this study is generalisability. The study focuses on lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at one higher education institution and therefore cannot be generalised to lecturers at other HEIs. Research conducted qualitatively draws conclusions based on contextual factors rather than generalisations (Cohen et al., 2018). For AI, a quick-fix is not possible; it requires considerable time (Drew & Wallis, 2014). In order for sharing to succeed, a supportive, open, and positive culture needs to be established at HEIs; it is not possible to attain full participation from all stakeholders, and this raises questions about how to strategise when there is no democratic consensus (Schooley, 2012).

4.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explained how data was generated, the research design, and research methods. To answer the research questions, a qualitative approach was applied. As this study was concerned with lecturers' understanding of student engagement and its enhancement through an appreciative inquiry, a qualitative approach was appropriate. Throughout the study, interpretivism was a dominant concept since interpretivism and qualitative research are compatible as they enable researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of student engagement. A descriptive case study was used for the study. Participants of a case study were identified within one environment, one situation, or one event. This study focused on lecturers at one higher education institution. In descriptive case studies, narrative accounts are used to collect data, which is in line with the researcher's methods. Case studies follow an interpretive tradition of research and focus on individuals' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018). A higher education institution in Durban was the site of the study, and a total of eight participants were sampled.

The researcher utilised both purposive and convenience sampling. Lecturers who are required to teach mandatory modules and those who were willing to take part in this study, were the selected participants. The data for this study was collected through appreciative interviews, conversations informed by discursive discourse, and open-ended digital questionnaires. The AI phases were applied to each of these data collection methods. In order to conduct this study, consent was obtained from the institution and the participants. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Throughout the study, confidentiality and anonymity were protected. The next chapter presents the data generated from this study, and the discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The research design, data generation methods, sampling procedures, research paradigm, and ethical considerations were described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the collected data was presented, analysed, and interpreted. Also, the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis, were outlined. The data generation methods followed the phases of the appreciative inquiry. Lastly, the summary of the chapter provided.

The data presented responds to the following research questions:

2 What are lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution?

3 How do lecturers' understanding shape their enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution?

4 Why do lecturers enhance student engagement at a higher education institution the way they do?

To address the above research questions, a descriptive case study was employed (see 4.4.1). This was complemented by appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and an open-ended questionnaire which were used to generate the data. More importantly, the researcher targeted lecturers who facilitated compulsory modules on the Bachelor of Education (Foundation and Intermediate Phases) programme. Therefore, the findings presented in this study were elicited from eight lecturers who responded to the researcher's invitation to participate in the research process. Furthermore, all eight participants were subjected to all three of the data generation methods used in this study. All questions asked in the appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and the open-ended questionnaire were aligned to the aim, objectives and research questions of this study. The research questions were used as a basis to discuss the findings in this chapter. Table 5.1 below provides the themes and sub-themes that emerged from this study.

5.2 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

In this study three themes and twenty-one sub-themes emerged (table 5.1)

Table 5.1: Themes and subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
5.2.1 Student engagement is active participation	5.2.1.1 Active Participation/Involvement 5.2.1.2 Collaborative and Co-constructive relationship 5.2.1.3 Interaction 5.2.1.4 Metacognition
5.2.2 Encouraging active participation	5.2.2.1 Facilitation of the module 5.2.2.2 Humanising content 5.2.2.3 Creating interconnectedness 5.2.2.4 Use of a variety of resources, activities, applications, and interactive teaching aids 5.2.2.5 Lecturer preparation 5.2.2.6 Authenticating the learning experience 5.2.2.7 Creating opportunities for critical-thinking 5.2.2.8 Providing quality feedback 5.2.2.9 Facilitating smaller groups and tutorials 5.2.2.10 Creating a supportive learning environment 5.2.2.11 Encouraging work-integrated learning and innovative models 5.2.2.12 Reviewing content and pedagogical practices
5.2.3 Enhancing student engagement through active participation is linked to success and fulfilment	5.2.3.1 Lecturer and student fulfilment 5.2.3.2 Application and reflection of knowledge 5.2.3.3 Value/Interest 5.2.3.4 Preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work 5.2.3.5 Positive student feedback

5.2.1 Theme 1: Student engagement is active participation

Appreciative interviews and discursive informed conversations were administered to explore lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution. To achieve the objectives of the study, the phases of AI were implemented in the data generation methods. At certain points, the researcher prompted the participants to steer the conversation in the right direction as sometimes spontaneous conversations led to digression. Responses from the questionnaire were also extracted to triangulate the responses from the narrative interviews and the discursive conversations.

5.2.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: active participation

During the appreciative interviews and discursive conversations, participants were prompted to share their understanding of student engagement. The following responses were noted:

L2:

Okay, I'm not going to give a theoretical or practical explanation of that, as I must be frank with you. I'm willing to share what I perceive or what I think. So, I would say student engagement has to do with how I relate with students, you know. Engaging with the materials, the activities, the distance and everything related to the module, which we put out there for them. So, I regard it as active participation in the learning process when students are not just passively participating but are actively and intentionally involved in the learning process.

L4:

I think the most basic definition would obviously be students being able to get involved, not being passive, but being active in their learning process, when you're not actually lecturing to them.

L5:

Okay, to me, student engagement would be active participation, and then giving feedback and even asking questions about something that they don't understand, whether they're typing it out, or just putting their hands up in the venue and asking a question. I think when they're trying to engage in an understanding of what's happening in the lecture that to me is student engagement.

L6:

Well, I would say students being involved in the learning process, and I don't want to use the word engage, there's another word 'participating'. I think that the absolute key for any kind of engagement is active participation. And, many students are fearful; they don't want to participate, I don't know why they're worried about being ridiculed, or they're worried about sounding stupid, or whatever it might be. But what they lose out by not participating is far worse than that initial fear, or whatever they've got to overcome just by participating, if you know what I mean. The benefits that they gain far outweigh the risk of just going through the motions.

L7:

So, for me, student engagement is a very personal process. They need to make the active decision to choose to become engaged. And ultimately, it's my responsibility as a lecturer to basically provide that safe space to give them enough tools so that they can feel comfortable to engage and learn. Ultimately, they need to choose particularly if it's online engagement - they need to make the active decision, so I can't force them. I can only encourage them through setting stimulating tasks through providing a space; whether that space be online, whether it be in-person, in class, or at a tutorial session. Essentially, it is for me to provide that space and giving them enough tools so that they make that active decision to become engaged.

This corroborates with the responses given in the open-ended questionnaire when lecturers were asked what their understanding of student engagement is?

L3:

Student engagement involves students engaging/being active in the lesson. This may not only come in the form of responding to questions but sharing in the lesson. Perhaps they could teach/facilitate a part of the discussion or maybe even present the content/respond to other students' questions while the teacher facilitates.

L4:

Having students play a meaningful role in the learning process. Students who are active participants and co-constructors of knowledge and not merely passive recipients.

L5:

My understanding of student engagement is when students are actively involved within the lecture or lesson.

The above extracts revealed that lecturers understand student engagement as active participation, where students are actively participating in the learning experience. In other words, they are asking questions and not just ticking a box to meet the criteria but are intentionally participating. It is evident that the responses allude to students being active participants in their learning experience and not just passive recipients of knowledge. It can also be deduced that to be active, students need to be involved in lectures. Participants were probed in terms of their understanding of student engagement as the researcher used discursive informed conversations to steer the conversation in the right direction. Participants were asked to elaborate about what they understand about student engagement or what was significant about student engagement - participants emphasised involvement. The word participation and involvement were used interchangeably in the participants' responses. Furthermore, it was evident that participants understood the terms participation and involvement to be related and linked to student engagement.

5.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: collaborative and co-constructive relationship

Participants indicated in their responses that student engagement is a collaborative relationship that is bi-directional and involves the collaboration and co-construction of knowledge. In other words, both the student and the lecturer are responsible for engagement. Both the lecturer and the student are co-constructing knowledge together. The responses were as follows:

L2:

Having students play a meaningful role in the learning process. Students who are active participants and co-constructors of knowledge and not merely passive recipients.

L3:

For me, genuine interaction revolves more around collaboration, where I'm working with my students, to discuss something. We discover something together. Then I find now that we've moved onto an online platform. Even though many people battle with the concept of interacting and engaging with their students, I fin, by using digital tools I'm learning and collaborating with my students in the sense that they're helping me to understand the tool. I'm learning to use it better because of them.

L4:

But it becomes more of a collaborative space. They are actually engaging with the material in the sense that they co constructing knowledge with you, and it becomes a very engaging, an active kind of process where they are active participant. I think that's what engagement actually would mean.

L5:

It's not a one-way unidirectional flow of knowledge from the lecturer to the student, but where the flow is much more two directional where they are giving back to you and you're responding. I think this is what makes our job exciting when it's not just giving, you are getting back these responses that are unexpected that challenge you as well. And then you have to respond. So, I think that is this kind of circle of engagement for me. I think none of us get into this job without joy, or a love of being challenged. And I really enjoy that in the classroom when students challenge you or challenge your ideas or challenge even the material that they're studying. And together, you can co-construct this knowledge or this understanding of whatever it is. And I would say that that is really for me what engagement is; a co-construction of knowledge where it's not a unidirectional flow from the lecturer to the student, but together, you're negotiating your way through whatever material you're working through. You are together able to come to this understanding at the end of whatever the material is, what it means, how it can be understood in this context, how it can be applied in this context, and how it can be utilised in the classroom or whatever it is that you're teaching them on that particular day.

L8:

It is a mutually beneficial collaborative approach between student and their institution. Solid experiences are built during teaching and learning processes while engaging in learning activities.

The above excerpts indicate that lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a HEI is a collaborative effort and a bi-directional process. The lecturer and the student co-construct knowledge. The responses also indicate that engagement means asking questions, challenging the lecturer, or the content. It is also evident from L5's response that there is an enjoyment that comes from this bi-directional relationship where students challenge as well as work together with the lecturer by dissecting content and how it is understood. Also, for collaboration and co-construction of knowledge to occur
there needs to be interaction.

5.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3: interaction

During the interviews and discursive informed conversation lecturers also mentioned that student engagement is about interaction. The questionnaire also revealed that lecturers understand student engagement as an interactive process. During the narrative interviews, discursive informed conversation, and responses from the questionnaire lecturers indicated the following:

L3:

Well, I think for me, you know, on a very superficial level, student engagement would mean interaction much of the time. I want to be able to ask my students a question, and I want them to answer, or I want them to do group work. So I would consider that as interaction.

L8:

I should say interacting and breaking down difficult to understand concepts into simple words and express them in a manner that students will find easy to understand.

It is evident from the above extracts that lecturers at HEIs also involve interaction in their lectures. Interaction includes the lecturer as well as the student asking questions and expecting

answers. It was also evident that the interaction mentioned in lecturers' responses does not merely include student-lecturer interaction, but also interaction with content.

5.2.1.4 Sub-theme 4: metacognition

The responses from appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and questionnaires indicated that when lecturers were asked about their understanding of student engagement, there was also reference to metacognition. Whilst cognitive skills may include thinking, reading, and remembering, amongst others, metacognitive skills include the ability to regulate learning through challenging opinions and asking questions. The following extracts bear testimony:

> L1:
> *Are they awake? Are they taking in information? Are they thinking? Is their brain engaged? I think that's what engagement is. I was going say, are they able to do some reasoning, you know, use their logic in decision-making? The most significant thing is for students to be able to make sure that they are thinking during the lecture. If they raise their hands to make a point to ask a question or to answer a question or to challenge someone else in the class or challenge the lecturer, then interaction on the level of metacognition is taking place.*

> L2:
> *Sometimes they could probe into thinking deeper about the modules you teach. Students can be completely immersed in the module and the subjects which you teach. So, when it comes to teaching and learning, this is what I regard as student engagement.*

> L3:
> *At the end of the lecture, I always had many students waiting to ask me something and wanting to tell me something, or want to share some thoughts with me. I can relate this, and this happened, you know, so that's their way of engaging with me.*

> L4:
> *They provide feedback via questions and stating examples so that they relate to what is being discussed within the class.*

L5:

The indication for me is when they provide their own examples, to make it relevant to what I'm saying, as well as when they try to question items from content materials to get an understanding. So, I think it's about questioning, and also providing their own examples to get an understanding of what's going on. I think paying attention(if they're not on the phone) or if they are looking at you and nodding and understanding, then this is a good indication of being engaged.

L7:

Yes, definitely, because ultimately, I think it's the student' duty, and we can't force them. We are facilitators of learning so we need to encourage them, and we can do that through various means. But ultimately, it's about selecting materials that are of interest and topical that will naturally stimulate engagement.

L8:

Mostly the level of participation because I can tell by the way they are contributing, or by the wa, they are actively involved in the question-and-answer sessions. I expect students to become self-directed learners engaging their natural curiosity about the material presented and taking that curiosity to the next level. I see myself and our work in the classroom as the springboard for their further exploration.

L6:

Questions posed by and to the lecturer should encourage engagement. But being a creative arts lecturer, there are often engagement opportunities and tasks. So, things like creating a piece of music would lead to getting instruments such that learners would be engaged in creating this piece of music. So, you can actually see whether they're doing it, and how they're doing it. For me, engagement in this context or setting has to do with using one's body. We'd often clap our hands, sing, and use instruments to create sounds. So, you can see, and you can hear when students are engaging in these kinds of tasks. In the online space, I have really struggled with student engagement.

From the above responses we learn that lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution includes metacognition. These skills include questioning, providing feedback, thinking, and challenging lecturers about the content of modules that they teach.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Encouraging Active Participation

From the responses regarding Theme 1 (5.2.1), it was evident that lecturers' understanding of student engagement enhances academic performance through ways that encourage active participation. Most importantly, lecturers were asked to share their experiences of how their understanding of student engagement shapes the enhancement of student engagement. They were also asked to share ideas that assist to foster positive student engagement. The responses indicate that the methods used encourage active participation led to overall academic enhancement.

5.2.2.1 Sub-theme 5: facilitation of the module

During the appreciative interview, discursive informed conversation and open-ended questionnaire drew responses concerning lecturers' understanding of student engagement and how to promote its enhancement. They were also asked to share what leads to positive student engagement. The responses were as follows:

> L2:
> *I lectured to a PGCE group, and it was a teaching practice module. So, it's not really for individual students, I will describe it as a group, because almost everyone in that group felt that they have been impacted upon. I've helped them in their journey. So, I've worked with a group of students who I basically taught how to organise themselves like lesson planning, how to prepare their portfolio of evidence, how to teach lessons. So, we have what we call the 'micro-mini' kind of lessons where they sit down and I teach them on how to prepare resources, and other related educational things.*

> L4:
> *Okay, so it would solely depend on the nature of the module. Obviously, each module has a different context. And so, I think engagement would depend on the module that you are lecturing in. I would say when students, especially with our*

TP model, are out in schools for a week and they're back on campus for the next week. So that model lends itself quite well to our methodology modules. So, it's almost like we get to do theory in class together, and then they go out, they practice what we've learned for a week, and then they come back they able to relay those experiences and reflect on how they were able to apply theory and whether it was it successful. I ask about what kinds of activities they were able to design? Was it meaningful in the classroom, what were the challenges? so they were able to draw on the practical experience of being in a classroom and then coming back into a lecture and then sharing that kind of information, be it in a discussion or a forum.

L6:

Well, there has to be an interest in the subject matter. I think that first of all is fundamental. I think I'm quite lucky that this ignites interest in the creative arts. People enjoy it, even if you think you can't draw, you can't sing or whatever. When you actually do it there's an element of enjoyment. I think that that's the first thing that really helps me in my subject that there are fun things to do.

L7:

Psychology, and even English literature. I think they tend to stimulate quite a lot of thinking. These encourage very real conversations and leads to students' holistic development, and things that are very real to students.

L8:

I'm taking a BKN module. This is basic knowledge for the foundation phase graduates. I think this one was more exciting for me because it was my first time using this method that I'm going to share with you. So BKN is divided into three, teaching disciplines: it involves social science, natural science, and technology. So, I was taking them through the different teaching approaches of teaching the grade three learners. I actually proposed that they should break out into groups. It was only on Friday that we had a tutorial based on revision of the lectures that are presented during the week.

The responses above indicate that the quality of facilitation of the modules plays a significant role in student engagement. Some modules lend themselves to practical activities that are

hands- on in nature which encourage active participation whilst others might focus on interesting topics like human behaviour that students find quite stimulating and engaging. It is also evident from lecturers' responses that modules which have an element of practical work motivate students to apply their knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Other modules may also be of interest to students and could ignite interest and excitement; for example, the creative arts which was mentioned by L6. From the above excerpts we can deduce that the quality of facilitation of a module determines whether or not students will actively participate in the lecture.

5.2.2.2 Sub-theme 6: humanising the content

Responses from the appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires revealed that when lecturers shared their understanding of student engagement and their enhancement of this phenomenon, humanising the content was a theme that came up. The responses were as follows:

> L2:
> *Structuring your programmes and activities in a way that they're not too loaded or cumbersome or difficult to engage with. Okay, so putting the activities and the material in a way that is nicely organised, spaced out, broken down, where students can complete them and make sense of them.*

> L7:
> *Okay, so I think there's a lot that can be discussed. But for me, personally, I think it comes down to humanising the content.*

> L7:
> *I would love to actually have students who are engaged with the materials and the textbooks, and that they feel comfortable to actually challenge some ideas in the textbook. They bring their textbooks to me for discussion, like a sort of academic book club where we discuss and explore ideas.*

> L8:
> *Breaking down these difficult to understand concepts into simpler language; when you express them in a manner that students will not find it difficult to understand.*

To accomplish this, I present information in the most interesting and basic way possible. I believe higher education teaching is about going beyond content mastery. It is a fact that all students, in order to become active members in the society, need to understand, not only the facts presented in the book and by lecturers, but the elements of the question that they need to ask based on what they learnt.

The findings revealed that subject content plays a significant role in enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. Breaking down information to more meaningful units and humanising the content are important skills that evoke students' interest. It is evident from the responses that when content is too loaded or cumbersome it becomes difficult for students to engage with it. It can be concluded from the findings that humanising the content is a factor that encourages active participation and enhances student engagement.

5.2.2.3 Sub-theme 7: creating interconnectedness

The responses from the appreciative interviews, the discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaire indicated that connecting with and knowing your student was a recurring theme that came up as a way of enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. For lecturers to connect with students they need to know elements of how students' function. The responses were as follows:

L1:

How open the lecturer or how approachable they are? I think that if students feel comfortable to ask questions, then they're more likely to engage. Learn about the world. Learn about your students. Show students your understanding of the world through examples that are fresh and interesting. Allow yourself to be 'wrong' and human.

L3:

To get connected. I'd like to use the word 'connected' when engaging with the student because you have some form of relationship with the student in order for them to give you feedback. Even when you ask a question, the type of response you get from the students is largely dependent on their relationship with you. How candid they can be, how friendly, will depend on your quality of relationship with

them. So, part of the feedback is collaboration and effort. I would like to say it's also dependent on the connection you attempt to develop with your students. I'm very big on relational learning, I'm very big on developing relationships with these students. So, in an ideal world, for me, teachers would spend a large amount of time building relationships with their students to really get to know them so that in a classroom or lecture room environment, you're comfortable enough to gain the confidence of your students so that they can be comfortable that you can be free with them. So also giving them an open space to learn without feeling inhibited about asking something too stupid, or something like that. So, I definitely think building relationships is very important. So in an ideal world, I think we'd have a nice structure where students and teachers or lecturers could come together in a common space, learn together, build together, work together. But I think that will be very hard to achieve initially because in South Africa, we have this very top-down situation where teachers and lecturers almost seem like gods and seem inhumane. They themselves feel they have to be very stern and strict with students. So, lots of those sorts of things occur and have to eventually fade away for this kind of balance to happen. If I send an email to a student saying you are doing well and I am very pleased and I am so proud of you, they send me an even longer email telling me how hard it has been for them and how happy they are to be here. And then after that a better relationship is developed, and the communication again starts to flourish. I found that during face-to-face lectures a friendly, warm disposition made learners more comfortable to interact with me. I think being approachable is also an important for better student engagement. If students feel that can speak to you and that you are approachable, then you will be able to engage/interact cordially with students. Sometimes the status that lectures carry and display can often be a stumbling block or a wall to student engagement and building relationships with students. Being status-conscious can also prevent students to want to develop sound relationships with lecturers. I think openness, approachability, and trust are so important for student engagement.

L4:

I think firstly, being aware as a lecturer of your students means knowing your students' profiles. You know, I've lectured across a number of modules across a number of year-groups and programmes. And you'd find that in certain

programmes, students are much more aware of the language barrier, they're much more aware of their lack of ability to converse proficiently in English. And I think this is one of the factors that actually determines whether or not you have a lot of active engagement in a classroom setting. The very same could be said for the online settings. Now, you'd find that a certain group of students show quite high levels of engagement like in my intermediate phase degree programmes. The students are always talkative, and they are happy to engage in debates. You know they're not afraid to share their opinions, even if it's quite contrary to what you're saying, so they're quite confident to express themselves freely. But it's not what I've seen in the higher certificate programmes. So, I think that's one of the major things that you as a lecturer needs to be aware of the different student dynamics. It's not just about what they know, also it's a lot about their confidence levels. They're quite aware, I've also lectured groups across programs, like the bridging group, for example. And you'd find even in these groups that sometimes students in the diploma programme or higher certificate programme will not be comfortable to speak when they know they are mixed in a group with degree programme students, but you'll find that they might be more comfortable to speak when they're just with their own programme group. I think just being aware of your students and who they are, where they come from, what do they bring to the lecture apart from just content knowledge and that kind of thing. And then I also think something that's quite important to consider is their knowledgebase, what level they are currently at, what was their understanding of your lecturing content. As a lecturer, you need to also think and be aware of what's the level of their prior knowledge, as we tend to assume that at tertiary level that they come with a certain level of knowledge. And that's the expectation, right? I think, in practice, what we found is that that's often not the case. So having students who don't engage, but not necessarily that they don't want to, could also mean that they don't know how to. They're also quiet, you know, intimidated sometimes. If it's an academic setting. They don't feel comfortable enough to hear someone else's comment that might be quite valid, as then realise that they aren't able to articulate their views that well, and then it becomes quite an intimidating kind of environment. That's just some of the things that come to mind for me.

L5:

I don't think that we know our students well enough. I don't think that we are very aware of the realities of many of the student's face. And I think that's one of the first things that we should be doing. I would think this is quite important. And I think that's one of the first things that we should be doing.

L7:

Being somebody who's open, and to position myself as the facilitator of learning, I'm not the authority, or an authoritarian in the front of the lecture hall, I'm somebody who's approachable. I'm somebody who's providing the space for them to engage. I also think that part of it is the preparation that needs to go in beforehand. So, a successful lecture is something where I'm engaging with them. So, I'm not just standing by reading through notes like a robot. I'm actually that human being who is there to say, this is a safe space to engage. And, like I say, I think humanising it actually connects them to you. I think I would perhaps try to have more lecture sessions to connect with them. So, I think that my ideal is to really connect with them on a more individual basis, and in a more real manner.

L6:

I'm also further and further and an age away from them. So, I think when I started this job, I was in my 20s. And I did have quite a good sense of what was important to students because I was at a similar space in my life. And now I'm just not in the same space at all, though, you know, having the physical disconnect, as well as the age disconnect means it's quite hard to know what is important to them without seeing them. So I think for me, seeing them to make some kind of connection so you can find out what's interesting to them, what's engaging, what's troubling them. I think all of these things are important for student engagement. I think the humanising element is also quite important. I certainly want to be a lecturer who sees my students for who they are. And I think that when students feel noticed they feel valued, so they're more likely to engage in your module. Also, the challenge of massification makes it difficult to tap into this element of engagement because if you're dealing with about 2000 students, as some lecturers are in this institution, and it's very difficult to build these connections and to have this humanising element for engagement. So I think you're the connection, the physical connection, the emotional connection. The relevance of the topics that you're doing are also

important, and must be interesting, I think those are the kinds of things that are going to ignite the lesson. But for me, engagement is such an important thing that you almost want to put off the content to allow these opportunities to happen in the classroom.

L3:
Well, certainly, some relationship-building is necessary to break down the barriers between lecturer and student.

L4:
Know who your students are. Get to know your students so we can adequately assist them.

The responses above indicate that connecting with one's students and knowing student dynamics enhances student engagement. One can conclude from the findings that the lecturers are emphasise relational learning and forming connections with students. Knowing your students and connecting with them will allow the lecturer to understand their backgrounds, language, and allow them to feel comfortable to develop a professional relationship with the lecturer. It can be deduced that there needs to be more effort to promote interconnectedness with students so that the student feels comfortable to engage and actively participate in the lectures. Moreover, the lecturer needs to be approachable and create a safe space for students to engage in productive activities in the educational spaces provided by the HEI.

5.2.2.4 Sub-theme 8: use of a variety of resources, activities, and applications

The appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and responses to open-ended questionnaire, revealed participants' understanding of student engagement and how it shapes the enhancement of student performance. Many of the participants referred to the use of a variety of resources, activities, applications, and interactive teaching aids. This was evident in the responses below:

L1:
I think, at the beginning of 2020, when I was teaching a hardware section of the ICT course, I had concrete examples with me; I had graphics cards and CPUs. All

the parts that are inside a computer as I'd taken a computer apart. I passed these parts onto the students to examine, and they passed them on to each other.

L2:

I think of introducing different varieties of activities in my modules. Somehow, it gives you the option of playing around with different types of activities, and some of them are quite interesting. So, students who are actively engaged will always want to participate and will always look forward to completing those activities; not doing the same thing every now and again. I also think the use of a weekly involvement tracker works well as students can engage consistently in weekly activities.

L2:

As we are practising a flexible hybrid approach to teaching and learning, students are exposed to various activities such as live sessions, recorded sessions, as well as MOODLE activities.

L3:

I use digital tools, and do something different, so I find my attendance is getting better. I also find my students' responses a lot better. I find myself getting emails from students saying thanks for sending me this tool. For example, I give them details of how to use a whiteboard. Since I have transitioned into a digital platform, I use many Apps to engage my students and to include them in the lecture. At times the Apps don't always function the way I intended, and my students often share their knowledge and expertise with me as many are very familiar with technology. I have also tried to steer away from that power-point approach as learners are often too passive; and that certainly is not the approach I want to use for my lectures. When I speak to students very casually, the lesson takes on a discussion flavour or the use of emojis in the chat function - that's how I think I am engaging my students. In the physical space during face-to-face lectures, it was much easier to engage with students as one physical presence automatically creates a connection between students and lectures.

L4:

Students engage with much theoretical aspects and may not know how to apply the information that is given to them. I plan practical sessions where students can engage by asking questions, role-playing, and observing the way I teach within a classroom. The students to whom I lecture need many visual examples to ensure that they are on the right path, within their own learning.

L6:

I do make use of some worksheets. So, I send out a worksheet beforehand, before the lecture, and they can download it and follow the directions in the worksheet.

L8:

I present information in the most compelling and interesting way possible through interactive teaching aids such as laptops, projectors, and smartboards, among others. Also, hands-on learning such as modelling, experiments, and theme tables are used during face-to-face lectures. Additionally, I provide opportunities to small groups to present their findings to the whole class. Moreover, I provide spaces for Q & A sessions, and chats where they raise their hands during online learning (zoom).

L3:

As a lecturer I may go out of my way to plan fun interactive lesson. I use the whiteboard (among others) to improve motivation and interest in my students. I would certainly 'wow' them with my tech-savvy skills, knowledge, and values.

The above responses indicate that a variety of resources, activities, applications, and interactive teaching aids encourage active participation and enhance student engagement. Participants referred to practical activities as well as the use of applications such as Zoom, whiteboard as well as hands-on activities such as experiments. It was also mentioned that some students need visual examples, so the use of visual resources also assists with enhancing student engagement. The use of interactive teaching aids such smartboards and laptops was also mentioned in L8's response. Also, L3 mentioned that her attendance at her lectures were improving after the use of certain applications. Introducing a variety of activities such as live sessions, recorded sessions, as well as Moodle-based activities encourages active participation and in turn enhances the quality of student engagement. One can conclude from the above findings that a

variety of activities, resources, applications, and interactive teaching aids encourage active participation and enhances student engagement.

5.2.2.5 Sub-theme 9: lecturer preparation

Lecturer preparation was one of the sub-themes that emerged from the data generation processes. The responses follow:

L2:

I think it's about preparation and pouring your heart into it. Make sure that you prepare your materials in a way that students don't find it difficult to engage with. Put in a lot of time in the preparation process.

L4:

My understanding shapes the way I enhance student engagement by guiding the way I structure, plan, and prepare my lessons or sessions.

L7:

So, a lot of it means that we as lecturers have to be well-read, we have to be engaged, we have to be prepared. It does tend to naturally come when we are prepared and engaged ourselves as facilitators.

L5:

So, I think maybe helping them and reminding them to be prepared, bring their laptops with, and bring a pen and paper so you can write down in your own handwriting. When you read your own handwriting, it'll go better for you. Also write down examples; don't just write down what I'm saying, you know - write down the examples. So maybe for them to be prepared and engaged with the materials prior to the lecture, is beneficial. So, when they come to the lecture, they're not playing, they have some type of information; and from this understanding, they can ask questions on content that they don't understand.

L5:

I think the most important part of enhancing student engagement is to ensure that you as the lecturer or mentor are indeed prepared. Planning and preparation are

very important is you want a positive outcome for your lesson or lecture with your students. If you know, what is it you want to achieve, by having a specific set of outcomes, you can then plan your session accordingly.

The above responses indicate that thorough preparation is crucial for enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. Whilst the majority of the above responses emphasised lecturer-preparation, one of the responses emphasised student-preparation. It can be deduced that both lecturer and student preparation are beneficial for enhancing student engagement.

5.2.2.6 Sub-theme 10: authenticating the learning experience

Emanating from the appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and responses from open-ended questionnaires, participants revealed how their understanding of student engagement shapes the enhancing of student performance. Participants were also asked to share their best or most positive student engagement experience and responses revealed that practical work that lends itself to the use of real-life examples enhance student engagement and encourage active participation. The responses included the following:

L3:

There's very few positive experiences in the lecturing world, however I have to say in 2019 I had a guest speaker. So actually, it wasn't me giving the lecture, but I had an expert (guest speaker) to come to the institution who spoke about, you know, special needs, because students had to go into a special need's environment. It was the first time I had invited somebody over because I'm not a special needs specialist. It's not my area of expertise. The information I had given was pretty superficial. But another colleague had suggested I try this avenue. So, I did, and I invited the guest speaker. It took a lot of preparation; firstly, because I had students not only based on the campus that I was at, but in other venues as well. So, it was difficult for me to coordinate that. So that was the first part. So, for me to actually get somebody to coordinate it to get my students there, you know, was difficult. But the best part about the lecture and the whole process was that my learners were engaged because there was somebody different talking to them, and it was a topic presented to them in such a way that they could really connect with it. I was happy because my students asked the guest speaker everything that they wanted to, and

when he left, my students were still wanting to ask more questions. I could only provide some answers. I began to share some of my experiences with learners who had experienced challenges. And my students just sat in, they listened. And I think what was important was the attempt to that I was sharing a real story, I was giving them the nitty-gritty by also revealing to them in my own way about how uncomfortable I felt initially about dealing with students with challenges. So, I think that was a very rewarding experience for me. I had extended my learners' thought processes, and some of them were quite excited to know more. It also gave me an opportunity to share with my students on a deeper level about what I had experienced when teaching learners with special needs. So, I would say that was really a highlight for me.[When prompted about what was significant about this experience]. *As a teacher educator, you need to recognise that you do not know every part of education. And you have to be able to identify that this is not your strong side. But I want my students to excel, so I should be able to give them more opportunities, and by inviting experts from the specialist fields, I think I am giving students a better footing in a particular topic or something that is ready to be better understood. I mean, we have people from the Guardia, also coming to talk to our students about how to handle situations in school like abuse and things like that. And again, our students really enjoyed this because it's an expert from the field, it's not just not the lecturer. So, I think that it does help being able to recognise the needs of your students.*

L5:

Students engage with much theoretical content and may not know how to implement the information that is taught to them. I plan practical sessions where students can engage by asking questions, role-play and viewing the way I would teach within a classroom. I think, I know that the theory is very important, but I think for students, they need to link the theory and the practical, so we need a lot of practical examples for them. So maybe, as a lecturer who abides by Covid-19 protocols, I could act out and record myself doing these things for the students to watch and understand. I also conduct lectures for the English module and there is an English literacy module that I teach. So, what we can do is maybe practise writing skills; we can also record ourselves delivering an essay-writing lesson on the board. So, I think giving them little tips like that gives them more real-life experience and knowledge

about how to deliver lessons in the classroom. I think that we need to just include more practical methods and provide them with as much visual support as we can.

L6:

As I said earlier, I think if you can tap into something that's current, relevant, interesting, and contentious then it will really assist with engagement. So, for example, whatever you teach, if you can bring in a current event that's maybe contentious or challenging, and kind of build a debate around that, or link that to your subject somehow, I think that that's always going to improve engagement. Another thing that might assist is when you're teaching something quite theoretical, link it to real-life examples. I kind of build engagement around real-life examples. I think that anything where students can relate to encourages or stimulates engagement. In a nutshell, I think enjoyment is critical to eliciting engagement in the lecture room. If it's relevant, concrete examples are what students can really engage with and talk about. If it's relevant, current, interesting, and engaging, I think that that's always going to help with creating a positive engaging educational environment.

L7:

I really enjoy seeing their intellectual growth and providing a space or a platform to have conversations that deal with very real issues in the world that students experience, and that they will experience as future teachers.

The above responses indicate that authentic learning experiences encourage active participation and enhances the quality of student engagement and academic performance. Lectures that are authentic and lend themselves to practical and hands-on experiences arouse interest in students as they relate to lectures that emphasise practical work; hence, this encouraged active participation.

5.2.2.7 Sub-theme 11: creating opportunities for critical-thinking

Data from appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and questionnaires elicited responses from participants who highlighted that creating opportunities for questions-answer sessions, debates, and discussions encouraged active participation while enhancing student engagement. It was revealed from the findings that participants planned sessions that

incorporate contentious, relevant, and current topics as an impetus for discussion and debate. This created opportunities for critical-thinking, problem-solving, and discourse analysis. The participants' responses were as follows:

L1:

I would have students giving lessons in front of each other as this encourages discussion and debate. Critical thought must be encouraged without fear of ridicule.

L4:

Unfortunately, we are no longer in a position where we have on-campus face-to-face discussions. When we did, engagement and active participation were reflected a lot through discussions during lecture time; now a lot of that has obviously moved to the online spaces. So, in terms of online learning I think it's forum discussions where they get to engage with each other.

L6:

The first thing would be to set up 'engagement points' within your classroom. A discussion point, for example, is where you can see very easily if students are engaging in the topic at hand. And one of my favourite things to do is to set quite contentious topics, topics that would challenge them so that they would have quite diverse viewpoints on something that hooks them. With the transition to online learning, the only real opportunity you have is to use the Q&A method and the chat box on zoom. So, I often pose questions directly to students. Now, I've had to learn that there's a time lag because it takes them much quicker to raise their hands than it is to type. So, what I try to do now is ask a question and say I'm going to talk about this while you're typing your answers. I talk about the test due date, which is not something they need to concentrate on; they just need to note the date and time. I think a useful thing is to give them a bit of time to type out those answers. I would often pose direct questions. I would ask questions like, can you explain a way in which you could integrate the words of the song into musical notes? Or, how could you integrate the elements of music into the song like pitch and tempo which are some of the building blocks of music? And then the main question would be, how could you introduce these into the foundation phase classroom? So, then students type away.

L7:

Well, it's quite interesting having 'zoom' lectures. So now we have a chat feature and a Q&A feature, and then we can post responses on YouTube. A lot of the times you see that they're engaged. Often, in these zoom lectures, we provide questions, and we encourage them to engage, and students often do in secular modules. So, it's quite interesting to see that because in other modules I believe that it's not a lecturer's duty to teach for a test, but to actually develop their critical-thinking skills to answer test questions.

L8:

In fact, in my lectures, when I do my presentations, I make sure that in the middle of my slide-presentation, I insert a slide that says 'question and answer time' way before the ending time, so that I engage with them. In case they might forget you ask questions. So, in the middle of my lecture, I stop lecturing and then engage the students on the week's content that was presented.

L1:

Getting students to think about the subject matter. Asking questions and offering practical examples and concrete objects.

L6:

I started to fill the role of the facilitator rather than a lecturer when they were posing each other questions. They were posing questions and saying, Oh, yes, but what about this? I think what you're aiming for is a lecture where you can actually stand back and watch the magic happen. You direct them sometimes and say, 'okay, this is a good point so let's talk about that a little bit'. You can direct this kind of wonderful engagement happening in front of you. And so that was a really great moment.

L8:

Providing space for Q&A, chats and raising hands during online learning (zoom). I give them questions to work on in groups. So, when they finished it, and came back onto the platform we needed one from each group as a scribe who takes notes

and reports back to the whole class. It was very exciting that they ended up being in a debate. I believe higher education is about going beyond the mastery of content. It is a fact that all students to become active members in the society need to understand, not only the facts presented in the book and lecturers, but the questions they need to ask based on the information they learnt. Therefore, considering this viewpoint, I work hard to create an environment which promotes critical-thinking and problem-solving. Engaging in discussions tell me that students are actively trying out skills during the session.

From the above findings it can be concluded that opportunities for critical-thinking encourage active participation and enhances student engagement. When contact lectures were still in place before Covid-19, lecturers would create opportunities for in-class group discussions and facilitations. Lectures became student-centred as mentioned by L6. With the transition to online platforms, lecturers are still creating opportunities for critical thinking via chats and Q&A sessions on zoom and YouTube. It is evident that opportunities for critical thinking through discussions is beneficial for enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation for both contact and online learning.

5.2.2.8 Sub-theme 12: providing quality feedback

Through the appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversation, and open-ended questionnaire, quality feedback was mentioned in the following responses:

L2:

It will be a lot easier for you to track and trace your students in the classroom. That plays a huge role you know, so when I walked into my class back in the day, when classes were smaller, I could call most of the students by their names. I can picture them, and I can guess what a student would do after a month of teaching the module. So, this made it a lot easier as I was able see the strengths and weaknesses of most of the students. Because I could give different activities, mark them, and provide feedback on a one-on-one basis, it was a lot easier for me to know the type of support I was going to give for each calibre of student. I also enjoy watching my students grow from people who come into the university system with absolutely no clue about what teaching is about, about what lesson planning is, about how to prepare a portfolio of evidence, how to articulate the mission and

vision as teachers, how to manage the classroom, and then growing into fully-fledged teachers.

L3:

For me personally, I find a lot of the student feedback that comes from things that I actually act on. For example, after a lecture if I'm talking about the online space, I will take screenshots of my student's names and I'd say 'thumbs up for all who attended', and put it in a little announcement section in the module page.

L8:

I love helping them to understand the content. At the end of the day, I'm helping them to help themselves by providing quality feedback so that they can grow, self-correct their errors, and develop. I think they also appreciate the feedback.

The above responses indicate that providing quality feedback to students is beneficial and appreciated. It is something that encourages participation and enhances student engagement. The findings in the above responses also indicate that feedback also assists lecturers to track and trace a students' academic development which helps them improve. It was also evident that when quality feedback is provided to the student, it motivates, accelerates improvement, and gives the student a sense of assurance in terms of their progress.

5.2.2.9 Sub-theme 13: facilitating smaller groups and tutorials

The appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and responses from questionnaires revealed that having smaller groups in lectures or tutorial sessions is something that assists with enhancing student engagement while encouraging active participation. Lecturers were asked to share their vision to enhance student engagement. The responses were:

L2:

If it was ideal, I would say keep the classes smaller, then you'll be able to know the students in your classroom. It will be a lot easier for us to increase student engagement. Some students are very smart, and you don't really need to monitor them too much. But sometimes students are weak and need more support. In a small class in a smaller classroom, you could pick up students that are struggling and know how to support them. Let me give you an instance, in the TP 701 module that

I was teaching, I received emails from about 25 to 30 students, saying can you please edit my work or can you please look at my draft and give me feedback on this aspect so that I can improve? Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do that because if word went out that I'm looking at drafts, I'm going to drown. But I would have been able to do that if I had a set of 30 students that I'm teaching which would have made more impact on them in terms of their understanding of things like lesson planning. My best student engagement experience was when they were struggling to write lesson plans, among other difficulties. So, we will sit down in the classroom and do the lesson planning. Then I would give them the opportunity to work in groups and design their own lesson plans. I would sit down with them in small groups of four or five and look at each group's lesson plan and point out what was wrong with it. So, they record this, redo them, and email it to me. I looked at them and realised that I was helping them to grow by grooming them. I constantly remember the times we spent together in much smaller groups of students; I think about 30 of them, so this was very possible but 50 and above becomes a lot more challenging. So, I think that was the most impactful set of students I've worked with and I have most of them still in my contact list, and I currently interact with most of them. I've seen most of them succeed and excel in their careers as teachers.

L5:

Okay, so if I had the opportunity, as I said, I would arrange contact classes. So, we're talking in a non-COVID world, there would be contact classes, and there would also be smaller classes.

L6:

I think that a perfect class size for some kind of engagement is around 25 or 30 students. I would, in a perfect world, make sure all my students have read whatever material they can to prepare for the class. Students are actively involved before class commences, because one of the best ways of engagement is if everybody is on the same page. Once they've all done what they intended to do, they can prepare for the class, so that your whole lecture period runs more like a tutorial session where everybody does the whole thing almost as an engagement. So, there's none of this lecturer domination at the front telling us what to do.

L7:

I think I would perhaps try to have more lecture sessions to connect with them more in tutorials, so maybe smaller group tutorials where I can really get to know them on a one-on-one basis, is actually where we share ideas. Obviously, this would be, like I said, ideal because we have a lot of students, and I wouldn't then be able to tutor all of them. But I think those kind of small group activities would be really great for me to engage with in a very real and very meaningful manner. So, we could still have online discussions for everybody in a full group, but with a smaller group.

L8:

Organising learners in small groups for effective discussions.

The above findings indicate that smaller groups or tutorial sessions are one of the factors that encourage active participation and enhances student engagement. The participants expressed in the above responses that having smaller groups can be beneficial as you are able to connect and identify students who are struggling and thus provide them with support. It is also evident that the size of the group affects the quality of the feedback. In large groups lecturers are not able to provide the support and feedback that they would like. The above responses also indicate that the lecturers are able to put a name and a face to each student which they felt would help to connect and engage students.

5.2.2.10 Sub-theme 14: creating a supportive learning environment

During the appreciative interviews and discursive informed conversation, it was evident that lecturers referred to a supportive environment frequently when they were asked to share what leads to positive student engagement. The responses were as follows:

L2:

So, I will say identify tutors; even if the modules are very big because of the nature of the programme. So, you have a lecturer like we do, and you can identify some people who will work as tutors within those modules like they are trying to do now. Train the tutors and let them come in right on time when the module has started and not at the end or halfway into the semester. This will allow you as a lecturer to train tutors. The tutors should be ready and up and running already. I don't know

if I'm making sense. So, from the beginning, as the module is being designed, as the assessment, you know, component has been designed, get the tutors involved, so that they understand the assessment, the objectives, the module, the outcomes, and everything expected of them. So, they're working with you as the lecturer from the word go.

L4:

It's impossible to expect people to succeed if we don't create an environment for them to do so. And I think it's become also quite difficult in the past year through the pandemic. Many of our students were really struggling. We have a responsibility, an ethical responsibility, to make sure that we provide them with the support that they need to get through the programme. I know we do run classes, maths classes, we do some English stuff in the Student Centre for Success and students sign at the beginning of the year that if they have not met the points.

L5:

I think just to reassure them that I'm there to support them, and actually provide them with some guidance. For example, we would say, this is week one, we need to read this, please read this, and if you read this, it's going to help you have a better understanding of what we're going to do in the next lecture.

L7:

We'd talk about student support a lot. We talk about student engagement a lot. But I think a much falls on the shoulders of specific lecturers, and everyone has their own way of supporting a student. Everyone has their own idea of what constitutes effective support. To some people, it might mean four o'clock is the end and I will not look at another email, and for other people who know an assignment is due the next day, you will literally be on your phone even when you're in bed and you hear something about an assignment query, and you feel the need to help the student because you remember what it was like when you were a student. So, I think the point that I'm trying to make is it has to be an institutional kind of thing. It needs to come from higher up. There needs to be one plan where you are reaching out to all the students, and you have the same people who are sitting to try and troubleshoot and find whatever problems and challenges the students are finding.

L8:

I create a culture that empowers them to be engaged and by this, I mean, I will maximise my feedback to students, or I can put them in groups to involve students in peer support, just to make it interactive.

This corroborates with the responses from the open-ended questionnaire. The responses include the following:

L3:

This is key to creating a safe supportive learning environment in which students are comfortable to engage.

L4:

A learning environment in which students feel that they can make meaningful contributions to the learning process and hence want to engage. Creating a safe yet challenging environment where critical thought is encouraged without fear of ridicule or saying what could be considered incorrect.

L5:

Referring to support, I would then collaborate with my colleagues to see what is the best way in which we can support our students to enhance student engagement. I lecture 2nd year modules and 4th year modules. There are lecturers who have the same subjects but in a different year-level. This could be 1st year or 3rd year modules. I find that it is best to converse with them and find out what my students are struggling with, so I could go over it with them and ensure they grasped the knowledge. The example I can provide here is that many students struggle to put together a lesson plan (especially a Foundation Phase Mathematics plan) as it has many areas to fill in. I can then reiterate what they have learnt within the 1st year by going through it step-by-step with them and providing many practical examples.

L6:

My ideal image for enhancing student engagement would be having the support and resources required in order to deliver and prepare my students in the best way I can.

L8:

A Supportive learning environment in which students feel that they can make meaningful contributions to the learning process and hence want to engage.

The above findings indicate that creating a supportive learning environment encourages active participation and enhances student engagement. Lecturers mentioned support with reference to resources, tutors, creating a space where students can make meaningful contributions and feel that they can engage in the learning process. Lecturers also referred to existing support such as extra Mathematics and English classes to assist students who are struggling. The above findings also indicated that support goes beyond the lecturer and has to be an institutional initiative where people in senior management are involved. Also, L5 mentioned her ideal image for student engagement would be having support and resources to perform her job effectively. Seeking support through collaborating with colleagues to strategise about different ways to support students, was also a salient point to enhance student engagement.

5.2.2.11 Sub-theme 15: encouraging work integrated learning and innovative models

During appreciative interviews and discursive informed conversations some of the participants mentioned Work Integrated Learning (WIL) as a way of enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. The responses included the following:

L3:

Students have to gain more experience in the profession which is important to understand concepts that they have learned in class. So, more teaching practice experience is necessary for engaging students which is something we provide.

L4:

Students are able to engage when they integrate what they have learned to the world of work. This should be integrated more into the programmes.

L8:

I'm working with teachers, and I was a teacher before. It's now the world that we are living in is quite different. I would love to introduce what we call innovative models of work, integrated learning, which respond to the changing nature of work. In the whole spectrum of education, you will agree with me that we need to enhance a student's chances of employability, they need to get employment after they've completed their degrees, and hence improve graduate outcomes. I will give you a scenario: presently in TP they do face-to-face observations, when they go for teaching practice. I would need to include or to expand students' horizons by engaging in the global work integrated learning opportunities. And by this, I mean, instead of having face-to-face observations, why not give them a platform to have teaching online placements, I know there are service providers out there.

This corroborates with the responses in the open-ended questionnaire. The responses included the following:

L5:

The ideas I have for enhancing student engagement are very practical and include giving students more opportunities to work integrated learning.

L8:

I would introduce innovative models of work integrated learning which respond to changing nature of work for two key reasons: to enhance students' employability and to improve graduate outcomes. Presently we have teaching practice where students engage in observations in schools. We need to improve or expand students' horizons by engaging in global Work-Integrated-Learning opportunities. For example, teaching-on-line placements through international service providers.

The above responses indicate that work integrated learning (WIL) and innovative models encourage active participation and enhances student engagement. It was mentioned that WIL engages students when they are able to integrate what they have learned in the world-of-work. The use of online placements tell us the world-of-work is constantly changing and we need to prepare students for global work. It was also mentioned that more experience with WIL assists students in understanding theoretical concepts as well.

5.2.2.12 Sub-theme 16: reviewing content and pedagogical practices

The responses from appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires pertained to enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. The responses follow:

L4:

I feel like we also need to as an institution have a good look at our programmes. I think we would find that many of our programmes and modular content overlap. We are teaching similar content in some of the modules. There's a lot of theory, and there's many aspects that are just being repeated. And I don't think it serves our students well at all.

L5:

We need to examine our content and the way we teach, and ask ourselves is this understandable, is it topical, is it current? Are students enjoying this? I think we should review what we do on a regular basis as opposed to just at the end of a semester.

The above two participants revealed that reviewing content and pedagogical practices assists with encouraging active participation and enhancing student engagement. Participant L4 mentioned that there is content repetition in some programmes. Also, lecturers should be questioning whether the content they are teaching are is current, topical, interesting and whether it will be useful to acquire a job.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Active Participation is Linked to Success and Fulfilment

Appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires were administered to explore why lecturers enhance student engagement at a higher education institution the way they do? In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the phases of AI were implemented in the data generation methods. At certain points the researcher prompted the participants to steer the conversation in the right direction. At this point there were spontaneous conversations that took place. Responses to the questionnaire were to triangulate the information from the narrative interviews and the discursive conversations.

5.2.3.1 Sub-theme 17: lecturer and student fulfilment

Emanating from the appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and responses from open-ended questionnaires lecturers at a higher education institution shared why they enhance student engagement in the way they do. Lecturers also shared the peak moments of their student engagement experiences, thus the theme of fulfilment emerged for both lecturers and students. The responses included the following:

L2:

I try to help them to think about their philosophy and their vision. Although their visions evolve with time as they encounter new experiences and challenges, I feel that I instilled something into them within that period. I worked with these learners and made a lasting impression, which they took from those sessions. It kind of informed the type of teachers they later became. So, they went out there and excelled as did very well in the modules. So, they were constantly looking forward to coming back. I hardly had people being upset when teaching modules and I never fought for students to submit their assignments on time. They were willing to follow due dates. These were not students who required chasing around. So, you could instantly feel that these ones are going to be successful.

L3:

I was also thrilled that something I had planned and did differently for the other two years of teaching this module, worked so well. So, in a way, trying new things and inviting experts from the field to boost things up can really improve student engagement.

L6:

This was not a recent experience but occurred about three years ago. I had taken a group of students to see the orchestral production. It was small group of students in the intermediate phase who chose the creative arts specialisation. We understood each other well before we even put the module together. I designed the modules, including all the creative arts modules. A few students enrolled in tertiary studies had very limited experience of the arts in their everyday life. So, most students have not been to an art gallery, or a theatre production, or to a musical show. So we built the modules around this idea that they would go to exhibitions and productions when they did visual arts, drama, and music. So, I gallantly, every

year, took them off to the orchestral production. For many students, the orchestra is quite unfamiliar, especially as we tend to facilitate it at the beginning of the semester. They lack music knowledge as they're kind of just starting with their musical studies. It's far easier to engage at an art gallery or at a theatre than it is to engage with the orchestral renditions, so I was a little bit nervous about taking them to the musical production. The lecture schedule often allowed us to attend orchestral renditions on a Thursday night, so often I would take them to the listen to the orchestra. And we had a rich, wonderful discussion about what they had experienced. I just remembered that it was such a positive experience for them, which I was a little bit nervous about as a lot hinged on which pieces are playing; classical music or light classical music. And this was just really a nice piece. And in the lecture on Friday morning, we were able to unpack exactly what the feelings were. The engagement was so deep and so interesting that the students were actually engaging with each other.

L7:

Generally, you don't get to gauge their understanding and connection to the material. And you never see who they are because they are distance learning students, but in this particular learning event, they were really engaged and really provided some thought-provoking comments. After the session, a lot of them contacted me, saying how much they enjoyed it, and that they've been reading on specific areas. And that was really wonderful, because it also provided quite a lot of positive feedback on various forums online. And I think that was really good, because the next time when we met attendance was much better. So it did seem like positive engagement which really impacted on the other students. As a lecturer, that really makes me feel fulfilled, because you know, that it's not just this one-way sort of lecture- centred session, it's really interactive and engaging.

L8:

The most exciting part was viewing their facial expressions. It was as though I could see the lightbulb go off, so I could see that they actually "got it" as they understood the whole point and purpose of the session. What made me to be excited about this experience was that students were debating issues that matter most regarding theory and practice. This engagement was their own doing and not

planned, which shows the peak of experiencing students' thirst to know, share and engage more beyond content mastery.

This corresponds to the following response in the open-ended questionnaire:

L5:

The best story or situation that I have had regarding student engagement was when I acted out how to teach a Foundation Phase Mathematics lesson on classifying 2D shapes and 3D objects. We started the lesson as we would in an actual classroom (pre-Covid-19) where a group of learners were seated on the classroom carpet. We counted and did some mental maths before going into the topic of the lesson. Once that was completed, I explained to learners that we would form one small group, and the rest of the learners would return to their seats. I would work on the topic with a small group of leaners who were seated on the carpet, and the learners at their desks would complete other work (on a work card or what was written on the board). We would then rotate groups once the small group on the carpet was finished. Before rotating, I would ensure that the group of learners understood the topic by providing them the opportunity of sorting and classifying 2D shapes and 3D objects into different baskets. This practical activity allowed me to observe who had grasped the concepts and who did not. I displayed a checklist to the "students" who were acting as the learners to show them that there were many ways in which to check and record if the knowledge taught to learners had indeed been grasped. One of the highlights was when students got actively involved and used real-life objects within the sorting task. They used Pringle containers as a cylinder, and a toothpaste box as a rectangular prism. They loved sorting objects that they found in their daily lives. The most exciting part was viewing their facial expressions. It was as though I could see the lightbulb go off, so I could see that they actually "got it".

It was evident from the above responses that lecturers enhance student engagement the way they do because it can be fulfilling for both the lecturer and the student when they have positive student engagement experiences. It is evident from the above responses that a positive student engagement experience is mutually beneficial to both the lecturer and the student.

5.2.3.2 Sub-theme 18: application and reflection of knowledge

The appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and responses from open-ended questionnaires revealed information from lecturers as to why they enhance student engagement the way they do. Participants mentioned that the methods they use enable students to apply knowledge they have learnt at lectures in a deep and meaningful way. The responses included:

> L3:
> *This stood out for me because it was evident that students saw the value of what they were being taught and of the lesson content we engaged with. There was also evidence of meaningful reflective practice on the part of students which is an important component of developing as a teacher.*
>
> L5:
> *I definitely think that when students are able to apply what you have taught them, they have engaged on a meaningful level. I see it when I go to assess them during their practicals especially when they are teaching Mathematics.*
>
> L7:
> *I see that they actually are learning, engaging, and reflecting in a very real and meaningful manner. It is something that I'm trying to incorporate into my modules. So, to really get them to not just regurgitate theory, but to really use this theory to socially reflect on the world as both students and teachers, is the essence of engagement.*

The findings arising from the above three participants' responses indicate that lecturers enhance student engagement at a higher education institution the way they do due to students being able to reflect on the lectures on a deep and meaningful level and then apply what they have learnt. Participant L5 mentioned that when students are able to apply knowledge practically, it is an indication that they have engaged on a meaningful level.

5.2.3.3 Sub-theme 19: value and interest

During the appreciative interviews and discursive informed conversation participants mentioned that they enhance student engagement the way they do because students become

engaged when they can identify value and interest in what they are doing. The responses included the following:

L3:

This stood out for me because it was evident that students saw the value of what they were being taught, and of the content we engaged with. There was also evidence of meaningful reflective practice on the part of students which is an important component of the developing as a teacher.

L4:

Knowing that students saw the value of the lesson and wanted to improve on their own practice.

L5:

When students are interested in what they are doing they are more likely to be engaged.

L8:

Students need to see the value in what they are learning, and this will deepen their engagement in lectures.

The responses from the above three participants indicated that if students find value and interest in what they are doing, they are more likely to become engaged in the lectures. This is supported by L4 who mentioned that what stood out for her concerning lectures was when students were able to see the value in what they were being taught.

5.2.3.4 Sub-theme 20: preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work

During appreciative interviews and discursive informed questionnaires lecturers stated that preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work informed some of the methods they use to enhance student engagement at a higher education institution. The responses included the following:

L2:

We need to prepare our students to meet global challenges as the landscapes of teaching and learning are changing. So, we need to work towards increasing their chances of employability so that they are ready for the world-of-work.

L5:

When I asked students why they have chosen to become teachers, most of them state they want to go work abroad. So, I think that we need to prepare them for the global world.

L8:

We must enable our students to prepare for the 21st century world-of-work. Just take that I'm training the foundation phase teachers; do they know how to teach a grade three class online? They've never done it, but we are sending them to schools to do teaching practice. I think it's the most critical engagement that our institutions can start to introduce to our students.

The above participants reveal that preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work is an important part of enhancing student engagement at higher education institutions. The participants indicated that we need to increase the students' chances of employability by preparing them effectively and efficiently for the global working conditions.

5.2.3.5 Sub-theme 21: positive student feedback

From evidence gathered during appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and the analysis of open-ended questionnaires, lecturers shared their reasons for applying certain methods concerning enhancing student engagement at a HEI. lecturers stated the methods that they used are informed by the positive feedback that they get from students. The following responses were included:

L2:

I've received some emails from students with positive feedback thanking me for the recordings for the unit. They found it consistent and very useful in terms of teacher professionalism in the virtual space. This person mentioned specific aspects of the recording which showed me that he didn't just skip through the content, but attentively listened to it, completed the involvement tracker that is required, and found it useful to him thus he reached out to me through emails. So, you could say that this person is active in the lecture and, of course, in the module by extension.

L3:

I find a lot of the student feedback comes from things that I actually implemented, and they would say "Thank you, we enjoyed the lecture". So, I found a lot of the time for me to get feedback, it had to be something that I had initiated. So, it was really my actions that elicited the feedback, because often students are very quiet. So, whenever I wanted feedback about something, I sent an email with an announcement. Or let me put this question up on the forum discussion. So, I think for me, if I wanted feedback, it was something that I actually had to actively think about doing to get responses.

L4:

For me, that's one of the highlights. We see it in those student feedback questionnaires that they fill in at the end of the semester, and to then read quite a number of students referring back to that particular lecture. And so, it confirms that you are not the only person that thought it was actually a success.

L5:

There is a questionnaire that is done at the end of the semester to check student engagement. This usually asks students what they enjoyed, found difficult, and ways that the lecturer or module co-ordinator can improve the delivery of the module content. If this is changed to be completed after each unit, the lecturer could then adjust the style of delivery to ensure that there is maximum engagement and student understanding of the content provided; instead of only going over the information once the module is complete, which is too late.

L7:

A few weeks ago in one of my introductory psychology lectures there was excellent engagement, and the chat was actually saved electronically. And by the end, there were well over 100 comments from students. I felt that was really successful because I could see that the students were engaging together. I could review the chat at a later stage. And also, what was interesting about this particular lecture was that I had my lecturing team with me, and they were facilitating the chat. So, they would bring to light interesting comments from students, and then we would

discuss it together. Another example which was quite interesting was one of my Saturday lecture sessions with the distance learning students. Generally, you don't get to gauge their understanding and connection to the material. And you never see who they are because they are distance learning students, but in this particular learning event, they were really engaged and really provided some really thought-provoking comments. And then afterwards many of them contacted me, saying how much they enjoyed it, and that they've been reading up around specific areas. That was really wonderful because it also provided quite a lot of positive feedback on various online sessions.

L8:

I request feedback from students about my presentation of materials and this assists me in my planning and preparation. When the feedback is positive, I am able to determine what works and what does not work. I use anonymous surveys to ensure I am meeting their needs.

The above findings corroborate with the responses in the questionnaire. The responses were:

L4:

It's the idea of starting somewhere, a simple questionnaire, of finding out what were the challenges overall. I know we do it in our module at the end of the semester. Everyone does it for their module, but even so, everyone's interpreting it in a different way. We are interpreting our module and feedback questionnaires in a different way. We're look at specific things; it's quite subjective. But I think as an institution, there needs to be one sort of instrument that goes out where we have a particular group of people that are looking for the same thing. So even if you put together a little research team and send out a short questionnaire, and then we sit together and say, well, these were the challenges that our students faced in this particular year. I don't think it would be that difficult to do. Honestly, I mean, a very short questionnaire, even if we don't have in-house people that have the time to analyse those kinds of things. We can very well outsource it to people who are able to analyse the data, who have the technical know-how to send things out and have our students answer anonymously. I think for me, it's just the idea of having

getting a start and wanting to know how we can do better. And right now, with everything that goes on, we forget that we actually need to improve on those kinds of things.

The above responses indicate that the methods that lecturers use to enhance student engagement or encourage active participation are informed by the positive feedback that they get from students. Some of the lecturers facilitate their own feedback; different platforms and forums are used for feedback. Some lecturers conduct anonymous surveys whilst others use forums to transition to online learning. Some of the lecturers also mentioned that they get email feedback from students whilst others mentioned feedback in chat boxes or Q&A functions in a Zoom lecture.

5.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the data, analysis, interpretation, and findings, which were structured from participants' verbatim responses guided by the research questions. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires were presented and interpreted. Theme 1 demonstrated that lecturers understand student engagement as an active process that involves active participation and intentional involvement. Theme 2 indicated that due to lecturers' understanding of student engagement as an active process, teaching methods centred on its enhancement. The methods that lecturers use to enhance student engagement encouraged active participation and intentional involvement. Theme 3 indicated that lecturers use methods that are fulfilling and bring about a sense of achievement in terms of quality engagement of students in academic activities. When students are effectively engaged it leads to academic success and achievement. The following chapter provides a discussion that incorporates a mixture of findings in relation to the literature review.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented, analysed, and interpreted the data generated by utilising appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires. The data presented was supported by direct responses and transcriptions. This chapter focused on the discussion of the findings based on the analysis of data elicited from the narrative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires. Literature is also integrated into the discussion of the findings. This discussion is presented in accordance with the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the analysis and interpretation of data. The contribution of this study to new knowledge is also outlined.

6.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The aim, objectives, and research questions which were tools to investigate the topic under study were aligned to the findings.

6.2.1 Student Engagement is Active Participation

This section discusses the findings on lecturers' understanding of student engagement. From the findings, it was evident that lecturers at a higher education institution understand student engagement as active participation (see 5.2.1). There were various sub-themes that emerged which align with the concept of active participation and affirm lecturers' understanding of student engagement at higher education institution as active participation which will be discussed in the sub-sections below

6.2.1.1 Active participation

The findings of the study revealed that lecturers understand student engagement as active participation where students are actively participating in the learning experience (see 5.2.1.1). In other words, they are asking questions and not just ticking a box to meet criteria but are intentionally participating. The words participation and involvement were used interchangeably. The findings were congruent with Angelle's (2018) study who emphasised the critical shift in student engagement from the conception of learning as passive absorption of information to the conception of learning as active participation. The majority of the

participants mentioned that students need to be actively involved or actively participating to be engaged. Participants further mentioned that in order to be actively involved students would need to ask questions and engage in discussions. Varga (2017) raised similar points declaring that student engagement highlights a student's attention and interest in academic activities, which are shown by participating in learning activities through independently working on class assignments, contributing to class discussions, working on learning tasks with peers, and a student's willingness and desire to participate in the learning process. One of the participants also mentioned that certain gestures like raising your hand to ask a question and making an effort to understand the lecture content aligns to active participation and involvement. This aligns itself to the behavioural dimension of student engagement.

From literature it was also evident that there are different dimensions and indicators of student engagement. Students demonstrate engagement behaviourally by regular attendance and participating in activities (Konold et al., 2018). Behavioural engagement is based on the idea of participation, involvement in academic, social, and extracurricular activities, and is considered crucial for achieving positive outcomes (Sahin, 2019). It is evident that active participation and involvement can be classified as a behavioural dimension for student engagement (see 3.2.1). The findings have confirmed that students who are actively participating and involved demonstrate engagement behaviourally through activities such as discussions and answering questions. Hence, Wang et al. (2016) define behavioural engagement in terms of asking and answering questions, participation, and persistence. This resonates with the study's findings as the participants described active participation as participation through discussion and asking and answering questions. Whilst the findings confirm that student engagement involves active participation, it also raises issues of how involvement and participation are measured in an online space given the transition of the higher education institution to online platforms.

6.2.1.2 Collaborative and co-constructive relationships

The findings revealed that student engagement is a collaborative relationship that involves the co-construction of knowledge (see 5.2.1.2). In other words, both the student and the lecturer are responsible for collaborative engagement to construct knowledge. The findings also indicated that student engagement is a bi-directional relationship between the student and the lecturer. Both the lecturer and the student co-construct knowledge together. The findings also

reveal that engagement means challenging the lecturer or critically dissecting the content. One of the participants also mentioned that there is sense of mutual fulfilment that comes from this bi-directional relationship where students challenge as well as work together with the lecturer on content and how it is understood. The findings are consistent with Zepke (2014) who emphasises that emotional engagement is about reactions to and relationships with teachers, classmates and administrators who encourage a love of learning (see 3.2.2). This is also congruent with Summers and Miller (2012) who mention that emotional engagement from their perspective has more to do with the pleasant and unpleasant emotions students remember concerning their relationships with teachers, peers, and the school rather than the feelings they have during learning activities. One of the participants mentioned that student engagement is not a one-way uni-directional flow of knowledge from the lecturer to the student, but where the flow is much more two-directional where students are giving back to you and you're responding, and that is what makes the job exciting and mutually beneficial. After examining literature, it is evident that both the student and the lecturer have significant roles to play in student engagement.

6.2.1.3 Interaction

The findings of the study revealed that lecturers at HEIs understand student engagement as interaction (see 5.2.1.3). Most of the participants indicated that student engagement involved interaction between the lecturer and student. The findings concur with Schut et al. (2020) who state that teaching occurs through human interaction, and therefore the characteristics of teachers' interaction and relationships with learners can make a substantial difference to the quality of the learning environment they operate in. Furthermore, Pianta (2016) identifies high-level teacher-student interactions as a key asset for improving student engagement and development. Yildiz's (2015) findings affirm that in inclusive classrooms, teachers' interaction with students can be seen as an important factor of supporting students' behavioural, social, and emotional engagement. One of the participants mentioned that interaction with the content by breaking down complex concepts into smaller simple units and expressing them in a manner that is not difficult to understand, is key to teacher-student engagement. Madland and Richards (2016) agree that content has become an important part of engaging students; and student-content interaction is the primary reason why formal educational systems exist. Considering this, it can be concluded that active participation can be seen through interaction. Hence, interaction is an indicator of student engagement and active participation. Students need to interact with the lecturer to demonstrate interest and understanding of the content of the

module. This could be through challenging the content knowledge or asking questions. Whilst the findings alluded to lecturer-student interaction, student-student interaction and student-content interaction are equally important.

6.2.1.4 Metacognition

The findings on lecturers' understanding of student engagement also revealed student engagement as metacognition (see 5.2.1.4). Whilst cognitive skills may include thinking, reading, and remembering (among others), metacognition includes the ability to regulate one's own learning through challenging and asking questions (see 2.3.2). Most of the participants mentioned that student engagement includes questioning, providing feedback, thinking, and challenging lecturers about the content of modules that they facilitate. In support, one of the participants mentioned that they expect students to become self-directed learners who engage their natural curiosity about the material presented and taking that curiosity to the next level by challenging content as well as asking questions and engaging in meaningful discussion.

Moreover, providing real-life examples and applying theoretical knowledge to practice demonstrates that students are also engaged. This ensures that critical-thinking during the lecture occurs. Cognitive mainly refers to memory, thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, planning, and speed-processing which are broadly described as aspects of human intelligence (Anstey, 2016). This understanding of student engagement can be classified as the cognitive dimension. Casimiro (2016) concurs that cognitive engagement describes ways in which students think, how they make meaning of the material presented to them, and how they use self-regulating and metacognitive strategies to master academic content. Furthermore, a tangible outcome of cognitively engaged students would be to understand the learning objectives (Pickering, 2017).

The findings are also congruent to a study by Redmond et al. (2018) who affirm that cognitive engagement is identified as an active process that highlights the most fundamental form of engagement. Schindler's (2017) study affirmed that cognitive engagement is the degree to which students invest in learning, and the mental effort that they make to master or learn the prescribed content. In terms of cognitive indicators, this could include motivation to learn and the ability to overcome challenges, critical-thinking, and self-regulated learning. The use of metacognitive processing of knowledge requires reflection on one's own learning process, and

thus critical-thinking processes assists self-regulated learners to structure their own learning (Gaup, Fabry, & Korner, 2018).

It is evident that the findings of this study are in line with the reviewed literature concerning student engagement. The findings established that lecturers at a higher education institution understand student engagement as active participation and involvement, and as bi-directional relation that involves collaboration and co-construction of knowledge, interaction, and metacognition. The ability to regulate one's own learning demonstrates motivation and autonomy; hence students need to develop metacognitive skills as these are beneficial for enhancing engagement and active participation.

6.2.2 Encouraging Active Participation

The findings revealed that lecturers' understanding of student engagement shapes their enhancement of student engagement through ways that encourage active participation. Lecturers' understanding of student engagement indicate that it is an active process that encourages active involvement, interaction, collaboration, and metacognition. Each of the sub-sections below reveals how lecturers enhance student engagement through ways that encourage active participation (see 5.2.2).

6.2.2.1 Facilitation of the module

The findings revealed that the nature of the modules plays a critical role in student engagement and encourages active participation (see 5.2.2.1). Some modules lend themselves to practical activities that are hands-on in nature which encourage active participation whilst others might focus on interesting topics that include human behaviour that students find quite stimulating and engaging. It was evident from lecturers' responses that modules which have an element of practicality allow students to apply their knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Some of the modules which could ignite excitement include the creative arts. Many of the participants stated that engagement depends on the nature of the module, and that whether students have an interest in the subject matter or not. Some lecturers mentioned that their methodology modules are found to be engaging as students are able to apply what they learnt in theory to practice. Modules such as Psychology and English are quite focused on human behaviour, hence they tend to stimulate a lot of thinking to lend itself to having real conversations that sparks engagement in lectures. As a researcher, I did not come across literature that explains the facilitation of a module as a contributing factor to student

engagement, or as a way to encourage active participation: however, literature does discuss the contributing factors of student engagement such as flipped classrooms, blended learning and online learning (see 2.61; 2.6.2 and 2.6.3) which are ways in which modules are facilitated to enhance student engagement and encourage active participation.

6.2.2.2 Humanising content

The findings revealed that humanising the content of modules (see 5.2.2.2) was a sub-theme that arose when lecturers were asked to share how their understanding of student engagement shapes their enhancement of student engagement. The findings revealed that the content plays a significant role in enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. Breaking down information to more relatable units and humanising the content were suggested to stimulate student engagement in lessons. Many of the participants indicated that content should not be intimidating and abstract to students but must be presented in a simple understandable form. As such, the content should be well organised and spaced out so students could make-sense of the content which should not be loaded and cumbersome that it becomes difficult to understand.

The above findings are supported by previous research on how understanding content materials contributes to student engagement. Madland and Richards (2016) affirm that content has become an important part of engaging students since student-content interaction is a primary reason for formal educational systems existing. It has also been confirmed that when students interact with the learning content it affords them the space to reflect and develop their own understanding of what they have read (Krudysz & McClellan, 2017). Multimedia tools such as video-file, picture file, social media, two- or three-dimensional models, and text files related to course content are considered as important factors for student engagement (Alhih, Ossiannilsson & Berigel, 2017). When content is provided to students, we need to consider it as taking them on a journey where they are able to easily navigate and make reference to details; it needs to be relevant to real-life situations, and less intimidating.

6.2.2.3 Creating interconnectedness

The findings also revealed that connecting with your students and knowing who your student is, is a contributing factor to enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. The findings indicated that the lecturers who are big on relational learning form better professional connections with students. Understanding their backgrounds, language, and

diversity allow them to feel comfortable to develop a bond with the lecturer to engage and actively participate in lectures. The lecturer needs to be approachable and create a safe space for students to engage in order to exploit the true potential of students – we must break down the barrier between the lecturer and student to promote trusting, cordial, and engaging professional relationships on an individual or group level.

According to literature, a professional connection with students and knowing student-dynamics can be classified as emotional or affective engagement (see 2.3.1). Based on Conner's (2016) work, emotional engagement describes the connection or disconnection that students experience over learning or any other activity. Students who are emotionally engaged are more likely to be successful academically (Beale, 2018). Significantly, Zepke (2014) defines emotional engagement as the relationship between students, teachers, and administrators that fosters love of learning which engenders positive outcomes. Creating a bond of interconnectedness allows students to feel secure, comfortable, a sense of belonging, motivated to perform at higher levels, and safe to engage or participate in lectures.

6.2.2.4 Use of a variety of resources, activities, and applications

The findings found that using a variety of resources, applications and interactive teaching aids enhances student engagement and encourages active participation (see 5.2.2.4). Participants referred to practical activities as well as the use of applications such as Zoom, Whiteboard, Moodle, Padlet and hands-on activities (such as experiments) that boost student interest and involvement in academic work. Some students need visual stimulation to understand materials, so visual resources must be available and used skilfully to enhance student engagement. The use of interactive teaching aids such smartboards and laptops also enhance student performance while having a variety of live sessions, recorded sessions, as well as Moodle-based activities encourages active participation and in turn enhances student engagement. It was also evident since the introduction of Covid-19 protocols that the transition to online learning technological tools, activities and resources have become a big part of enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation. The use of worksheets where students have access to them prior to the lecture via downloading processes allows them to be armed with information to bring into the virtual lecture-space. Also, planning fun and interactive activities will spark interest and increase motivation.

The findings align with Shenoy, Mahendra and Vijay's (2020) contention that the traditional lecture style has been criticised for not engaging students; the emphasis is now placed on more contemporary pedagogical practices like online learning, groupwork, peer feedback, blended learning, and flipped learning. Taylor and Statler (2014) agree that various innovative methods and approaches are being used by educators to encourage student participation through the use of digital technologies and social media. According to Kim and Whang (2013), interactive multimedia content has displaced chalk, blackboards, and papers in teaching in the current tertiary education environment. Zee (2019) mentions that online learning, web-based learning, distance learning, e-learning and computer-based learning are terms that are used interchangeably – all are intended to increase student engagement. Ko and Rossen (2017) affirm that online learning allows students the freedom to use the internet to search for resources, classes and instructors that fit their needs. Moreover, students can read articles, books, listen to lectures, and submit assignments online. This is a convenient, flexible and a personalised approach to teaching and learning. Providing students with variety and flexibility fosters a more personal learning experience which can contribute to enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation which was evident in the participants' responses.

Usman (2016) elaborates that electronic sources include fundamental materials to make teaching-learning simple, meaningful, and comprehensible for students. According to Castañeda and Selwyn, (2018), there are various benefits in the use of online tools and resources: reliability, authoritativeness of data, authenticity of materials, opportunities for the achievement of multidimensional objectives, and increased motivation. Technological resources and online tools are certainly proving to be key drivers for 'recasting' higher education (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018). It was highlighted in the literature review that the landscapes of education are changing, and we continuously need to find ways of enhancing student engagement, hence it is beneficial to explore a variety of creative activities and resources in the planning and preparation of lecturers to increase student engagement.

6.2.2.5 Lecturer preparation

The findings revealed that lecturer preparation is important for enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation (see 5.2.2.5). Whilst the majority of the participants' responses emphasised the importance of lecturer preparation, one of the responses emphasised

student preparation. Many of the participants indicated that dedicating time to lecture-preparation is a significant part of enhancing student engagement. Emphasis was placed on the way lectures are planned, structured, and delivered to stimulate interest. In addition, lecturers have to be well-read and thoroughly prepared in order to engage students.

The findings are congruent to Gaikhorst et al. (2020) who affirm that adequate preparation and support can help lecturers deal with the challenges of teaching and learning. Martin (2019) adds that desirable attributes for a lecturer were thorough preparation, responsibility, meeting tutorial schedules, punctuality, and timeous feedback. Student satisfaction surveys must consider and include significant aspects of lecturer preparation, and these include organisation and planning (Carvajal, 2016). Generally, students mentioned that the lecturers should prepare an interesting course syllabus in advance, design creative instructional materials, and be punctual (Suparman et al., 2019). Whilst the findings pre-dominantly focused on lecturer preparation, student preparation is equally important. Student engagement is a collaborative relationship, hence both students and lecturers need to be equally and adequately prepared prior to a lecture in order to actively participate.

6.2.2.6 Authenticating the learning experience

The findings revealed that practical sessions that use real-life examples enhance student engagement and encourage active participation (see 5.2.2.6). The use of role-play as a practical activity where students enact lessons on specific topics being taught in the classroom, is a method that creates excitement to engage in the module. Linking theoretical aspects to authentic practical examples experienced in the outside world, was meaningful to students who saw this relevance as opportunities to debate about contentious issues in society.

Additionally, as a teaching approach, the flipped classroom was proposed as an effective way to enhance student learning since much of the information will be removed from the classroom and replaced with active learning methods that enable assimilation of the information (Seery, 2015). Flipped classroom is a constructivist approach in which students construct their own knowledge and become active participants in the teaching and learning process (Ozdamli & Asiksoy, 2016). Unlike traditional classrooms, flipped classrooms are student-focused and emphasise student learning, thus placing greater responsibility on students than on teachers, while encouraging them to take risks (Danker, 2015).

Tolie and Kallery (2021) examined aspects such as service learning (see 2.8.2) which is part and parcel of HEI programmes throughout the world. Participants in service-learning engage in structured learning opportunities that have been designed to meet an authentic community need. In my view this is an effective way of authenticating the learning experience. I am also convinced that lecturers also need to examine content and ask themselves the question on whether the content of lessons being taught are authentic, relevant, topical and do they lend themselves to real-life experiences that students can utilise in the world-of-work.

6.2.2.7 Creating opportunities for critical thinking

The findings revealed that opportunities for questions and discussions in learning spaces encourage active participation and enhances student engagement. During pre-Covid-19 there were opportunities for in-class group discussions which made lectures to become student-centred. With the transition to online lectures, adaptations were initiated in creating opportunities for discussions through the use of the chat application and Q&A feature on zoom and YouTube. Such opportunities for discussions and questions are beneficial for enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation for both contact and online learning. The art of questioning and answering, in-depth discussions, and critical-thinking processes must be encouraged such that students develop intellectually by engaging in this way. As such, online forums encourage discussions and questions which enhance critical-thinking and problem-solving processes especially when engaging in contentious topics which can generally be challenging for students. Additionally, the Q&A time is a space for analytical or reflective thinking that can be facilitated through slides during online lectures.

These findings are consistent with those of Khan et al. (2017) who note that literature supports the notion that discussions encourage student engagement and critical thinking. Also, discussions via online classrooms can incorporate active learning or participation through various options such as chatrooms (Khan et al., 2017). To ensure high-quality discussions in online classes, the environment should be conducive as that of a face-to-face classroom. It was also noted that the purpose of debates was not only for students to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, but also for them to share that knowledge with others. Accordingly, it is beneficial to identify a variety of topics that arouses the spirit to debate - students can pick a topic from the many suggested ones on areas they would like to debate on, especially on argumentative topical issues which demand an element of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills which belong to the higher-order cognition quadrant (Khan et al., 2017). Hence,

it will be advantageous for lecturers to create opportunities or spaces for activities that precipitate higher-order thinking skills to enhance quality engagement.

6.2.2.8 Providing quality feedback

The component of quality and timeous feedback in education and from the lecturer was a contributing factor to encouraging active participation and enhancing student engagement (see 5.2.2.8). When lecturers provide effective feedback, it is appreciated by students who are then encouraged to actively participate in lectures which enhances student engagement. Feedback also assists lecturers to track and trace students' development and help them improve. One of the participants mentioned that one feedback technique she gives students is providing a screenshot of the names of students who attended the lecture, among other aspects of the lecture. There is a growing consensus that to be effective facilitators, feedback must be embedded in the system of lecturing; this is linked to student engagement (Winstone et al., 2017). A study conducted by Cotton (2021) further reinforces the importance of providing students with feedback so that they know how to correct mistakes or fill in gaps to improve their understanding. Cotton (2021) adds that students with learning difficulties require support, encouragement, and attention to achieve success; feedback enables the achievement of goals. Hence, lecturers need to examine the quality of feedback they provide to students; even with large numbers, groups with similar challenges can be facilitated to remediate their misconceptions.

6.2.2.9 Facilitation of smaller groups and tutorials

Lecturers were asked to share their vision for enhancing student engagement or what do they think leads to positive student engagement. It was revealed that smaller groups or tutorial sessions encourage active participation and enhances student engagement (see 5.2.2.9). Having smaller groups can be beneficial as you are able to connect with, identify, and support students who are struggling with academic work. It is also evident from the responses that the size of the group affects the quality of the feedback. In a large group, lecturers are not able to provide meaningful support and effective feedback. Enhancing engagement in smaller groups leads to effective and higher student performance. Tutorial sessions also give students more individualised attention where specific student academic challenges can be addressed and remediated.

Additionally, the groupwork approach gives students an opportunity to collaborate and share ideas. In order to be successful in the 21st century, students need to engage in a variety of ways to learn, and collaborative learning or groupwork has been identified as a key strategy for deep learning (Palmer, Peters, & Streetman, 2017). It is evident that whilst literature makes reference to groupwork, there is no specific reference to the size of the groups including tutorial groups. In the study undertaken by Forslund and Chiriac (2018), groupwork was found to be one of the most commonly used and intensively studied teaching and learning methods. The ability to work in groups can be beneficial as group members have different backgrounds, experience, and abilities that one can learn from. Kwon (2014) notes that groupwork is consistent with the sociocultural approach which views learning as a social process in which learners interact in a social context. It has been found that the learning effects of groupwork escalate when students are given well-structured groupwork tasks and/or when they have been taught groupwork strategies (Forslund & Chiriac, 2018). Learning in groups can lead to shared learning objectives which has been shown to improve student performance, persistence, attitudes, and gaining a better understanding of themselves (Wilson, Brickman, & Brame, 2018). literature highlights the benefits of groupwork concerning enhancing student engagement, and the study's findings show that students can get a greater sense of engagement with content materials through groupwork by asking better quality questions and offering meaningful explanations. (Backer et al., 2018). Jackson et al. (2014) adds that groupwork requires the establishment of an environment of support and trust in order for learning and achievement to be enhanced. It is my belief that creating smaller groups and introducing regular tutorial sessions will allow lecturers to connect with students and engage on a deeper meaningful level as opposed to lecturing to large groups where lecturers are unable to put a name to a face.

6.2.2.10 Creating a supportive learning environment

Lecturers referred to a supportive environment frequently when they were asked to share what leads to positive student engagement and how does their understanding shape their enhancement of student engagement (see 5.2.2.10). A supportive learning environment encourages active participation and enhances student engagement through support such as utilisation of resources, better tutoring skills, and creating a space or environment where students can make meaningful contributions while engaging in the learning process. Support such as extra Mathematics and English classes to assist students who are struggling was implemented; this fostered a better quality of engagement. However, support goes beyond the lecturer - there has to be an institutional initiative where senior management are involved in a

committed manner to uplift the quality student engagement, largely by providing the relevant resources and learning spaces. Collegial support to strategise about different creative and innovative ways to enhance students' performance was also deemed as significant to enhance student engagement. Dary et al. (2016) affirm that students in a supportive community find themselves within an environment that encourages and offers them resources to overcome hurdles. Literature makes reference to institutional, peer, and family support which do not directly align to the findings in this study which specifically emphasise institutional and lecturer support. Intuitional support includes a whole host of aspects that entail resources, counselling facilities, libraries, administrative assistance, and technical support (Myatt et al., 2018). Researchers found that institutional support structures can support student engagement in terms of achieving success, as they provide access to information and advice, connections to university services, high-quality courses, and programmes, as well as quality instruction and guidance. (Pather et al., 2017).

However, there was no reference to peer support which was surprising. Research conducted by Ryder et al. (2017) showed that peer support can aid students in adjusting to higher education, especially first-year students' transition. According to Peiffer, Flaig and Schneider (2020), peer support enables students to go from being examiners to being examinees, and this teaching method leads to a self-directed and active learning process that includes social interaction and reciprocal teaching. One way in which many higher education institutions have attempted to address the need for curriculum integration of student learning development has been to introduce peer support (Copeman & Keightley, 2014).

Another aspect was family support (see 2.10.3). Research reveals that family emotional support promotes psychological wellbeing and facilitates greater student engagement in higher education which is essential to boost academic performance (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Successful students almost always cite the support they receive from partners and family as a major factor in their success (Williams & Emerson, 2019). Engagement is significantly influenced by the support of parents who have high academic expectations placed on their children; therefore, the family, peers, and the institution have been identified as the three key contexts of support bases (Fernández et al., 2016). The academic self-efficacy beliefs and engagement levels of students from families with balanced support were significantly higher than those from families with low interaction levels (Stubbs & Maynard, 2017). As reported by Gutiérrez et al. (2017), there is strong evidence that students' engagement, academic success,

and overall satisfaction are influenced by the support they receive from their families, peers, and teachers.

Additionally, Young, Williamson and Egan (2016) affirm that students value psychologically safe environments which are conducive to learning. The research found that students can perform better in a learning environment that promotes inclusion, caring, and supportive interpersonal relationships (Idsoe, 2016). It is imperative that emphasis be laid on developing supportive and conducive learning environments that promote the professional development of students (Tharani, Husain, & Warwick, 2017). Whilst the findings demonstrated that institutional and lecturer support is beneficial for encouraging active participation and enhancing student engagement, in my view, peer support and family support are just as important (see 2.10.3; 2.10.4).

6.2.2.11 Encouraging work-integrated-learning (WIL) and innovative models

The findings revealed that Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a way of enhancing student engagement and encouraging active participation (see 5.2.2.11). The majority of the participants mentioned that WIL engages students when they are able to integrate what they have learned to the world-of-work. Online placements in the world-of-work is constantly changing and we need to prepare students for global relevance. The use of international service providers could be explored through online placements. Also, to increase employability, WIL assists students with understanding concepts to apply them practically in the world-of-work.

Service-learning is a pedagogy that is being used in higher education programmes all over the world. It connects theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom with practical experience gained in the community, therefore this is especially relevant in subjects where academics seek to expand and transform the students' knowledge and understanding of diversity. Additionally, the findings correspond with Bandy's (2016) statement that service-learning enhances academic learning, the ability to apply learning in a real-life situation, and one's understanding of ambiguity and complexity. It is a popular pedagogy in undergraduate education, partly because students learn and retain information better when they are able to apply it practically (Lowrey, 2020). In my view this is something that the higher education institutions need to consider through looking at innovative models that will allow students to get online placements and exposure to international classrooms. Strategic innovation is necessary to implement this idea.

6.2.2.12 Reviewing content and pedagogical practices

Reviewing content and pedagogical practices assists in encouraging active participation and enhancing student engagement (see 5.2.2.12). However, due to similarities in content and repetition across some modules we should examine content more regularly. Lecturers should be questioning whether the content they are teaching is current, topical, and whether students are enjoying it. It is evident that content is a significant part of student engagement, hence content needs to be reviewed to ensure it is understandable, current, and relatable. According to Khan et al. (2017), for students to be active participants in learning processes, they must be comfortable with the content to be able to dissect it into meaningful units.

Pedagogy is an important part of enhancing student engagement. Shenoy, Mahendra and Vijay (2020) state that the traditional lecture style has been criticised for not engaging students, and emphasis should be placed on more contemporary pedagogical practices like online learning, groupwork, peer feedback, and blended or 'flipped' learning. In recent years, online education has witnessed a phenomenal growth, making it available to learners who previously did not have access to education because of their location and financial situation (Ramesh et al., 2014). The pedagogy of blended learning is said to improve student engagement and achievement (Castro, 2017). Mozelius and Rydell (2017) report that technology enhanced didactics and pedagogical variety as well as providing a convenient access to knowledge – these reasons motivate higher education institutions to invest in blended learning.

In a flipped-classroom approach, Limniou, Schermbrucker and Lyons (2018) identified three elements that are part of the process: the teachers' contribution to the students' learning, the lesson plans designed by their instructors, and the learning materials made available to them by their instructors. Flipped classroom students also exhibit higher confidence in their abilities and understanding of the course material than their traditional lecture counterparts, attributing their improved understanding primarily to in-class activities, which are possible because flipped classrooms promote an experiential, active-learning environment without compromising content (Heuett, 2017). The changing landscapes of education require reviewing content and pedagogy to ensure that higher education institutions are making their teaching and learning current, learner-centred, and relevant.

6.2.3 Active participation is linked to success and fulfilment

Moreover, lecturers enhance student engagement according to their unique manner of teaching because it is fulfilling and leads to success in HEIs (see 5.2.3). The following sub-themes associated with why lecturers enhance student engagement the way do are: lecturer and student fulfilment, application of knowledge and reflection, value, preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work, and positive feedback from students.

6.2.3.1 Lecturer and student fulfilment

Lecturers at a higher education institution were asked to share why they enhance student engagement the way they do. Lecturers also shared the peak moments of their student engagement experiences. When students are gainfully engaged, lecturers feel fulfilled, and it is fulfilling for students as well when they are engaged (see 5.2.3.1). Such students later became the type of teachers that lecturers hoped for. It was evident from the findings that the feeling of fulfilment is mutually beneficial to lecturers and students who also gain from positive engagement experiences.

Wahyudi (2018) declares that job-satisfaction is an important factor impacting on the performance of lecturers - satisfied lecturers display feelings of joy and enthusiasm when students are gainfully engaged in learning activities. Literature deals with job-satisfaction extensively; however, none alluded to student engagement being directly linked to lecturer fulfilment. Also, students also appreciate and feel fulfilled when they are positively engaged. Pelletier et al. (2017) found that there is a significant relationship between student engagement and student satisfaction.

6.2.3.2 Application and reflection of knowledge

Methods used in lecturing enable students to apply knowledge they have learnt, in addition to reflecting on lectures in a deep and meaningful way (see 5.2.3.2). The majority of the participants mentioned that when students are able to apply knowledge practically it is an indication that they have engaged on a meaningful level, thus increasing the quality of student engagement.

According to Schindler (2017), application of knowledge can be classified as cognitive engagement. Bond and Bendlier (2019) affirm that students demonstrate the construct of cognitive engagement when they are able to demonstrate application of skills and reflect on

knowledge in a meaningful way. The ability to reflect on the learning process is not only essential to self-regulated learning but is also fundamental for successful experiential learning (Gaup, Fabry, & Korner, 2018). Gaup, Fabry and Korner (2018) affirm that in order for learning goals to be met and for students to be engaged, they need to demonstrate reflective and critical thinking.

6.2.3.3 Value and interest

Participants enhance student engagement the way they do because students are engaged when they find value and interest in what they are taught (see 5.2.3.3). Three participants indicated that if students find value and interest in what they are doing then they are more likely to become engaged in the lectures. Murayama, FitzGibbon and Sakaki (2019) affirm that interest is central to intellectual behaviour and therefore evoking interest in lectures has been repeatedly emphasised in literature. Goni and Muntuuntu, (2021) state that there is correlation between student interest and student achievement. Tolie and Kallary (2021) cite the importance of interest and value in stimulating motivation and ensuring engagement in content. As such, it is a powerful force for igniting and promoting learning, and it is considered essential for academic success (Tolie & Kallery, 2021). Gutica (2021) declares that who participated in his study experienced a high level of enjoyment, increased interest, and perceived positive learning gains. In sum, if students find value and interest in what they are learning, it most likely will enhance student engagement and encourage active participation.

6.2.3.4 Preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work

Preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work informs some of the methods lecturers adopt to enhance student engagement at a HEI (see 5.2.3.4). The need to increase the chances of students' employability by preparing them for the global world-of-work, is of utmost importance. Students who chose to become teachers stated they would like to teach abroad, hence we need to prepare them to also work abroad. Teaching and learning environments are continuously changing, so we must be able to prepare students for the 21st century world-of-work by diversifying their skills and increase their opportunities for future employment.

Malik (2018) states that we live in an interconnected world that is characterised by globalisation, information and communication technologies, and changes in knowledge, so university students must also be equipped with the skills necessary to handle the complexity of the modern world where education is a key factor in everyday life in order to maximise their

employability. Suarta, Suwintana and Sudhana, (2017) state that in the 21st century, graduates are not only required to possess high academic qualifications, but a number of skills and attributes as well. According to Suarta et al. (2017), employability skills are crucial for students to prepare themselves to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation. Employability skills and values are considered the missing link between education and training and the world-of-work. It is evident that preparation of students for the 21stcentury world-of-work is beneficial for enhancing student engagement and employability.

6.2.3.5 Positive student feedback

The majority of the lecturers stated that the methods that they used to teach are informed by the positive feedback that they get from students (see 5.2.3.5). Some of the lecturers' receive their own feedback by using different platforms and forums. Some lecturers conduct anonymous surveys whilst others use forums since transitioning to online learning. Some of the lecturers mentioned that they get email feedback from students whilst others elicited feedback from chat boxes or Q&A functions in a Zoom lecture. A simple questionnaire assists in finding out students' challenges and how they feel about different aspects of the module. It was mentioned by one of the participants that module feedback is done at the end of semester after the completion of a module; however, it was suggested that module feedback be done more regularly so changes can be implemented early in the designing of the module as planning and preparation of a module is critical and time-consuming. Mandouit (2018) affirms that getting student feedback is commonly used in educational settings to measure and improve performance and provides teachers with vital information about their practice and identifies areas for further professional development. It also opens up dialogues concerning teaching and learning in the classroom as well as providing teachers with insight into the unique challenges their students face. Floden (2016) mentions that teachers at universities perceive student feedback positively which influences their brand of teaching and improves the quality of courses.

6.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The contribution of this study falls under two categories: The theoretical contribution, and contribution to practice.

6.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

The Appreciative Inquiry theory focuses on what is working rather than what is wrong. The theory further engages participants in the direction of strategic innovation. It was evident from

the literature that student engagement is a complex and multi-faceted concept, hence there is a need to engage in research and examine what is working as this is necessary for enhancing student engagement. The way students engage is always changing; therefore it is always necessary to explore what is working for enhancing student engagement as well as presenting new and innovative ideas so that lecturers in other HEIs may benefit from it. The ideas presented on *Lecturers Understanding of Student Engagement* clearly demonstrated that it is about active participation. Hence, the ideas presented for enhancing student engagement in terms of what is working are based on the tenets of AI as AI looks at what is working rather than what is going wrong. Lecturers were also engaged in strategic innovation when they were asked to share innovative notions of the topic. The theoretical framework guided the direction of the research which was largely due to the phases and principles of AI.

The first phase of AI identified the focus of inquiry which the researcher clarified to participants. The researcher also ensured that participants also understood what an appreciative inquiry is, and that the data generation process will follow the phases of AI. To identify the focus of inquiry, lecturers demonstrated their understanding of student engagement. It was evident from the findings that this understanding was active participation which included involvement, collaborative and co-constructive relationship, interaction, and metacognition. This is how lecturers at a higher education institution understood the topic of inquiry. This also fitted in well with the constructionist principle as participants constructed their own understanding of student engagement. Positive language was promoted during this phase as the researcher used prompts and probes to steer the conversation in the right direction.

Once lecturers demonstrated their understanding of student engagement, the researcher then prompted participants to express their high-point experiences concerning student engagement. It became evident that the narratives that lecturers shared about their best student engagement experience involved active participation. This suited the discovery phase as the researcher could gather that lecturers shaped their enhancement strategies from student engagement activities. This also was in line with the simultaneity principle of AI which seeks positives and high points. It was evident that the different factors such as lecturer preparation, nature of the module, and practical sessions (among others) are the positives and highpoints of what is working in terms of enhancing student engagement.

Similarly, the dream phase examined what will work for the future. In this phase lecturers shared their ideas of how student engagement can be enhanced. Lecturers mentioned aspects such as small groups, innovative models, and 21st century skills. This also aligned well with the poetic principle which seeks to enliven and inspire people or organisations. The ideas that lecturers mentioned (e.g., innovative models) are aspects that the DHET together with HEIs can look into for the future to enhance student engagement. In the design phase, lecturers examined how their ideas for enhancing student engagement can become a reality in terms of authenticating learning experiences, reviewing pedagogical practices and content, and creating opportunities for critical thinking. This was also aligned to the anticipatory principle which explored ideas that inspire action.

The last phase of AI is where planning and implementation takes place. It was evident how lecturers provided a wealth of understanding aspects of higher education institutions to help in future planning. Education evolves hence it is necessary to engage in research through AI to consistently explore what is working, and to generate new ideas on how to enhance student engagement. It is apparent that quality student engagement leads to success and achievement. This is consistent with the positive principle of AI which indicates that positive questions lead to positive change. As such, AI is an effective tool of bringing about positive change, collaboration and innovation which is what the researcher hoped to achieve in investigating student engagement through the use of AI.

6.3.2 Contribution to Practice

It is evident from the findings that there are various paths to encourage active participation and enhance student engagement; however, the gap identified is the ability to encourage active participation in an online space. Whilst lecturers have demonstrated that they are trying to look for creative and innovative ways to explore active participation in an online space, it is necessary to explore the idea of active participation in an online space specifically especially in the current times that we are living in with the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also evident from the findings that we need to prepare students for the 21st century world-of-work by implementing global work-integrated-learning opportunities. This can add value to enhancing student engagement. The ideal strategies for enhancing student engagement is teaching smaller groups and implementing regular tutorial sessions. Many of these strategies are beyond the control of lecturers and therefore HEIs need to become visionary to implement innovations into a reality.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Throughout this chapter, the key findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review are discussed in accordance with the aim and objectives that guided the study. The themes that emerged from *Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution* through an appreciative inquiry were presented and discussed. How this understanding contributed to the enhancement of student engagement, was also explained. It was established that student engagement involves active participation, in a bi-directional relationship with students that involves interaction, collaboration and co-construction of knowledge. Therefore, the factors that contribute to active participation were discussed. Lecturers and students mutually found engagement in lectures fulfilling and this led to success. A discussion of this study's contributions is also included in this chapter. The final chapter of the thesis summarises the findings, presents the limitations of the study, and makes recommendations for further investigation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The study focused on lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution through an appreciative inquiry approach. The purpose of the study was to explore how lecturers understand student engagement at a higher education institution, and how this understanding shapes the way they enhance the quality of student engagement. This chapter starts by providing a summary and synthesis of the key findings. This is followed by an outline of the reflections of the research processes, and the theoretical and conceptual elements of the study. The research processes focused on an evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the chosen research design and methodology in addressing the research questions. The chapter also explained the limitations of this study, followed by the recommendations and directions for further research, and lastly the conclusion to the study was provided.

7.2 SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Three fundamental questions framed the research:

5 What are Lecturers' Understanding of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution?

6 How do Lecturers' Understanding shape their enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution?

7 Why do Lecturers' Enhance Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution the way they do?

7.2.1 Student Engagement is Active Participation

Lecturers at a higher education institution understand student engagement as active participation. It was therefore evident that this understanding influenced student engagement endeavours as it was connected to the notion of active participation. This understanding of active participation was explored through discursive informed conversations which confirmed that participation and involvement were synonymous in terms of student engagement. Angelle (2018) also found that student engagement had shifted from passive knowledge absorption to active participation, which had been regarded by some researchers as a critical shift in student

engagement. In other words, students are asking questions and benefiting from participating in lessons. The responses from lecturers confirm that students are being active participants in their learning experience and not mere passive recipients of knowledge.

In addition, to involvement and participation, student engagement is a collaborative, bi-directional relationship between the lecturer and student. As such, the lecturer and the student co-construct knowledge. This indicates that engagement means asking questions, challenging the lecturer, or the content materials. In terms of emotional engagement regarding relating to each other, teachers, peers, and administrators, encourage students to develop a passion for learning. Summers and Miller (2012) mention that emotional engagement has more to do with the unpleasant and pleasant emotions students associate to their relationships with educators, peers, and institutions rather than the emotions they have during learning activities. Forming a collaborative relationship that allows students to co-construct knowledge was evident in lecturers' understanding of student engagement at a higher education institution.

Active participation needs quality and harmonious interaction between the lecturer and student. Accordingly, Schut et al. (2020) claim that teaching is mediated by human interaction, and therefore teachers' relationships with learners can have an enormous influence on the quality of the learning environment they create. In addition, Pianta (2016) points out that teacher-student interactions are essential for improving student engagement and development. Yildiz (2015) adds that in inclusive classrooms, interaction between teacher and student plays a vital role in enabling students to experience high levels of behavioural, social, and emotional engagement. Aside from lecturer-student interaction, the findings also revealed that interacting and dissecting content materials demonstrate active participation. This corresponds with Madland and Richard's (2016) assertion that content has become an important part of engaging students, and student-content interaction is a primary reason why formal educational systems exist.

The study also revealed the significant role of metacognition in demonstrating active participation. Metacognition included questioning, providing feedback, thinking, and challenging lecturers about the content of modules that they facilitate. Metacognition also included one's ability to regulate one's own learning which demonstrated active participation for lecturers. As such, lecturers expect students to be autonomous learners by engaging their natural curiosity, challenging contentious issues, asking relevant questions, and engaging in

meaningful discussion during the lecture. Hence, it can be said that metacognition is also a good indicator of active participation. Schindler's (2017) corroborates the findings and explained that cognitive engagement is the amount of investment students make in learning and how much mental effort they exert in mastering content. This includes motivation to learn, the ability to overcome challenges, exercising critical-thinking processes, and self-regulated learning**.** Metacognition requires reflection on one's own learning process, and thus critical-thinking assists in self-regulation to structure one's learning (Gaup, Fabry, & Korner, 2018).

Lecturers' understanding of student engagement is beneficial to inform methods of teaching to enhance academic performance within the changing landscapes of education which constantly needs to be explored.

7.2.2 Lecturers' Understanding Shapes Enhancement of Student Engagement

The findings revealed that lecturers' understanding shapes their approaches in the enhancement of student engagement through strategies that encourage active participation. There were various ways that lecturers utilised to encourage active participation that was revealed in this study. The quality facilitation of modules played a significant role in encouraging active participation. The findings revealed that certain modules lend themselves to practical activities or hands-on activities which encourage active participation. Other modules might focus on interesting topics that include human behaviour that students find quite stimulating and engaging. It was evident from the findings that modules which have an element of practical work allow students to apply their knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Modules that also aroused student interest and ignited excitement included the creative arts. It was evident that engagement depends on the quality of facilitation of the module. Also, methodology modules engaged students fruitfully since they apply what they learnt in theory to the practical work sessions. The psychology modules were also found to be engaging as they encouraged active participation because students focused on the interesting field of human behaviour; this tends to stimulate deep-thinking, real conversations about holistic development, sparks engagement in lectures, and encourages all-round active participation.

Humanising content was also used to encourage active participation. Breaking down information to a more relatable form and humanising the content played a significant role in encouraging active participation. The findings indicated that content should not be intimidating to students and should be broken up into discrete understandable forms. Further content should

be well organised, spaced out, and logically presented in class so that students can make-sense of the content. In addition, content materials and activities should not be loaded or abstract that it becomes difficult to understand; it should be presented in an interesting style such that complex concepts should be explained in simple ways by being dissected into meaningful units in order to encourage active participation. Moreover, multimedia tools such as videos, pictures, social media, two-dimensional or three-dimensional models, and text files relevant to course content are important elements for enhancing student engagement. (Alhih, Ossiannilsson, & Berigel, 2017).

Another technique to arouse student engagement is creating interconnectedness which is relational learning and forming cordial and professional bonds with students. As such, lecturers should understand students' backgrounds, language, habits, styles of learning, and allow them to feel comfortable when developing a professional cordial relationship with the lecturer – this promotes engagement and active participation in lectures. Moreover, building a relationship with students is definitely one of the ways to break down the barrier between the lecturer and student hierarchy (Conner, 2016)

The availability and use of a variety of resources, learning activities, applications, and interactive teaching aids also encouraged active participation and enhanced student engagement at a higher education institution. Practical activities, the use of applications such as Zoom, Whiteboard, Moodle, and Padlet, as well as hands-on activities (e.g., experiments) are used to encourage active participation. It was evident that technology-based resources, activities, and teaching aids are commonly used by lecturers at the HEI. Also, since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic with its resultant restrictions, the transition to online learning became a necessity which required the use of technological tools, activities, and resources to enhance student engagement and encourage active participation. Shenoy, Mahendra and Vijay (2020) state that the traditional lecture style has been criticised for not engaging students; thus, emphasis is placed on more contemporary pedagogical practices like online learning, groupwork, peer feedback, blended learning and 'flipped' learning. Taylor and Statler (2014) agree that various methods and approaches are utilised by educators to encourage student participation through digital technologies and the media. In the current learning environment, Usman (2016) mentions that technological resources and online tools are certainly proving to be key for transitioning higher education (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018).

Importantly, lecturer preparation was another critical factor to encourage active participation. Emphasis was placed on the way lectures are planned, structured, and delivered. Lecturers have to be well-read and thoroughly prepared to effectively engage students. Gaikhorst et al. (2020) affirm that adequate preparation and institutional support can help lecturers circumvent the challenges of teaching and learning. Martin (2019) confirms that highly valued attributes were preparation, responsibility, meeting tutorial schedules, punctuality, style of presentation, and timeous feedback. Accordingly, student satisfaction survey questionnaires must include significant aspects of lecturer preparation such as organisation, planning, and delivery of lessons (Carvajal, 2016). Lecturers effectively engage students when they are thoroughly prepared and familiar with the subject matter and apply innovative techniques of teaching such as authenticating the learning experience. The findings revealed that practical sessions using real-life examples evoke spontaneous responses from participants which enhances student engagement and encourages active participation. Also, role-play as a practical activity where students enact or demonstrate lessons on specific topics in the classroom, encourages active participation; this links theoretical aspects to authentic or real-life examples. The flipped classroom method has the potential to enhance student learning by removing much of the ‘‘transmission of knowledge’’ from the classroom and replacing it with active learning approaches that enable the assimilation of information (Seery, 2015). In other words, and according to Tollie and Kallery (2021), the connection between theory-subjects and real-life contexts is also an important factor that stimulates students' interest, as it makes topics relevant and applicable to their lives.

Moreover, critical-thinking, problem-solving, and discourse analysis encourage active participation and enhances student engagement. Pre-Covid-19 conditions often encouraged face-to-face opportunities for critical-thinking and problem-solving but with the transition to online platforms, the lecturers at the HEI create opportunities for discussions and questioning through the use of the chats and Q&A applications on zoom and YouTube, among others. The findings also revealed that presenting contentious topics to encourage debate challenges students to engage in active participation.

Furthermore, providing quality and timeous feedback encouraged active participation and enhanced student engagement at a HEI. Effective and efficient feedback that tracks students’ development is motivational and appreciated by students especially if it helps to remediate

inconsistencies, misconceptions, and fills knowledge gaps regarding content and assessments (Mollestam & Hu, 2016).

Further, facilitation of small groups and regular tutorials also encourages active participation and enhances student engagement at a higher education institution. You are able to connect with students and identify and support those who are struggling. The findings also indicated that lecturers are able to engage in a more meaningful way with students if they have smaller groups of students and put a name and a face which they felt would help to connect and engage with students. Regular tutorial sessions give students more individualised attention. Forslund and Chiriac (2018) state that the effects of working in groups are significantly improved by well-structured group experiences or by instruction in group-working strategies. Students achieve shared learning objectives through group learning.

Creating a supportive environment was also deemed as an enabling factor that promoted engagement. Support included resources, tutors and just creating a space or environment where students can make meaningful contributions. Extra Mathematics and English classes also assist students who are struggling. Support should go beyond the lecturer and has to be an institutional initiative where people in senior management are involved. Hence, institutional support structures could improve student engagement because they enable access to information and advice, connections to university services, and high quality of course materials and instruction, which are all factors that can contribute to a successful student engagement (Pather et al., 2017). Support from partners and family is a major factor in student success (Williams & Emerson, 2019).

Work integrated learning (WIL) and innovative models engage students when they are able to integrate what they have learned to the world-of-work. We need to prepare students for the world-of-work via global work integrated learning. Accordingly, the use of international service providers could be explored for online placements. Moreover, the appropriate pedagogy connects theory to practice and has particular resonance within subjects where academics are striving to expand their students' understanding of diversity (Whitley et al., 2017). Sometimes there is an overlap of content and repetition across some modules which needs attention.

7.2.3 Enhancing Student Engagement: Success and Fulfilment

The findings in this study revealed that encouraging active participation is linked to success and fulfilment. The feeling of fulfilment is mutually beneficial to lecturers and students who enjoy positive gratifying engagement experiences. Job-satisfaction is an important factor concerning the performance of lecturers who may experience feelings of joy and enthusiasm.

According to Schindler (2017), the application of knowledge can be classified as cognitive engagement. The findings align to Bond and Bendlier (2019) who affirm that students demonstrate cognitive engagement when they are able to demonstrate application skills and reflect on knowledge in a meaningful way. When students are able to apply and reflect on knowledge, it can be mutually satisfying for the lecturer and student as this is an indication that students are engaged.

Moreover, students become meaningfully engaged when they find value and interest in what they are doing. Murayama, FitzGibbon and Sakaki (2019) affirm that interest is central to intellectual behaviour which has been repeatedly emphasised in literature. Hence, lecturers at higher education institutions must ensure that the content of the lecture is of value to students to arouse interest by authenticating the learning experience.

Preparing students for the 21st century world-of-work is important to enhance student engagement at HEIs. We need to increase the students' chances of employability by preparing them for the global world-of-work. We also need to prepare students to be able to teach abroad. To increase employability, students need to be equipped with skills to handle the complexity of the modern world in which education plays a critical role in everyday life.

Feedback on different platforms and forums are used to promote engagement. Also, feedback via chat boxes or Q&A functions in a Zoom lecture may be engaging. Lecturers mentioned that student feedback is an important part of informing their planning and preparation. Mandouit (2018) affirms that students' feedback is commonly used as a performance measure and an improvement tool in educational settings. Floden (2016) mentions that feedback has a significant impact on university educators' teaching, and that it contributes to courses being revised and becoming more effective.

7.3 RESEARCH PROCESSES, AND THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REFLECTIONS

In this study, reflecting on the research process, and reflecting on conceptual and theoretical premises, were important factors. An interpretive paradigmatic position was used in this study, which was conducted as a case study in a higher education institution in KwaZulu-Natal using a qualitative research design. A key benefit of the chosen paradigm, approach, and design of this study was that the researcher was able to interact extensively with all participants to determine the lecturers' understanding and the enhancement of student engagement. The data generation methods used in this study were suitable since the research explored the lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement. According to Rahi (2017), a qualitative approach was used to collect the in-depth details on a specific topic, and this approach assumes that a person represents the collective feelings and emotions of the group, which the quantitative approach does not account for (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). By using qualitative research methods, we can better understand participants' experiences and analyse how decisions are made, and we can gain a detailed understanding of how interventions may affect outcomes.

It was difficult to collect data at the higher education institution as there were new procedures put in place to acquire gatekeeper permission. The University of KwaZulu-Natal requires gatekeeper permission to apply for ethical clearance, however the gatekeeper in my study required ethical clearance before providing me with permission. I therefore had to go through two stages in order to collect data: the first was to apply for in principle permission and once I received this, I had to apply for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Once I was granted ethical clearance, I then needed to apply for final permission from the gatekeeper which was like going through ethical clearance again. Once I received final gatekeeper permission, I was then allowed to recruit participants and collect data. It was also difficult to set up meetings with lecturers due to their availability. I had to conduct most interviews during weekends.

There was one significant moment that emerged from the conceptual framework and theoretical framework respectively that deepened the understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution. This moment involved the conceptual framework that emerged from the data. Figure 7.1 represents a reflection of this conceptual framework in which lecturer's understanding and enhancement of student engagement is understood. This

conceptual framework is a current student engagement research model that helps understand how emotional, behavioural, and cognitive student engagement are conceptualised and to identify particular indicators that correlate with each dimension of engagement. (Schindler et al., 2017).

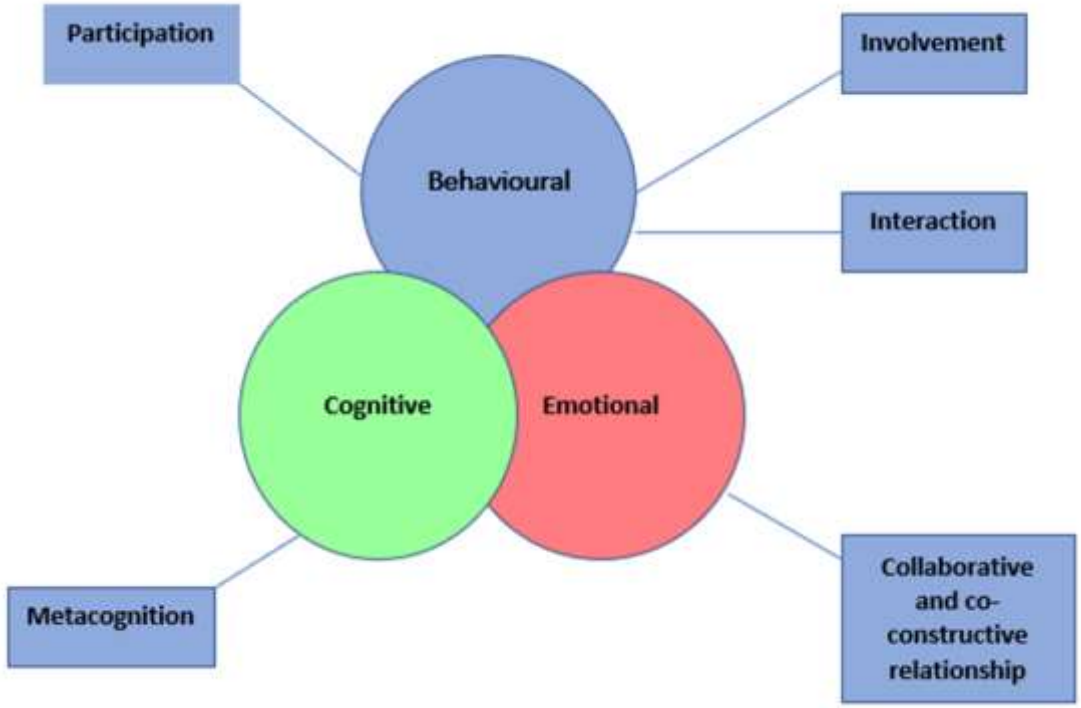

Figure 7.1: Conceptual framework for understanding the enhancement of student engagement (Schindler et al., 2017)

The dimensions are behavioural, cognitive and emotional; each has its own defining characteristics but there are similarities across the dimensions. For example, a collaborative and co-constructive relationship can be seen in behavioural and emotional engagement.

The second significant moment that emerged from this study was from the theoretical framework which is an appreciative inquiry. The fundamental principle of AI is positive inquiry, as opposed to behavioural perspectives to change, which focuses on changing individuals rather than encouraging people to build organisations and communities that they want (Mohr & Watkins, 2002). According to Van Brabant (2015) AI is based on the simple principle of simply seeking and valuing positives in the present and past, and encouraging key stakeholders inside an organisation to discover their own energy and commitment to drive forward positive change. With this particular study, it was evident that lecturers' understanding

of student engagement determined the methods that they used to enhance student engagement. Figure 7.2 below depicts the phases and principles of AI in which lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement is understood to generate positive findings.

Table 7.2: The 5 phases and principles of AI (Lewis, 2020).

Phase and Description	**Lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement according to the phases of AI**	**Principles of AI**
1. **Define**: The first step of AI is to define the affirmative topic of inquiry or identify the focus.	The affirmative topic was lecturers' understanding and enhancement of student engagement at a higher education institution	**Constructionist:** This fitted in well with the constructionist principle as participants constructed their own understanding of student engagement, and positive language was promoted during this phase. This was evident in theme 5.2.1 from the understanding that was of student engagement was derived based on their experiences and interaction with students during teaching and learning. This places further emphasis on social construction in creating understanding and meaning
2. **Discovery:** This phase involves obtaining narratives of peak experiences connected to the topic of inquiry.	Participants were asked to share their understanding and peak experiences of their best student engagement through	**Simultaneity**: This was aligned to the simultaneity principle as this principle of AI moves in the direction that seeks positives

	narratives. Positive experiences were highlighted where students demonstrated active participation, involvement, interaction, and metacognition.	and high points. The positive experiences and stories that lecturers shared were in line with their understanding of student engagement. How they understand this affirmative topic was in line with how it featured in their positive stories. This was evident in theme 5.2.1 through aspects such as interaction, involvement and meta-cognition
3. **Dream**: In the dream phase the participants generate a vision for their perfect or ideal future based on the discovery phase.	Lecturers shared their vision and ideas based on their understanding of student engagement. Lecturers also shared ideas of how they would enhance student engagement in an ideal world. The findings demonstrated that lecturers understanding of student engagement shapes their enhancement of student engagement through ways that encourage active participation. Some of the findings of ways that encourage active participation include humanising content,	**Poetic**: This phase was aligned with the poetic principle which seeks to enliven and inspire people or organisations. The strategies that encourage active participation in 5.2.2 demonstrated creative and innovative ideas.

	authenticating the learning experience, facilitation of modules, creating a supportive environment and facilitating of smaller groups and tutorials. More of these findings can be seen in (5.2.2)	
4. **Design:** The design phase plots the steps that will turn the dream into reality.	The findings also generated ideas that lecturers presented in terms of enhancing student engagement and also suggested how these ideas could become a reality. For example, WIL and innovative models were some of the ideas that lecturers mentioned to enhance student engagement which will increase employability and prepare students for the global world of work. Further to this the ideas suggested were forming relationships with international service providers and finding online placements for students on an international level so that they are able to get experience in an international classroom. Accessing feedback through	**Anticipatory:** This was also aligned to the anticipatory principle which examines ideas that inspire action. This principle was aligned with theme 5.2.2 as lecturers mentioned WIL and innovative models

	surveys and questionnaires on a regular basis could also inform lecturers what is working in terms of enhancing student engagement.	
5. **Destiny**: The destiny phase involves planning 'what will be' and involves the stage where the energy moves to the implementation phase (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).	It was evident that the outcomes are that enhancement of student engagement is fulfilling and linked to success. This is evident through lecturer fulfilment, positive feedback, value and interest, and the preparation of students for the 21st century world-of-work.	**Positive:** This phase is also consistent with the positive principle which indicates that positive questions lead to change. The AI is an effective way of bringing about positive change, collaboration, and innovation which is what the researcher hoped to achieve in investigating student engagement through the use of AI. The results yielded from 5.2.3 aligns with the positive principle as positive change will lead to positive results such as success, value and interest and positive feedback

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Researchers Ross and Zaidi (2019) state that significant limitations must be explained. Ross and Zaidi (2019) add that the limitations should explain the possible consequence of the limitation, provide possible and different approaches, and describe steps that are taken to reduce the limitation. It is evident that the limitations of the study should provide meaningful information to the reader. This study only included one higher education institution and eight participants, therefore generalisations to include the wider population were difficult to make.

Due to Covid-19, all interviews had to take place online which made the interaction quite non-personal. An appreciative inquiry is very conversational so doing this in an online space might have been intimidating for participants. It was also difficult to schedule interviews with participants as their availability was limited due to them being involved in lectures, work commitments, and their own studies. I therefore had to utilise weekends which was also difficult as some lecturers had family commitments. Getting institutional permission also took longer than expected (3 months). I had to apply for 'in principle' permission and then final permission which was like applying for ethical clearance three times which caused delays in ethical clearance being granted. It was my first time using an appreciative inquiry approach and narrative interviews. The AI is quite conversational and has many phases which can sometimes be very similar which may elicit similar responses in each question phase. Another limitation was when I started my research, the institution only offered a Bachelor of Education programme; however, they have recently introduced an honours programme and PGCE programme so I would have liked the research to look at lecturers on the different programmes; so, the understanding of student engagement in this study is limited to lecturers who facilitate one programme. Moreover, AI takes a substantial amount of time (Drew & Wallis, 2014) depending on the degree of a supportive, positive, and open environment where sharing is possible. Realistically, it is not possible for all stakeholders to be involved which questions the ethical morality of strategising using the democratic consensus principle (Schooley, 2012).

7.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In chapter one it was mentioned that the landscapes of education are always changing and so too is the way students engage. Student engagement is complex and multi-faceted therefore there is always a need to engage in on-going research on enhancing student engagement at higher education institutions. As mentioned in literature, student engagement is associated with success and achievement. Therefore, the researcher suggests the following for future investigations:

- A more elaborate and in-depth research could be conducted at various different HEIs to involve a larger lecturer population to reveal a more generalised result.
- Due to Covid-19 restrictions, lecturers focused mainly on digital pedagogy, hence more research on exploring the understanding and enhancement of digital pedagogy could provide further insight on student engagement.

- The study mainly uses AI; although there are many benefits of AI, there has also been criticism. The AI has been criticised by authors for being unbalanced as it focuses on the positive and could possibly mask potential problems. Hence, the challenges of *Enhancing Student Engagement at Higher Education Institutions* should be addressed.

7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

A qualitative case study was carried out in one HEI in KwaZulu-Natal. Appreciative interviews, discursive informed conversations and open-ended questionnaires were used to generate data. The findings revealed the lecturers at a higher education institution understand student engagement as active participation which involves involvement, interaction, collaborative relationships, and metacognition. The findings revealed that lecturers' understanding of student engagement shapes their enhancement of student engagement through ways that encourage active participation. These include humanising content, authenticating the learning experience, reviewing content and pedagogical practices, facilitation of small groups and tutorials, and preparing students for the 21st century world of work, among others. Encouraging active participation is fulfilling when linked to success. While some recommendations are already in place, implementing others is challenging due to the increasing enrolment at HEIs. In order for these ideas to become a reality creating a supportive learning environment is necessary. Support goes beyond the lecturer; institutional support is necessary in order to enhance student engagement. It would also be useful to examine the challenges of enhancing student engagement especially since the transition to online spaces are still being explored as a means of enhancing student engagement. This study has opened opportunities to enhance the quality of engagement such that academic performance is taken to a higher level.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

27 July 2021

Miss Nirashnee Muthusamy (204519973)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Muthusamy,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003113/2021
Project title: Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 16 July 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 27 July 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,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Appendix B: Invitation to Recruit Participants

To whom it may concern

My name is Nirashnee Muthusamy. I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student from the Educational Psychology Cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Based on my degree requirements, I intend carrying out a study that involves Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry. The study will be targeting Lecturers, and the objectives of the study are as follows:

8 To explore lecturers' understanding of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution.

9 To understand how lecturers' understanding shape their enhancement of Student Engagement at Higher Education Institution

10 To gain insight into why Lecturers' Enhance Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution the way they do.

Please note:

- Participation in the research is voluntary.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate, or stop participating at any stage in the research.
- You can withdraw from the research process at any time without any negative consequences.
- Your identity will not be disclosed. Confidentiality and privacy are guaranteed.
- Your participation in this research will not affect my position as a lecturer.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be securely stored and used for purposes of this research only.
- The research will not impact on lecturing time.

- The information obtained will be used in the strictest of confidence. All digital data will be password-protected, accessed only by me and my supervisor, and deleted after five years.
- You will be given my transcripts to read to verify that the information is accurate.

Your involvement is purely for academic purposes, and there are **no financial** benefits involved. However, it is expected that you will gain insight and be able to share best practices in terms of enhancing student engagement. You will be required to participate in three data generation methods.

I request the permission of lecturers to participate in appreciative interviews, digital open-ended questionnaires, and discursive informed conversations. Interviews and discursive conversations will take place via ZOOM or telephonically. These interviews will be between 45-60 minutes duration. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence and used for research purposes only. All digital data will be password-protected. All participants in this study will be recruited on a voluntary basis and participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any point in time without being disadvantaged in any way. The highest level of confidentiality and anonymity will be assured, and names of the lecturers' and the institution will not be disclosed. The research will cause no harm to the institution or the participants. Information will be made available to participants before publication for verification. If you would like to participate in this study, please read and complete the consent form which provides further information on the study.

Kind Regards

Nirashnee Muthusamy

Contact Details: **(0736496158)** 204519973@stu.ukzn.ac.za University of KwaZulu-Natal School of Education, College of Humanities, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

My supervisor's email address is **hlaleled@ukzn.ac.za**

Appendix C: Gatekeeper Request Letter and Consent Form

University of KwaZulu-Natal

School of Education

College of Humanities

Edgewood Campus

KwaZulu-Natal

Durban

4041

Dear CEO/Dean/Head of Academics/Lecturer

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER for the Higher Education Institution

My name is Nirashnee Muthusamy. I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student from the Educational Psychology Cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Based on my degree requirements, I intend carrying out a study that involves **Lecturer's Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry**. The study will be targeting Lecturers and the objectives of the study are as follows:

11 To explore lecturers' understanding of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution;

12 To understand how lecturers' understanding shape their enhancement of Student Engagement at Higher Education Institution;

13 To gain insight into why *Lecturers Enhance Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution* the way they do.

The study seeks to highlight the positives in terms of student engagement and gain insight into what is working. The information generated from this study may lead to the enhancement of current practices at higher education institutions. This study may also benefit lecturers in other institutions as the information generated from this study will be focusing on the peaks, strengths, and positives on how lecturers understand and enhance student engagement. As a result of focusing on the peaks, lecturers at other institutions will be able to gain insight into best practices used at the institution in this study. Hence, I request the permission for lecturers from the institution to participate in appreciative interviews, digital open-ended questionnaires, and discursive informed conversations. Interviews and discursive conversations will take place via ZOOM or telephonically. These interviews will be between 45-60 minutes duration. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence and used for research purposes only. All digital data will be password-protected. All participants in this study will be recruited on a voluntary basis and participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. The highest level of confidentiality and anonymity will be assured, and names of the lecturers and the institution will not be disclosed. The research will cause no harm to the institution or the participants. Information will be made available to participants before publication for verification purposes.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSSREC/00003113/2021.

Please note:

- The research is about Lecturers' Understanding of Enhancing Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Participants have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research.
- Participants can withdraw from the research process at any time without any negative consequences.
- Identities will not be disclosed. Confidentiality is guaranteed.
- Participation in this research will not affect one's position as a Lecturer.
- Any information given will not be used against the participant, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- The research will not impact on lecturing time.
- The information obtained will be treated in the strictest of confidence. All digital data will be password-protected and deleted after five years.

- Participants be given my transcripts to read to verify the information.
- Data will be kept in a secure storage for 5 years and destroyed thereafter.
- Participation is purely for academic purposes only, and there is no financial benefits involved. However, it is expected that you will gain insight and be able to share best practices in terms of enhancing student engagement.

Kind Regards

Nirashnee Muthusamy

Contact Details: **(0736496158)** 204519973@stu.ukzn.ac.za University of KwaZulu-Natal School of. Education, College of Humanities, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

My supervisor's Email is: hlaleled@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office at:

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics

Govan Mbeki Centre

Tel +27312604557

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time in reading this document about this research.

Consent to participate in this study.

I …… (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the study entitled: *Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry* by Nirashnee Muthusamy. I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in it.

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.
- I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers given to my satisfaction.
- I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without negative consequences.
- I voluntarily give permission for the interviews to be zoom-recorded, audio-recorded and for telephonic interviews. I also am aware that I will be expected to fill out a digital questionnaire.
- My identity will not be disclosed, and pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity as well as the identity of the institution.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher, Nirashnee Muthusamy on (0736496158) or 204519973@stu.ukzn.ac.za

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher, then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

- I am willing to be part of the research project on student engagement. I am also willing to allow recording using the following equipment, and the use of other data:

	Agree	**Disagree**
Audio Equipment		

……...

Name of Participant

…… **……**

Signature of Participant **Date**

…….. **……**

Signature of Researcher **Date**

Appendix D: The Appreciative Inquiry Data Generation Process

Thank you for your participation in this study. All data generation methods will be facilitated using an appreciative inquiry approach. Before we commence, I would like to explain how the questionnaire, appreciative interviews and discursive conversations will take place. Appreciative Inquiry interviews, conversations and questionnaires are different from traditional interviews because, rather than asking questions about what is wrong and how to fix it, Appreciative Inquiry conversations, questionnaires and interviews present positive questions that are used to highlight the strengths, peaks, and positives of an organisation. In a nutshell, it refers to what is working, and finds ways to create a positive future. There are five phases of an Appreciative inquiry: define, discover, dream, design and deliver - and the questionnaires, appreciative interviews and discursive informed conversation will be conducted in accordance with these five phases.

Appendix E: Data Production Grid (Phases of AI)

Phases of AI	Description	Appreciative Inquiry principle(s)	Data Generation Method	Research Question
Define	Clarifying the focus of the inquiry in terms of purpose, content, and what needs to be achieved together	Constructionist – Reality is created through language and conversations	● Appreciative Interview ● Discursive informed conversation ● Open-ended Questionnaire	**Research Question 1** What are the Lecturers' Understanding of Enhancing Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution?
Discovery	Appreciating the 'best of what is. Discovery is based on a dialogue, as a way of finding 'what works. It helps to rediscover the successes, strengths, and period of excellence of an organisation	Simultaneity – the moment we ask a question, we begin to create a change	● Appreciative Interview ● Discursive informed conversation ● Open-ended Questionnaire	**Research Question 2** How do the Lecturers' Understanding shape the way they Enhance Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution?
Dream	Participants are prompted to discuss innovative ideas about their most desired future for their school. They imagine/envision	Poetic – schools are endless sources of study and learning. What we	● Appreciative Interview	**Research Question 2** How do the Lecturers' Understanding shape the way they Enhance

	'what could be' a preferred future for their organisation.	choose to study makes a difference.	• Discursive informed conversation • Open-ended questionnaire	Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution?
Design	Participant's design and co-construct 'what should be' i.e. their most desired/ ideal future based on stories from discovery phase and imagination and creativity from dream phase	Anticipatory - Human systems move in the direction of images of their future. The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action	• Appreciative Interview • Discursive informed conversation • Open-ended Questionnaire	**Research Question 3** Why do Lecturers' Enhance Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution the way they do?
Delivery/destiny	This stage justifies how the design is delivered. Action learning, reflection and refining of plans/activities/potential action plans is embedded in the organisation. Participants are empowered, they learn, adjust and improvise to create 'what will be.'	Positive – positive questions lead to positive change. Participants are ready to learn, reflect, adjust, and improvise, on a continuum towards attainment of the ideal future	• Appreciative Interview • Discursive informed conversation • Open-ended Questionnaire	**Research Question 3** Why do Lecturers' Enhance Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution the way they do?

Appendix F: Appreciative Interview Schedule

There are few questions that I would like to ask you first before we start the appreciative inquiry interview process**.**

PART 1: SETTING THE SCENE

- When did you start lecturing?
- How long have you been lecturing for?
- What do you enjoy the most about lecturing or being a lecturer?

PART 2: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONS

DEFINE

Clarifying the focus of the inquiry in terms of purpose, content, and what needs to be achieved together?"

Tell me about student engagement in your lectures.

- What do you understand by student engagement?
- What indicates to you that students are engaged in your lectures?
- What do you think leads to positive student engagement?

DISCOVERY

Appreciating the 'best of what is'. Discovery is based on a dialogue, as a way of finding 'what works'. It helps to rediscover the successes, strengths, and period of excellence of an organisation.

Tell me a story about the best experience you had when lecturing. Think of all your years of experience as a lecturer and recall a positive experience (where you felt students were most engaged). Describe the event in detail focusing on the following:

What happened; what was a high point (peak experiences)?

- How did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- What was it about that experience that demonstrated that students were engaged?

- What is the single most important aspect of student engagement?

DREAM PHASE

Participants are prompted to discuss provocative ideas about their most desired future for their organisation. They imagine and envision ‘what could be’ a preferred future for their organisation.

If you had a vision for enhancing student engagement, propose some ideas for a positive student engagement for the future.

DESIGN PHASE

Participant’s design and co-construct ‘what should be’ i.e., their most desired/ ideal future based on stories from the discovery phase and imagination and creativity from the dream phase.

- What would be the ideal image for enhancing student engagement?
- What would you do create positive student engagement?

DESTINY PHASE

This stage justifies how the design is delivered. Action learning, reflection and refining of plans/activities/potential action plans are embedded in the organisation. Participants are empowered, they learn, adjust and improvise to create ‘what will be’.

- What can be done to enhance student engagement?
- How would you make ideas a reality?

Appendix G: Discursive Informed Conversation

A discursive informed conversation is a conversation that occurs spontaneously. These spontaneous conversations will be prompted by the researcher in accordance with what arises from the narrative interview, and this will be explored further.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

DEFINE

1. What is the most significant aspect that awakened your understanding of student engagement?

DISCOVERY

2. What is your best (or peak) experience or your most appreciative experience concerning student engagement?

DREAM

3. What is your best idea that emanated from your vision for enhancing student engagement?

DESIGN

4. What was your most creative or innovative idea that arose from your interview in terms of an ideal image for enhancing student engagement?

DESTINY

5. How would you like to be involved in enhancing student engagement?

Appendix H- Open-ended Questionnaire

Name:	**Date:**
Time:	**Discipline:**
Lecturer:	**Years of Experience:**

1. DEFINE
1.1 What is your understanding of student engagement?
1.2 How does this understanding shape the way you enhance student engagement?
1. DISCOVERY
a. Share your story of your best student engagement experience and highlight the peaks and positives of this experience. What made you excited about this experience?
b. What did you value most about this experience of student engagement?
c. What is the most important part of enhancing student engagement?
d. What is the most meaningful way that you have contributed to enhancing student engagement?
2. DREAM
a. If you had a vision for enhancing student engagement, how would you realise it?
3. DESIGN
a. Describe your ideas for enhancing student engagement in detail.
b. What would be your ideal plan for enhancing student engagement?
4. DESTINY
a. What can be done to achieve an ideal image of enhancing student engagement?

APPENDIX I: Gatekeeper Permission

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INVOLVING STADIO EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS AND/OR DATA
REF #: 2021_IRP_001

To: Nirashnee Muthusamy,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, 204519973@stu.ukzn.ac.za, 0736496158
From: Prof Elmarie Sadler
Dean: Research, Internationalisation and Community Engagement

Date: 16 August 2021

I hereby confirm that this letter grants institutional research permission to you for undertaking research involving STADIO employees towards a research study, entitled:

Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry

You may gain access to the required number and category of Academic staff, namely "*those who lecture compulsory modules on the Bachelor of Education Intermediate and Foundation Phase*" at STADIO as set out in your application. The permission allows you to access the prospective participants' email addresses and invite them to participate in Zoom interviews voluntarily. Furthermore, the Committee noted that the letter of information and consent (Appendix C) contains several language and grammar errors and recommends submitting the document for professional language editing before inviting the STADIO academics to participate in the study.

The personal information made available to you must only be used to advance this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith. It must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying to protect the participants' right to privacy. The researcher indemnifies STADIO from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

All of the best with the undertaking of this study.

Regards,

PROF ELMARIE SADLER
DCompt/CA(SA)
Dean: Research, Internationalisation and Community Engagement
Telephone | +27 11 662 1444
Cellphone | +27 83 703 5109
Email: elmarie.s@stadio.ac.za
www.stadio.ac.za

Appendix J: Language Editors Certificate

PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE EDITING SERVICES

680 Miami Road
Hillsborough
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brian.naidoo25@gmail.com

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

Brian Naidoo (BA Hons English; BA Hons TESOL; BEd Hons.
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SPECIALISING IN THE LANGUAGE EDITING OF THESES, DISSERTATIONS, JOURNAL ARTICLES, PROPOSALS, POLICIES AND PUBLICATIONS.

CERTIFICATE FOR LANGUAGE EDITING A DRAFT DOCTORAL THESIS

NIRASHNEE MUTHUSAMY
Student Number: 204519973
UKZN

TITLE: Lecturers' Understanding and Enhancement of Student Engagement at a Higher Education Institution: An Appreciative Inquiry

WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate confirms that the above-mentioned student submitted her draft doctoral thesis to me for language-editing, which included correcting in-text citations and the list of references. This was duly edited by me and returned to the student for revisions as per suggestions from me. I make no claim as to the accuracy of the research content. The text, as edited by me, is grammatically correct. After completion of my language editing, the student has the option to accept or reject suggestions/changes prior to re-submission to the supervisor who will check the content and instances of plagiarism, if any.

[redacted] ID: 5606255134081 DATE: 03/01/2022

Professional EDITORS Guild

Brian Naidoo
Associate Member

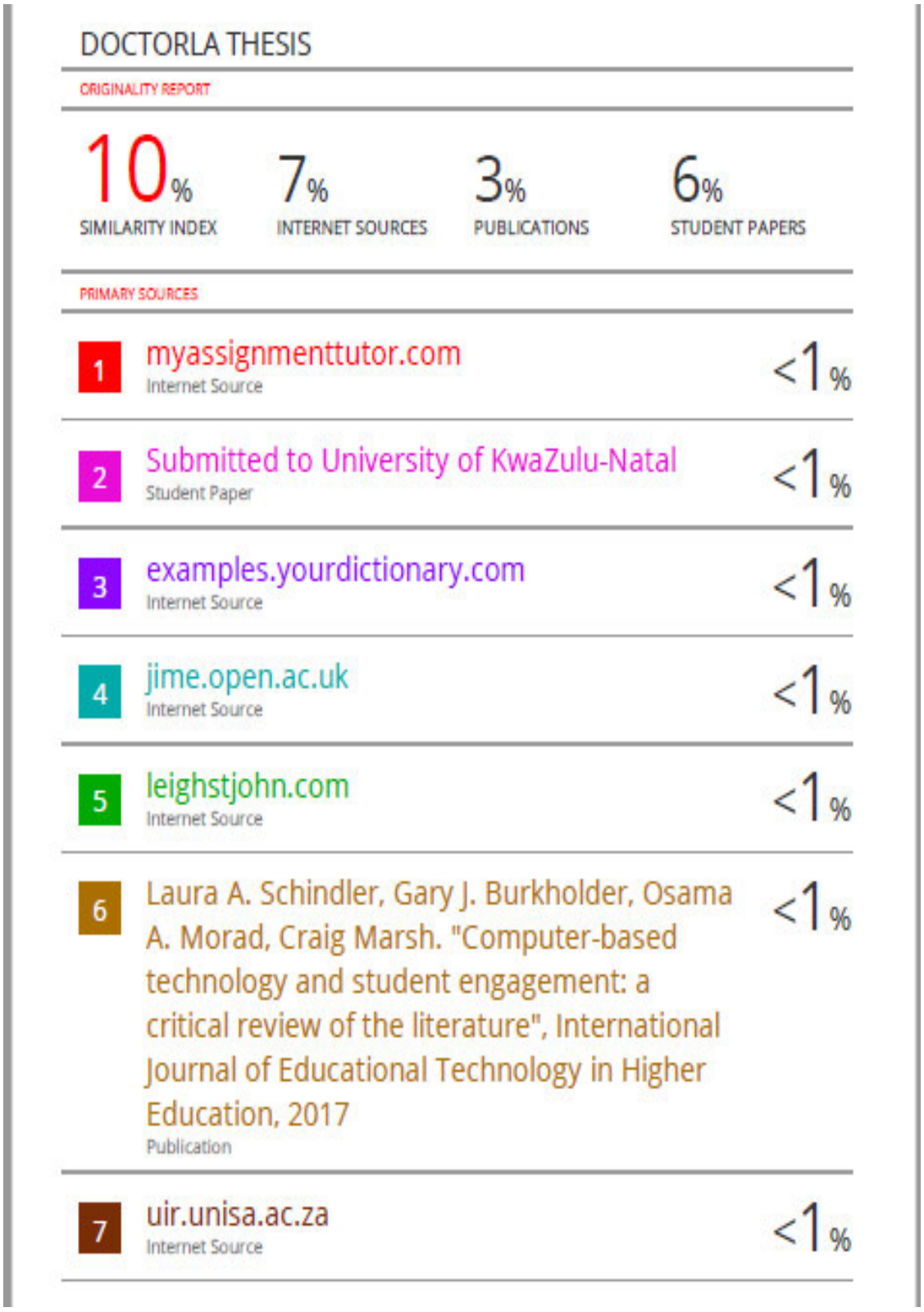
Membership number: NAI001
Membership year: March 2021 to February 2022

084 264 8401
brian.naidoo25@gmail.com

www.editors.org.za

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Appendix K: Turnitin Report



DOCTORLA THESIS

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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