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Masters of ArtsOrganisational Psychology

University of the Witwatersrand



Adjustment problems faced by international students in South Africa.

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A research report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Psychology by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Organisational Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg on 15 March 2017

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this point or any other university. The work presented is my own, unaided work.

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Kegomoditswe Morongwa Mokgwasi

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Date

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to assess the challenges faced by international students in South Africa. The study was conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. There were 14 international students who participated in the study. Of these, 6 were male and 8 were female. The study was qualitative in nature. An interview schedule was used to interview participants. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. The results showed that international students in South Africa faced adjustment challenges relating to: reasons for choosing to study in South Africa, first settling in experiences, financial constraints, registration process, language problems, visa application and immigration laws, cultural differences, diversity, discrimination, academic challenge, homesickness, social support, institutional assistance and how they handled the challenges to cope with the prevailing situation in South Africa. Future studies should thus focus on finding effective ways to improve the adjustment process for international students in South Africa.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and rationale

Introduction

Globalisation of higher education has become trendy in many countries worldwide (Maadad, 2013), resulting in international students finding themselves drawn to studying in different parts of the world rather than their home countries (Dorozhkin & Mazitova, 2008; Vinther & Slethaug, 2015). Most of the studies on international students show that studying abroad has benefits (Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010). The benefits include gaining of new experiences through interacting with new people, learning in a different environment, and making new international friends (Vinther & Slethaug, 2015; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010). However, there are difficulties that are inevitably encountered by international students despite the benefits that are derived from the international exposure (Dorozhkin & Mazitova, 2008; Bentley, 2008).

While most studies have documented that the United States is amongst the most popular destination international students flock to (Maundeni, Malinga, Kwatalala & Kasule, 2010; Selvadurai, 1992), according to Mudhovozi (2011) South Africa has become a popular destination within the African context. In 2007 alone, international students who were registered in South Africa were around 60 000 and this constituted 8 percent of the student population (Mudhovozi, 2011). International students in the United States are far more than the numbers reported in South Africa, hence most of the studies on international students were conducted in the United States (Jenkins & Galloway, 2009).

The benefits of adopting international students have also been documented throughout the world. According to Zhai (2002), international students alone generated around $ 12.3 billion in revenue to the economy of the United States. According to Zhang and Goodson (2010b) international students also generated around $ 15.5 billion in revenue. It was through tuition fees, accommodation and many other factors that the generation of revenue played a significant role (Zhang & Goodson, 2010b). According to Maundeni et al (2010), international students` fees are higher than those of local students and are usually required to pay in full earlier in the year. It therefore means that the South African economy is enhanced through the income gained from

charging international students higher fees. Thus most universities globally try to recruit international students (Lee & Rice, 2007; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Andrade, 2006).

Not only do international students contribute to the economic development of host countries; they also bring ethnic and cultural diversity that is essential in nation-building and internationalisation of universities (Russell, Rosenthal & Thomson, 2010). According to Lee and Rice (2007) international students bring forth different perspectives to the university environment and that challenges local students to have a broader perspective of higher education. The mingling of students from different countries gives South African students the opportunity to increase their knowledges and attitudes towards people from other countries and their cultures. International students are often selected in courses that may have enrolment gaps within the host country (Mokua, 2012). The recruitment of international students may also increase opportunities for countries to achieve future global partnerships (Castaneda, 2008). The international students would increase connectedness of various cultures and countries through educational advancement and exchange of information through immigration.

Universities in South Africa recruit students from all parts of the world (Andrade, 2006). They try to attract the best students with the academic ability to cope with the academic standards in South African universities. Universities in South Africa are known internationally for academic excellence and most of them have been in existence for decades (Mudhovozi, 2011). The universities advertise electronically by putting up websites and providing online applications (Andrade, 2006). They try to reach out to every prospective student with the desire to learn inside and outside the country (Andrade, 2006). The intakes are continuously increasing the number of students enrolled every year (Etzel & Nagy, 2015). It is government`s imperative that universities should recruit more students and equip them with skills that are needed in the country and by other countries (Andrade, 2006). The countries that send their students to study in South Africa have the belief that their students would receive an education of good quality. Parents who choose to send their children to study in South Africa fork out large amounts of money to meet the cost of learning at South African universities (Andrade, 2006).

Though it may be beneficial to recruit international students, there exist cross-cultural problems that seem to be associated with the transition (Wang, 2008). During the initial transition, it is posited that international students could experience changes such as geographical location,

weather changes, food variety, language, dressing and social interactions (Wang, 2008; Bentley, 2008). It is through these experiences of change that researchers grapple with trying to fathom the challenges experienced by international students in South Africa. Researchers also intent on understanding what international students face at an interpersonal level and how South African universities support these students in adjusting to the new environment (Wan, Chapman & Biggs, 1992).

Although there has been a growth in literature on international studies in recent times regarding international students and their adjustment to international institutions (Constantine et al., 2005); it seems, however, that literature regarding international students in South Africa seems to be inadequate (Mokau, 2012). It was reported by Constantine et al (2005) that the number of international students travelling from Africa during the period of 2000-2001 increased to about 30 300 and the number is assumed to have been growing exponentially.

The research therefore aims to look at adjustment problems faced by international students in South Africa. The migration problems are experienced in all universities in South Africa since all international students have to comply with emigration and immigration laws (Lee & Rice, 2007). This study seeks to assess the adjustment problems faced by international students as they try to further their studies in South Africa, away from home. Specifically for South African studies such as the proposed study, one should note that student adjustment problems could be more challenging socially, economically and politically in a diverse country like South Africa.

Even if it may be known in literature that many international students often face difficulties in adjusting to the new environment, the addressing of these cross-cultural adjustment issues remain a challenge that students and universities in South Africa have to deal with (Wang, 2008; Wan et al., 1992). A number of universities have adopted strategies to try and help international students adapt in South Africa. However, student adjustment is largely incumbent upon the international student to make an effort to engage positively with the adversity encountered which might not be the direct responsibility of the university to initiate such strategies. According to Nicholson (2001), the university has the responsibility to help international students adjust but in reality many international students in South Africa and overseas struggle to survive. This study sought to look at the adjustment dynamics faced by international students as they try to cope with South Africa`s transforming higher education and society.

Rational for the study

This study seeks to bridge the gap in knowledge about what international students face in South Africa. There are civil wars in some of the countries in Africa and students from those countries would seek to further their education in South Africa. Some of the African countries that help their students to study in South Africa have impoverished economies to such an extent that some of the countries pay fees for the students late. In such situations international students suffer economically and they are more likely to face both social and academic exclusion.

Whilst there is growing literature regarding internationalisation in universities around the world there seems to be a number of studies that focus on the adjustment problems faced by international students in South Africa; regarding challenges such as falling currency in neighbouring countries, destitution of foreign students in South Africa and the ever-changing immigration laws to curb the inflow of immigrants into South Africa. Most of the studies conducted in the past did not include new scenarios that are created by the introduction of new immigration laws and policies governing international studentship in South Africa (Lee & Rice, 2007).These new immigration laws contribute to the number of difficulties international students face during registration and are likely to discourage the foreign students from pursuing their studies in South Africa. This study seeks to bridge the gap by researching the contemporary adjustment obstacles faced by international students in the wake of new immigration laws, deteriorating economic conditions and social discontent in South Africa.

Chapter 2: Literature review

It has always been noted that anyone that travels to a new environment, whether as an immigrant, a refugee or sojourner, will always face adjustment challenges (Dorozhkin & Mazitiva, 2008). Though the difficulties may not be severe for every international traveller, it is evident that international students tend to experience difficulties finding their way in a new place. Some of them experience maladjustment (Wang, 2008). In South Africa such international students are prone to face challenges relating to the introduction of new immigration laws, economic conditions and socio discontent.

Within the South African context international students from African countries generally complain about xenophobia which mainly affects Black African students (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Constantine et al., 2005). International students from Asia, Europe and the US report less of xenophobia in South Africa. The South African context in which universities operate is going through a political and economic upheaval that is characterised by wildcat student protests that sometimes paralyse universities. International students are caught in the fight between South African students and their government over the removal or reduction of university fees for South African students. When universities are forced to shut down foreign students get stranded and find themselves with no place to live or sleep. Thus it is inevitable that international students globally face adjustment problems.

Adjustment and acculturation

Adjustment, adaptation, acculturation and accommodation are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably (Searle and Ward, 1990). More so, a variety of variables have also been used in describing rather than giving a definitive meaning of adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Such variables tend to describe adjustment as a state, a process or a construct that incorporates a psychological dimension and a sociocultural component to its definition (Searle & Ward, 1990; Fritz, Chin & DeMarinis, 2008). Thus, this lack of clarity in the construct of adjustment may have created a gap in research on international students and the

cross-cultural transitional process (Ward & Chang, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990; Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010).

Despite the lack of clarity on what adjustment may entail, Yusoff and Chelliah (2010) simply describe adjustment as the fit that should occur between students and their academic environment. Ward and Chang (1997) use the terms ``person-situation`` interaction which could be related to the person-environment fit theory that is widely used in adaptation studies. Adjustment may be known as the transition one undergoes when one reaches an unfamiliar environment (Mudhovozi, 2011). It is through the definition provided by Mudhovozi (2011) that one identifies adjustment. It may not only occur during cross-cultural transition but can also occur in various situations such as the transition from university to the world of work (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Nolan & Morley, 2014). In order to successfully adjust to a new environment, it is essential that the individuals are satisfied cognitively and emotionally in their subjective perception of the new environment (Nolan & Morley, 2014). Failure to reach the satisfactory levels in relations to the new environment may inherently lead to maladjustment (Israel, 2013). Thus cross-cultural adjustment can be defined as the level of comfort and satisfaction one has with the host`s culture (Nolan & Morley, 2014).

Research shows that during the cross cultural transition, the types of adjustment individuals' face can be characterised into two categories known as the psychological and sociocultural types of adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Psychological adjustment pertains to the psychological and emotional wellbeing or satisfaction of an individual in a new environment and sociocultural adjustment refers to an individual's ability to fit in with the hosts cultural, social and behavioural aspects (Zhang &Goodson, 2010a,b; Baba & Hosoda, 2014). Psychological adjustment is associated with factors such as personality, perceived social support and coping strategies whereas sociocultural adjustment is associated with factors such as the individual's general knowledge, length of residence and social contact (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Wang & Mallingckrodt, 2006). Psychological adjustment has been theorised under the stress and coping framework, whereas sociocultural adjustment has been theorised within the social learning framework with factors pertaining to cognition and social skills (Zhang & Goodson, 2010a; Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010). Thus, these categories of adjustment have been

presented as predictive of international students` adjustment or adaptation in a foreign or international university.

Acculturation occurs when difficulties arise from the interaction between the different cultures (Greenland & Brown, 2005). Thus the resultant of this conflict tends to be known as cultural conflict and acculturative stress (Berry, 2005).According to Berry (2005, pp.473) acculturation is defined as:

"----those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups…. under this definition acculturation is to be disguised from assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation."

It is through these explanations that one can infer that acculturation within the South African context is the process of adaptation that occurs when international students meet with South African students in universities. Adaptation occurs through social interactions in diverse cultures, as well as the exchanges in food and fashion styles (Berry, 2005).

Individuals who fail to adjust to the new environment may be experiencing an inadequate transmission of cultural values that failed to be in sync with that of the new environment. This also shows aspects of the person-environment fit, whereby failure in achieving congruence between the individuals' values and those of the environment result in misfit and thus maladjustment (Edwards, 2008). According to Greenland and Brown (2005) not all individuals adjust to the new environmental conditions and those who fail to assimilate their cultural values with that of the environment tend to face consequences concerning their physical and psychological wellbeing. It is stated by Gilbreath, Kim and Nichols (2011) that a perception of a misfit between an international student`s attributes and the requirements of an international university could have consequences of dissatisfaction, decreased performance and poor health. Thus, it is essential that international students find coping mechanism that may help them establish congruence between their cultural values and the requirements of the host University and country.

There are comprehensive acculturation models that are used in organisations or universities to deal with foreign employees or international students (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-

Deuba, 1999). One of the models on acculturation has five factors that influence the acculturation process, these are: nature of the larger society; the type of acculturative group; modes of acculturation; demographic and social characteristics of the individual; and psychological characteristics of the individual (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). These factors play a significant role in understanding how international students adjust within the new environment.

The first factor which refers to the nature of the larger society implies the culture of the people in which the university is located (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). The second factor respectively refers to the different groups that occur during cross-cultural transition process. These categories include immigrants, refugees, native people, ethnic groups and sojourners (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). The third factor is known as the modes of acculturation and is determined through how two dimensions interact, namely a) attitudes towards the host culture in relation to seeking identity within the host culture and b) attitudes towards their home culture in relation to their own cultural identity (Wang & Mallingckrodt, 2006; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Four combinations that arose from the dimensions included assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. The fourth factor pertains to variables such as age, gender, finances, education and intercultural experiences an individual has prior to the transition. The fifth factor refers to the psychological characteristics of an individual (Wang &Mallingckrodt, 2006).

It is essential to further understand the modes of acculturation as they influence adaption (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward &Mallingckrodt, 2006). Integration refers to identifying highly with both the host and home cultures; Assimilation includes high levels of identification with host cultures and weakly with those of home; separation includes greater identification with home cultures and less with host cultures; and marginalisation refers to neither identifying with the host nor home cultures (Lee et al., 2004; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Researches regarding the modes of acculturation have noted that integrated individuals tend to experience less stress and adjustment difficulties, whereas individuals within the separation and marginalisation categories tend to experience greater stress and adjustment difficulties (Wand &Mallingckrodt, 2006; Wang & Kennedy, 1994). Individuals in the assimilation category face intermediate adjustment and stress levels (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Thus these factors of the acculturation model have been seen to have an effect on international students as they strive to adjust.

Though acculturation may have been historically conceptualised based on the values of developed countries` cultures, it serves as a useful model in this study. It complements the person-environment fit theory in analysing the group dynamics between international students and South African students when they meet in universities (Baba & Hosada, 2014). The learning environment is a meeting place for individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds. The international university is home to various ethnic groups and social classes that could present challenges to the international student as she/he tries to settle in and study (Berry, 2005; Mokau, 2012).

Theoretical framework

The person environment- fit has been defined as the fit or compatibility that occurs between an individual and the environment (Schmitt et al., 2008). This type of theoretical framework was developed for the purpose of the workplace environment and the understanding of the dynamics that occur regarding the behaviour and the attitude of employees in organisations (Yu, 2009). Thus, it understands adjustment as the interaction that occurs between an individual's characteristics and those of the environment (Nolan & Morley, 2014). It should be borne in mind that individual differences and experiences do occur in various environments (Pawlowska, Wersterman, Bergman & Huelsman, 2014).

The person- environment fit theory has been categorised in terms of supplementary fit and complementary fit (Edwards, 2008). Supplementary fit pertains to the similar characteristics an individual possesses to those of the organisations; whereas complementary fit pertains to a reciprocal relationship that occurs when both the individual and the organisation possess characteristics that benefit one another (Schmitt et al., 2008). These categories then set the foundations upon which several fits occur, such being the demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit (Etzel & Nagy, 2015; Yu, 2009). Other fits that may also be recognised are those of person-job fit; person-organisation fit; person-group fit and person-supervisor fit (Schmitt et al., 2008; Nolan & Morley, 2014).

The needs-supplies fit, under the complementary fit category, is defined as the degree to which a match occurs between the individual`s need and the organisation`s supplies of rewards; whereas the demands-abilities fit, under the supplementary category, is understood as the degree to which a match between the organisation`s needs or demands and the individual`s ability to fulfil occurs

(Edwards, 2008; Nolan & Morley, 2014; Yu, 2009). The person-organisation fit also falls under these categories and pertains to the match between the person's values and the values of the organisation (Yu, 2009). The types of fits that occur are considered in both the organisational setting and the academic setting (Etzel & Nagy, 2015).

Adjustment within the higher education domain, in accordance with the person-environment fit, deals with the match that occurs between the characteristics of the individual student and those of the institution (Hutz, Martin & Beitel, 2007). In regard to the complementary fit, students` needs of gaining academic achievements need to be matched with the resources provided by the university (Edwards, 2008; Hutz et al., 2007). The university environment may also demand aspects such as assessments, examinations and similar expectations and those demands should be congruent to the abilities and skills of the students (Etzel& Nagy, 2015; Hutz et al., 2007). Therefore, in order for an individual student to adjust to the new environment, congruence or compatibility should occur (Gilbreath, Kim & Nichols, 2011).

The person-organisation fit may also pertain to international students in that, international students` values, culture and norms should fit with those of the host country in order for the student to successfully adjust to the new environment (Yu, 2009). According to Etzel and Nagy (2015) demands-abilities fit inherently leads to better performance; whereas needs-abilities fit leads to greater satisfaction and wellbeing. It is argued that students who experience a misfit in these aspects tend to experience decreased satisfaction, wellbeing and performance (Gilbreath et al., 2011). Thus, though person-environment fit may be organisational based, it may also be applicable to the academic context (Etzel& Nagy, 2015).

Causes and consequences

The causes of maladjustment among international students are linked to the models and theories of adjustment. Maladjustment among international students could be explained using various approaches. Maladjustment occurs due to the incongruence between the student and the university (Yu, 2009). As mentioned, other factors such as age, gender and language could affect successful adjustment of international students (Wan, Chapman & Biggs, 1992). The most common causes of maladjustment among international students are acculturative stress, academic and life stresses, perceived discrimination, lack of social support, lack of peer interaction and financial problems (Zhang & Goodson, 2010b; Yakunina et al., 2013). Cultural

conflict has also been reported to cause maladjustment amongst international students (Constantine et al., 2005). Thus, the discrepancies experienced by the student in terms of diverse worldviews, norms, values, culture and values of the host country might cause maladjustment in students. The consequences could be inability to meet personal and academic demands among international students (Al-Shariden & Goe, 1998).

In addition to cultural conflict, it can be noted that cross-cultural transitions on their own result in life changes that may have an impact upon an individual (Searle & Ward, 1990). Lee et al (2004) suggested that cultural distance had an effect on how students adjust in a new environment. Cultural distance refers to the degree to which differences occur between two cultures (Searle & Ward, 1990). The greater the difference, the greater an individual experiences stress (Lee et al., 2004). According to Lee et al (2004), most of the Asian students in Europe normally report more experiences of stress due to the differences between the two cultural contexts.

Acculturative stress is defined as the psychological disorientation that results during cross-cultural transition (Yakunina et al., 2013). The consequences that are resultant of maladjustment and acculturative stress include loneliness, sadness, fear, homesickness and social withdrawal (Yakunina et al., 2013). The psychological symptoms also include depression, anxiety, helplessness; whereas the physical symptoms tend to be those of loss of appetite, low energy, illnesses and somatic complaints (Russell, Rosenthal & Thomson, 2010). Reynold and Constantine (2007) as well as Constantine et al (2005) acknowledged that the consequences of stress are associated with psychological stress, physiological complaints, mental health complaints and poor physical health.

Not only does maladjustment result in both psychological distress and physical distress, it has an impact on a student`s academic success (Kambouropoulos, 2014). This aspect is also supported by Wang (2008), Wan et al., (1992) and Sherry, Thomas and Chui (2009). Another consequence that results from maladjustment is culture shock (Jenkins & Galloway, 2009). Culture shock is described as the cognitive dissonance that occurs in an individual when they find that their own culture is incompatible with the culture and practices in a new environment. The initial transition in an unfamiliar place with a different way of life could cause discomfort in some of the international students (Wang, 2008). Culture shock results from the incongruence that occurs

between an individual's cultural norms and those of their host country (Nicholson, 2001). Such cultural aspects may be those of differences in food, language, weather, dressing and behaviour (Maundeni, Malinga, Kgwatalala & Kasule, 2010). Besides, students learn to navigate their way at an international university despite the culture shock during the transitional phase between the home environment and the university environment.

Adjustment problems

Having addressed adjustment and maladjustment, it is essential to tackle the adjustment problems international students may face in their daily lives. The initial problems international students might face upon arrival in the new environment could be finding means of transport to the institution, dealing with differences in language and sensitivity to their interaction with strangers in the host country (Mokau, 2012). The difficulties could be varied and surfacing at different periods (Dorozhkin & Mazitova, 2008; Wan et al., 2008). The international students could face challenges such as academic pressure, accommodation, financial issues, perceived discrimination, relationship difficulties, language barriers, cultural differences or immigration regulations (Lee & Rice, 2007; Baba & Hosoda, 2014).It may be worth noting that international students face various difficulties that tend to affect local students as well (Kaczmarek et al., 1995).

The communication problem faced by international students is that of proficiency in the languages of the host country (Yates & Wahid, 2013). Language barriers occur when international students need to understand and communicate with the people of the host country and failure to communicate results in difficulties getting along and making friendships (Wang, 2008). According to Nicholson (2001) language difficulties that occur predict how an individual adjusts socially in the country and most importantly such limitations could affect academic success. The language barrier mainly affects international students who come from countries that have a different medium of communication to that of the host international university. For example, students from French speaking African countries, or Portuguese speaking countries, find it difficult to start learning and communicating in English or Afrikaans in South African universities. Although not all international students face the language barrier, it has been documented to affect students negatively (Bentley, 2008).

Huntley (1993) noted that within the American context students who adjust successfully tend to be those who possess the proficiency of both the conventional and formal English language. Zhai (2002) also stressed the same point that lack of proficiency in the English language in the US increased the chances of international students experiencing greater academic problems. Students from Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa whose countries do not have English as an official language of communication could take more time to finish their studies at American universities. The students need an adequate proficiency in the English language in order to communicate in the US and this includes aspects such as proficiency in accents, slang, enunciation and other subtle language characteristics employed by the first language speakers in their daily interactions (Wang, 2008; Zhai, 2002). According to Huntley (1993) students who struggle with communicating in English tend to enrol in extra English classes in order to reach an adequate level. This extra activity may put a strain on students as it requires extra efforts as well as extended working days on their studies (Castaneda. 2008). It has also been shown that most international students coming from countries which may not use English as their priority language tend to struggle not only in academic settings but also in social interactions that are a requisite in successful adjustment (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Thus academic difficulties that may occur specifically for international students are often linked with the level of English or dominant language within the host country. Lee et al (2004) noted that students often face academic difficulties as they fail to communicate within the academic setting as well as struggle to adjust to the new education system. This point has been noted in Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1998). Yeh and Inose (2003) have identified that students who struggle with adjusting to the new environment due to language barriers could face challenges like psychological adjustment or poor academic performance.

International students may need to get accustomed to the new ways of learning, teaching and interacting with lecturers in the host country (Wan et al., 1992). Other aspects pertaining to academic problems may be those of reading academic materials, participation in classroom discussions and debates and the drafting of quality notes during lecture sessions and seminars (Bentley, 2008; Selvadurai, 1992). The international students would need to familiarise themselves with current economic, political, social and health issues affecting the country in order be able to contribute meaningfully to the academic debate. Academic problems that have

been illustrated in the American context as affecting international students due to cultural differences among students could be evident in South Africa. Asian students who come from a collectivist background tend to have difficulties relating to lecturers and quickly making relationships with American students who have an individualistic background. These students from collectivist background have been taught to remain quiet and reserved and only allowed to speak when spoken to but the US context would require the students to initiate contact and fully participate in lectures and ask questions as well (Lee et al., 2004). In South Africa, the student population is diverse as all continents of the world have people studying in South Africa.

Financial problems affect adjustment and academic performance among international students (Castaneda, 2008). It is expected that international students need to be financially equipped prior to travelling abroad for their studies. They need money to adjust in the new environment (Nicholson, 2001). According to Baba & Hosoda (2014) the financial problems relate to prospects of part-time student employment and access to financial aid for students. It is not easy for international students to get part-time employment due to stringent labour laws and it is also not easy for international students to access bursaries, loans and donor funds for academic purposes. Lee et al (2004) noted that international students in most countries are not allowed to work outside the university. This creates a financial strain for the international student as most university jobs are limited and in demand. It was reported that most Chinese students at universities away from home experienced stress due to the lack of financial support (Nicholson, 2001).

Financial constraints cause the student to fail to get decent accommodation. If a student gets accommodation in a bad place, sharing living space with criminals, drug dealers or people previously convicted of gender-based violence that makes a student vulnerable to abuse. Inadequate funding causes student to seek cheap accommodation on the open market that is usually found in squalid conditions. The international student with limited financial resources might not afford to pay rent every month, buy the essential textbooks and pay for tuition fees on time (Nicholson, 2001). Travel costs to and fro the university could be high in a busy city (Mokua, 2012). The cost of food, grooming, and the purchase of trendy clothing to keep up with the fashionable life-style of young university students is expensive. Going out on excursions,

partying and large spending on social occasions are common activities among university students (Perdersen & LaBrie, 2007)

Discrimination against foreigners in general and international students in particular is a global problem. There are laws that are clearly stipulated for immigrants and foreign students in every country. Some of the laws and policies governing immigration could be perceived as discriminatory by international students (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). According to Constantine et al (2005) African students studying in the United States experience racial discrimination. This point was reiterated by Baba and Hosoda (2014) by mentioning that African students tended to face prejudice and discrimination even from fellow students in the host country. Though international students experience different types of discrimination, racial discrimination has been noted to result in social withdrawal amongst those that perceive the discrimination (Mokau, 2012; Baba &Hosoda, 2014).

Though immigration regulations are essential to countries, some international students experience problems with regards to visa applications (Lee & Rice, 2007). Visa applications go through rigorous scrutiny to weed out undesirable applicants. Some of the applications are declined and failure to get a study permit causes discontent among applicants. The international students could view the visa requirement as biased against them, as they perceive the requesting of too many documents rigorous. The immigration officers are sometimes perceived as rude or lacking understanding of the student`s circumstances. If immigration documents are not in order, the student would struggle to register. They could be moving from one office to other and they would make frequent visits to the visa office, home embassy and the university in order to have their stay and study in the country approved and sanctioned. The registration process is usually not a smooth process for international student s, some experience problems during registration (Maundeni et al., 2010).

A common registration problem that affects the admission of international students is that of verification of academic qualifications. Some of the students come from countries with different educational systems (Mokau, 2012). International universities tend to rely on external sources to verify the qualifications or they could refer to the student`s country to clarify the equivalence of the academic certificates to those of the host country. It is not an easy task for the international university, considering that some countries have no link offices or identifiable departments to

deal with overseas studies. Whereas South Africa has the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), an independent body that evaluates foreign qualifications, most of the countries in Africa and other developing countries do not have such an entity.

International students are prone to loneliness and homesickness, as well as the loss of social support in some situations (Russell et al., 2010; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Having to move from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar environment poses a challenge chatting to strangers (Bentley, 2008). Some of the international students might be confused (Constantine et al., 2005) while others could develop interpersonal difficulties (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007).

According to Zhai (2002) some international students often face difficulties in social integration. This relays back to difficulties in communications. Huntley (1993) noted that international students within the United States who had inadequate English skills often engaged less with American students. Social interactions play a role in how students adjust to the new environment, as was noted by Abe et al (1998) that international students who spent more time with host nationals adapted successfully than those who were socially isolated. Yeh and Inose (2003) also noted that the cultural differences that were noticed formed barriers that prevented social interactions that were essential in forming close relationships with American students.

It is necessary to bear in mind that these problems do not affect all international students and differences in the severity of integration difficulties vary from one student to the other (Wan et al., 1992). It has also been noted that these inherent adjustment problems tend to differ in adversity based on age, gender, country and community of origin, race and ethnicity, as well as language proficiency (Bentley, 2008; Jenkins & Galloway, 2009). Thus successful adjustment may be dependent upon a number of factors. However, research has placed greater emphasis on the role of social support in the alleviation of maladjustment (Israel, 2013).

Coping mechanisms

According to Tanaka et al (1997), international students have a tendency to build social networks that may temporarily replace the social networks from their country of origin. Through these networks they build social support systems to help each other in times of need. The network acts as a stress buffer that reduces maladjustment among international students (Lee & Rice, 2007; Tanaka et al., 1997). The more international students interact with the host nationals the lesser

their chances of feeling dissatisfied within the new environment (Sherry et al., 2009). Though not given in greater detail, according to Baba and Hosoda (2014) three models of social support exist that support the effects of social support upon international students. These are direct effects; stress buffering and social support deterioration.

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) also reported that the formation of social support systems for international students may be important in adjusting to the new environment. The students tend to form networks based on their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as similarities in nationalities (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Bentley, 2008). According to Nicholson (2001) Asian international students overseas tend to have most of their social networks made up of friends who were other international students rather than host nationals. Mudhovozi (2011) also reported that international students mainly regarded their families as their biggest social support systems, though other support systems may be formed from interactions with roommates, classmates, religious group members and other social circles.

According to Yosoffs and Chelliah (2010) social support is predictive of depression and stress. Low social support for international students within the new environment has a significant effect upon their psychological wellbeing (Yeh & Inose, 2008). According to Searle and Ward (1990) international students with close relationships with fellow international students experience lower levels of stress; whereas international students who experience social isolation or exclusion experience greater levels of stress (Yusoffs & Chelliah, 2010).

Searle and Ward (1990) noted that the most significant source of social support, particularly emotional support international students preferred were fellow nationals, whereas host nationals were some source of sojourner adjustment. Some international students preferred family and friends as their sources of social support (Zhai, 2002). Yeh and Inose (2003) mentioned that social support in academic matters enables the student to adapt to the university. Thus it is essential that universities initiate academic support for international students.

Even though social support systems are key to reducing maladjustment, the US academic environment sometimes lacks in providing international students with the tools of successful transition (Castaneda et al., 2008). There are cases where universities provide orientation programmes, counselling sessions, faculty assistance and other forms of guidance needed by the

student but these could be negatively construed by international students as superficial or window-dressing strategies to present a positive public image . Universities in India have also been noted to work with the government in order to provide universities with services that are considered beneficial to international students (Karky, 2012). Such services include orientation programmes, the establishment of student centres, websites providing relevant information and activities that link international students together and other stakeholders (Karky, 2012).

According to Abe et al (1998) international students that participated in peer programmes initiated by the university had significant improvement in their academic achievement and adjustment. These students were paired with a host national throughout the programme in order to establish a social bond that reduced the cultural distance. Thus they experienced lower levels of stress than non-participants (Abe et al., 1998). Huntley (1993) mentioned that universities that initiated programmes upon arrival of international students had greater chances of diverting significant difficulties international students might have faced.

Another factor that plays a significant role in student adjustment is social connectedness (Yusoffs & Chelliah, 2010). Social connectedness is understood in terms of how the student`s sense of self is connected to others in relationships (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Individuals with higher levels of social connectedness easily form relationships with other people within the new environment as compared to those with lower levels of social connectedness (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Thus, both social connectedness and social support are essential in how international students adjust to the new environment (Sherry et al., 2009).

Universities often tend to place the responsibility of successful adjustment upon the individuals and may tend to disregard the efforts of initiating such a process (Sherry et al., 2009; Castaneda, 2008). As mentioned earlier, a number of factors play a role in the successful adjustment of international students (Bentley, 2008). Jenkins and Galloway (2009) noted that older students along with students who have established stronger social support systems face reduced maladjustment. International students whose personality plays against their ability to form social networks face greater chances of maladjustment in various areas, including social exclusion (Sherry et al., 2009; Yakunina et al., 2013). Thus, international students are encouraged to find their own coping strategies at an international university abroad in order to adjust to the new environment (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).

Aims of the study

The aim of the study was to assess the adjustment problems faced by international students in South Africa, closely relating to the introduction of the new immigration laws, deteriorating economic conditions and social discontent. The study also looked at the coping mechanisms used by international students to adjust at South African universities.

Research questions

(1) What are the adjustment problems faced by international students at South African universities?

(2) What are the coping mechanisms used by international students in order to adjust to the university environment?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research design

The research design that was adopted was the qualitative research design. Qualitative research design allows for an exploration and an understanding of subjective experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Participants` views were obtained verbatim as they responded to questions. There are various approaches under qualitative research design and the one approach to be followed is a phenomenological approach in which participants` views on the subject are taken into consideration. This approach entails the examination of information from the participants through exploration of their experiences as firsthand information (Smith, 2007; Mudhovozi, 2011). This allows the researcher to objectively explore the data obtained with no prior expectations.

Participants

The study recruited 14 participants from the University of the Witwatersrand. These students were from various departments and faculties throughout the university. Participants were international students. The demographic representation of the participants comprised Black, Indian and White students. There were eight females and six males. Of the eight females, seven were Black and one was White. There was one male Indian and four Black males. Most of the participants were originally from African countries and one from a European country. Most of the participants came as sojourners, whereas a few came as refugees. The numbers of years these participants lived within South Africa ranges from a couple of months to about six years. The demographic information is provided in Appendix E.

Research Instruments

An interview schedule developed for this study was used to interview participants (see Appendix D). Participants` views were taped-recorded. The questions were open-ended to allow for an exploration of the participants` experiences. The interview schedule had five open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide responses that could be further elaborated on. The open-ended questions are suitable for a qualitative research design in that they allowed the researcher to extract important points from the participants` open-ended responses.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, an ethical clearance for the study was applied for at the University of the Witwatersrand (provided in Appendix F). Upon approval of the study data collection then began. At the beginning of data collection, pamphlets were created to recruit international students and were placed on noticeboards across the campus. This process did not yield much participation and another attempt to recruit students was sought. The researcher then approached the International Office of the university and an invitation email was sent out to international students with the details of the study in order to invite international students to participate in the study. Out of the many international students that received an email, 14 participants responded to the email with an interest to participate in the study.

The students were contacted via email and consented to participate on a voluntary basis. Students who gave consent to participating were briefed on the aims of the research, what it entailed and further details of what was required. The students were also given a participant information sheet to keep should any queries arise (provided in Appendix A). The students then filled an informed consent form to be interviewed and tape-recorded (provided in Appendix B and C). Those who agreed were interviewed. The interview recordings were, at a later stage, transcribed and analysed. The data collected from the interview recordings were handed over to the supervisor for storage in a password-protected computer.

Data analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The aim of using thematic content analysis was to allow for an interpretation of themes that occurred during the interviews (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Thematic content analysis allows one to extract sets of information or data that occur across all participants, which makes it, a flexible tool that allows for a descriptive and detailed account of participants` personal views (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Thus these themes were extracted from the interview scripts that were transcribed. Recurrent themes that emerged during data analysis were identified and categorised.

Reflexivity

During the research process, with particular reference to the interview, the researcher was aware that feelings of sympathy could develop but remained neutral and maintained professionalism and empathy. The researcher was aware of personal bias and avoided imposing personal views on participants. Although qualitative research requires objectivity, analysing such data could influence the researcher to be subjective in reporting results. It was therefore imperative that the researcher had to be reflexive and went through a process of personal introspection in order to mininse bias in the research process.

Ethical considerations

The study followed ethical standards so that participants` rights were not violated by the study. The ethical principles that were followed were those of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. All participants were required to sign informed consent forms to show that they agreed to participate in the study. No information that was collected by the researcher was passed on to third parties. No names of participants appear on any part of the research report. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured as pseudonyms were used where applicable.

Chapter 4: Results

The results of this study were based on the views of fourteen participants. The themes that emerged in this study explained the challenges faced by international students in South Africa. The themes are: reason for choosing to study in South Africa, first settling in experiences, financial constraints, registration process, language problems, visa application and immigration laws, cultural differences, diversity, discrimination, academic challenge, homesickness, social support, institutional assistance, coping strategies and suggestions for improvement.

It is worth noting that academic challenge as a theme was only mentioned by two participants out of the fourteen participants; the majority did not have an issue with their academic adjustment. The themes are discussed in relation to the challenges faced by international students in South Africa.

Reason for choosing to study in South Africa

This theme formed part of the rapport-building questions participants answered in order to openly engage with the researcher. All participants responded to this question, which yielded a 100 percent response rate. Their responses were recorded as follows:

***Participant** 1: "I have always wanted to further my studies and didn't really aim for South Africa. My husband came to South Africa and studied here and he applied for me… so I got the place."*

***Participant** 7: "Well, my wife works here in South Africa… So last year I came here for work but I searched for universities and somebody told me that Wits was a good university, so I took that option."*

***Participant 13**: "I do have relatives here so I think it played a huge role, well my uncle… recommended the education system here so I think that's the main reason I came here."*

From these responses given, it can be noted that all the above participants had family members and relatives in South Africa. It shows that family issues had an influence on the choice of a university in South Africa by international students.

The offer of specialised courses that were not available in home countries influenced international students to migrate to South Africa. South Africa had more prospects of job opportunities on completion of studies.

Participant 2: *"Well, I had a vision to study neurosciences and it was not offered back home. So I had to find a country that offered it but is not from home, plus I was only 17 years old. I wanted to go to Canada but I was still a minor according to their laws, so South Africa allowed me to come study here."*

Participant 11*: "It's because there are better opportunities here, job opportunities than back at home."*

Participant 9*: "It's just the opportunities because there aren't many opportunities back at home in terms of the kind of degrees you can pursue and the level of education you can get is quite different."*

Participant 4: *``It was the closest place where I could get a post-graduate degree in Psychology apart from where I come from."*

All the participants highlighted reasons that pertained to opportunities one could get in a different environment compared to that of home. They also gave reasons why they chose a university in South Africa due to the variety of degrees offered. South Africa was also near home for some of the international students. ***Participant 11*** added that:

"It's because it's near home and it's easy to connect with the people here."

Participant 6added*: "I would like to go to the U.S or the U.K but looking at schools in terms of standards and fees, Wits struck me and I have a friend here, a classmate from university and he said Wits is good so I decided to go with South Africa."*

Participant 8*: "Because everybody in Southern Africa wants to come study in South Africa because its where the biggest universities are and because I am Zimbabwean the standard of education isn't that high and there are no more opportunities that's why I chose to come."*

Participant 14: *"Currently in Africa to say the least, South Africa's tertiary education is highly ranked; the credibility is very high everywhere across Europe, Australia and the U.S, so that is one of the big benefits of doing tertiary in South Africa"*

Participant 10: *"I came to study in South Africa when I was thirteen. I didn't want that after completing my matric or what they would call in Botswana form 5 to have to redo matric … so if I come to South Africa I would have an advantage… Not only that, the education system here in terms of private schools is different from where I come from."*

These responses highlighted the comparative decisions made by international students when they chose to study in South Africa. Some of the aspects that influenced their choice were the high standard of education in South Africa and the world ranking of some of the universities in South Africa. The reputation of the institution where the qualification was obtained was perceived as giving participants credibility in their fields of study.

Some of the participants indicated that at times the choice to study in South Africa was due to inevitable circumstances.

Participants 5: *"I wanted to do my PHD, so I felt I needed something international…I wanted to pick the U.S but I did not like the way the school treated me. Then I looked at South Africa and saw that it was cheaper in education… I chose south Africa."*

Participant 12: *"I decided to come here; I think it was a bit unexpected. It was at the end of my Masters and my supervisor proposed to me that I should come to South Africa to make my studies and I didn't know about it… so I thought it would be interesting and then I decided to come."*

Participant 3*: "It wasn't my choice, my mom made that choice. She sort of compared the standard of Congo and another country and just chose a different country for better education."*

Various factors are considered by international students when they relocate to South Africa for educational advancement. Some of the reasons were personal choices and others were circumstantial, however, whatever the reasons may have been, South Africa seems to be one of the famous destinations sought by international students.

First settling inexperience's

The theme showed the initial settling in challenges encountered by international students. Most of the students experienced difficulties as illustrated in participants` responses.

Participant 2: "*Well, it wasn't easy coming to a country where they speak different languages from the ones you know. I come from a French speaking country so when I came to South Africa, I didn't know a single word in English besides `hello` and `how are you`. So I came with my sister and when we were at the airport we had interviews because we were here to study. I don't know what I was asked but I answered."*

Another participant had a slightly different experience.

Participant 9: *"Obviously you think it's not going to be weird because you watch these things on TV and it's almost like the same language… When you come here everyone is expecting you to speak IsiZulu. Well, fine you know it from watching soapies but it's hard to adjust to and to immediately try to answer in Zulu."*

Participants` responses highlighted the aspects of language difficulties that they experienced once they came to South Africa. Not only were their first experiences based on language barriers, other participants` experiences were also based on the expectations they had of South Africa.

Participant 12*: "So far, I experienced a bit of travelling… The social context I experienced but not really the way I expected it. I was expecting to meet more people and to make friends; but I find it difficult to go out of what people see you as, like being a White woman and it became difficult to meet other people that are different form me."*

The initial experiences were generally difficult. Their expectations were not met initially and they faced language barriers. Some of the international students experienced culture shock. Other participants reported that prior information that one gets of a country may have contributed to the difficulties or facilitated adaptation and integration in South Africa. This was evident in the following responses:

Participant 5: *"Before I came I got a lot of information saying South Africa is not okay security-wise and you get scared. So when I came in I didn't want to talk to people. I didn't want to ask anything, I needed help but I decided not to do that."*

Participant 7: *"Well, at that time I was more scared to go outside from my place… after I drop off my wife at work, I would be scared to leave, but after a couple of days I made some friends, some African friends, so I was not scared…."*

When asked follow up questions on what their prior thoughts were of South Africa, the participants stated that:

Participant 5: *"The crime rate was high; you don't talk to people on the streets, when you see people you keep to yourself they might get drugs dropped in your pocket or something, so you don't want to talk to people at all."*

Participant 7: *"Past experiences - some Indians told me, that it was not secure, they will crook you…."*

Both participants highlighted the aspects of crime that are reported worldwide and may have contributed to the ways in which they behaved and conducted themselves initially in South Africa. Though the participants` experiences might not have been as easy as they would have thought or expected, some of the participants found their experiences to have been good first experiences. Their responses were recorded as follows:

Participant 6: *"It's been good, I come from a tropical island which is always hot but here winter just passed but its good; it's a new experience but has been good."*

Participant 13*: "I think it was quite good because I had people here, my uncle was here, so I stayed with him for a couple of weeks before I found a place in Braam."*

Thus, some students had better experiences as opposed to others. Throughout the study, however, one participant had a response that stood out as compared to other participants` experiences. She elaborated her experiences as follows:

Participant 10: *"Traumatising! Firstly, I was turning fourteen that year. Secondly I moved from living in my parents' house, having my socks washed, having everything being done for me, to going to a school whereby you were governed by bells and people telling you what to do…not only that… people say they've got…support systems for people who come from two different*

places, the culture is different, the language is different… It's very difficult to adjust, to like new people especially when you young, it's very difficult."

Her experiences not only pertained to experiences that affect cross-cultural transitions but also included aspects of adjustment from one developmental stage to another. First Year students tend to experience challenges when they try to adjust to a new educational environment.

Financial constraints

Financial problems encompass a range of money-related difficulties faced by international students. This theme emerged as one of the major problems that affected international students in their studies. However, some of the international students had no financial problems. Some were funded by their governments, companies and independent sponsors who provided scholarships. Usually people who seek to study abroad come from affluent families. Six participants amongst the fourteen participants interviewed shared positive experiences; they did not have financial constraints. The participants were asked whether they had experienced any issues or difficulties relating to financial matters and their responses were recorded as follows:

Participant 2: *"No, I wouldn't say I did. I depend on my parents, so they supported me and help me financially."*

Participant 4*: "No, before I came I had been working so I saved up a lot of money, so I was able to apply anywhere. So I wouldn't say I faced any challenges that would have barred me from coming."*

Participant 4 further elaborated that their ability to come and study in South Africa was sponsored by government.

"*I am under government sponsorship, so when it comes to studying, the only thing I do is apply to a school."*

A similar response was obtained from ***Participan*t 12** who stated that:

"Well for me, it's okay because I have a grant. So I could manage to do it; but I recognise that it must be hard for people who don't have grants…."

It was highlighted by some of the participants that they experienced financial difficulties and that financial constraints compromised their studies.

***Participant 1**: "Finances is a huge thing. Accommodation, food, all resources… for an international student you don't really qualify for NRF and most sponsorship. So it might be hard when you don't have funds; so it affects a lot, even your academic potential."*

This was supported by another participant.

***Participant 3:** "The thing with finances, if you don't have a source from Canada, like you rely on South Africa then it becomes a problem. Like jobs for foreigners are not a lot and if they do get a job it's not enough to sustain them. So unless you have someone out there then you are okay."*

Finding accommodation and accommodation fees were a problem for international students.

***Participant 5**: "I had to move out because I had problems with funding."*
"It's been hard. Last year it was okay because I saved some money and my girlfriend was there, my mom and my sister were there."

Participants indicated that financial constraints affected their personal lives at the university. They were required to pay huge registration fees and to clear the balance in a shorter time than South African students. It was difficult for international students to obtain bursaries and scholarships in South Africa, as most of the state-sponsored bursaries were for South African citizens.

***Participant 14:** "Like for the past three years, every January when I have to pay the upfront fees, my dad doesn't like loans, so he takes from my savings, which is a big issue. Its pressure on me especially from my mom, she's like don't fail, we pay too much for you, yeah and so it's not helping them in terms of savings."*

***Participant 8:** "The problem is… they say if you are an international student… you have to pay the money in full before you move in, which is a problem, because you have to pay 75% of the fees at the same time."*

***Participant 14:** "Most bursaries are kind of strictly written for citizens only."*

Participant 6: *"Most of the issues that I had were finances… finance, I feel, is skewed towards south Africans and it's very hard for foreigners to get grant, like for instance, there are cases were a foreigner is more qualified than the south African but they can't access it."*

Most of the participants agreed that international students in South Africa with limited financial resources were prone to face difficulties. The international students pointed out that their situation was worsened by university policies that were stricter for international students and organisations that provide study grants in South Africa which tend to use discriminatory policies to exclude international students with the academic potential but financially incapacitated.

Registration process

The registration process was reported to be cumbersome. Most of the responses showed that it was an exhausting process that required many documents to be submitted. Information on the computer has to be matched with hardcopies to prove the authenticity of documents submitted. There was liaison between the University`s International Office and the Department of Home Affairs to ensure that immigration requirements were met. The International Office communicated with SAQA to verify qualifications before the student approached the Enrolment Centre to register for their studies. The Student Enrolment Centre of the University would liaise with the International Office and Fees Office to make sure that certificates submitted were authentic and all the required fees had been paid by the international student.

Participants` responses highlighted the situation.

Participant 1*: "It was okay, not that difficult. It's not a long rigorous process; it's just submitting your documents."*

Participant 14: "Well, I think getting good grades is key and then you have to pay a large amount for application for upfront fees."

Although some of the participants did not experience difficulties during registration, others experienced difficulties as they tried to register. These participants' responses were as follows:

***Participant 12**: "I think the most difficult thing is registration, and I think it depends on where you from, but for European people I suppose it's that…you have to change the way you live in general. So I think it's the first thing and the registration is a problem."*

The point was supported by another participant.

***Participant 13:** "For the registration too, you need to go to the Faculty and then come back for international clearance and then pay 75% of your fees and all that."*

He further added that the whole process should be made easier for most international students as noted in his comment.

"It would be nice if they could just find a way to make it easier."

One participant's response highlighted the broader aspect of the registration process. She illustrated how this process would be considered rigorous and a difficult process to go through for international students.

***Participant 10**: "I would change the registration process, it's the worst. You have to have your acceptance letter, plus your permit, plus medical aid, plus proof of payment. So what you do first is you go to the Faculty and then get a paper and write down your subjects, and then Fees Office and get the amount of subjects; then go back to Faculty to get a stamp; then you go back to Fees Office to get a fees clearance; then you go to International Office to get an international clearance; then only you can register."*

It is these registration requirements that make the registration process problematic for international students.

***Participant 8:** "The only difference comes with registration, like we can't register online whereas the local students can. So we have to come here personally and start the whole process and registration is around mid-January and schools open around February and that time gap is too much."*

The registration process requires the student to be physically present and yet it could be done online. It becomes expensive to leave the home country and go to South Africa for registration only and return home before the university opens.

Participant 9: *"When it comes to registration, you find that you have to register late. Well it's because it didn't get my application approval status yet. I didn't know what was happening so I actually had to come here last minute to ask whether I am accepted or rejected and all my friends also had to come here physically for the process as well."*

The responses of participants showed that they preferred an easier registration process that could be done online in the home country before the student travelled to South Africa.

Language problems

It is well documents that most international students in many countries tend to experience language problems. In this study most of the participants noted that language becomes a barrier when one is in South Africa. A few participants did not mention facing issues with regards to language.

Participant 8*: "In Botswana it was mostly Indians and Botswana people, here you find different cultures and languages."*

He further added that:

"*English! Just by knowing English because even if there are friends who speak different languages, they all communicate using English."*

Another participant also noted that:

Participant 11*: "It was easy for me; I understand the language and ja some people who speak Shona, I think it becomes hard… but then language is not really a problem because most people speak English here…."*

The responses showed that English was the main medium of communication at the university. Though this may be true in some instances, some of the participants experienced challenges in the use of English language. The other participants pointed out that it was the South African indigenous languages that acted as a barrier to communication among students. A few participants reported having issues with the English language when they initially arrived in South Africa.

***Participant 2**: "I come from a French-speaking country; so when I came to South Africa I didn't know any word in English besides hello and how are you… So the language was a barrier."*

She further added that in order to overcome the challenge she enrolled in extra lessons as stated below:

"*I went to an English centre before I came to university. I studied English for eight months."*

Another participant also shared a similar experience.

***Participant 14**: "I just had to study English first."*

He further added that although he had made progress in understanding English, he still faced challenges in relation to the other South African languages.

"Mostly when they talk in English anywhere I do pay attention because I can listen and get the message. But as soon as it changes to other local languages there I feel firstly lost…."

Another participant also expressed her experiences as follows:

***Participant 12:** "When I arrived it was not really easy because my English was not so great, but now I think I got used to it. I can speak English and its fine. I understand when people speak to me and it's okay. The only thing is that I don't understand the other languages."*

Failure to speak the South African indigenous languages offended some of the South African students.

***Participant 1:** "...With the different languages, I faced situations where if you don't know a certain language you are frowned upon. You speak in English and you don't respond in that particular language, they sort of take offence."*

A similar experience was shared by another participant as she stated that:

***Participant 9**: "When you come here everyone is expecting you to speak in IsiZulu. Well fine you know it from watching soapies but it was hard to adjust and to immediately try to answer in Zulu, but at times you just speak in English and it just makes you feel weird because you appear as a coconut because you don't want to speak vernacular languages."*

Another participant, though she may have not personally experienced the language barrier, noted that other students did face such a challenge.

***Participant 11**: "So, for people who speak Shona, I think it becomes hard because even when we are back at home they don't understand Ndebele; so if you come here you meet all these cultures. Because I had a Shona friend, even right now he doesn't like it when I speak Ndebele because he says he doesn't understand what I am saying and they easily get irritated."*

The language barrier was moderated by the use of English language for communication among students and the university at which the study was conducted uses English as the official medium of communication, teaching, learning and assessment.

Visa application process and migration laws

This theme emerged as one of the major themes, as twelve out of the fourteen participants shared various experiences regarding the processes surrounding visa applications and the migration laws. It is an international requirement that international students get study permits.

It seemed that the majority of the participants faced challenges with regards to visa applications.

***Participant 5**: "No, no I don't believe in challenges. If I go to any country that I am set for, I will go because all I know is that when you go to any country you need to go through whatever they set and once you are done you go through. South Africa has its own laws that I have to follow, then they won't stop you."*

***Participant 4**: "I don't know of any specific laws but I think that as long as you have your passport then you can come and study."*

Although a few of the participants raised valid points and supported the current immigration laws and regulations, the majority of the participants in the study perceived the requirements as unnecessary and unfair to them.

***Participant 1:** "Well I applied and it's really expensive and it's hard to get a study visa; and for a student who doesn't have the finances it can become a challenge. The rules, medical aid, you pay international fees, I feel like it's the most difficult."*

Participant 2: *"…the visa process is very long, at first it was easy to apply and renew the visa and I renewed it once. You had to go there with your documents, pay whatever is required and within a month or less you have your papers. But now it's a whole process, if you don't stress you don't get your permit; so you need money and to have proof of financial means, that's not something everyone has…."*

Participant 4*: "It was very difficult to get a study permit, the procedure is long and because I studied in South Africa a few years ago, I had to do a police clearance here in South Africa. So I had to travel here and go back home to apply for a study permit, so it was hectic."*

Another participant also mentioned that:

Participant 6: *"It's really difficult to get a South African visa even though you have all the papers."*

The views of participants on the difficulties they experienced when they applied for the study visa shed more light on the bureaucratic processes which contribute to the adjustment difficulties faced by international students in South Africa. Participants who came to South Africa as refugees did not experience difficulties when they applied for a study visa in South Africa.

Participant 14*: "Well, I think my story is different because some come with a student visa but I came under my parents to stay. Like I am using a refugee document so that I don't have to go back…."*

The participant stated that he sympathised with other international students.

"*Some students even with the visa, they are facing difficulties, even though they are registered some have to go back; which is an expense to go back to your country, to go back to S.A embassy and again while they can help you right here."*

Another participant who came on parents` permit had a difficult time processing the study permit.

Participant 3: *"They were not really good. When we came here we didn't have passports for all of us. We used our parent's passports and when we came to the boarder, we had to all have a*

refugee paper and they had to give us ten days, then go to home affairs and do a process that does not finish."

Another participant also indicated her frustration with the migration laws.

***Participant 2**: "When I came I'd say the laws were very flexible but not, it's hard. It makes you feel like you can leave the country. Before there was hope you could stay here for five years and have hope to apply for a residential permit and be here when you can."*

When further asked about applying for a work permit she added:

"*It is a long process with the new regulations and the new rules, it's a long process, and a lot of companies don't want to take you if you don't have a visa because they don't want to be in the stressful process. As well as to show the immigration officer the papers, why they taking you and what special skills you have and if you don't then it's very hard."*

It can thus be deduced that international students face difficulties in visa application processes and there are also problems with the migrations laws. The new immigration law introduced in 2015 does not allow persons under the age of 18 and this includes international students, to travel to or from the Republic of South Africa without both parents accompanying the student who is considered a legal minor. Some of the First Year and Second Year students are under the age of 18. If one parent is accompanying the child the other should provide parental consent by completing a Parental Consent Affidavit with various requirements. However, it is an inevitable process that international students cannot avoid when travelling to another country and it is requirements are the same for international students under the age of 18 at most universities in overseas.

Cultural differences

Cultural differences were associated with adjustment difficulties. Some of the female participants from Zimbabwe expressed cultural challenges.

***Participant 1:** "Zim is more of a conservative society and is resistant to change and is not as liberal in general. There is a huge difference compared to South Africa, which makes you uncomfortable because you are used to certain things, like dressing for the ladies. But*

now I'm used to it. It's the same with relationships, like homosexuality at home isn't there, it's illegal."

The other female participants echoed similar challenges.

***Participant 2**: "We come from a conservative culture and coming here we see things that we've never seen before. The dressing, finding friends…."*

***Participant 11**: "Well, the culture here is different in the sense that here they have something to wear… well corporal punishment is there but here it is not."*

Other international students coming from various other regions noted such differences.

***Participant 3: "**The dressing was also different and the behaviours of other people and some people don't have privacy and they just expose themselves and it's not what you used to, it's like what`s happening."*

Another participant coming from a different country also added that.

***Participant 4:** "Obviously, the environments are different, the people are different…the languages and behavioural differences here and there; people here would behave differently in different situations compared to people back at home."*

Another participant expressed their views as follows.

***Participant 5**: "In Nigeria we are so conserved in culture…like the differences here that I noticed first was that of dressing. It's like people here don't care but in Nigeria, it's not that they will crucify you but people look at you like an outcast, it's not that it's not there but its minimal. But here when a lady goes out they dress in ways that you want people to see you, it's like they don't care."*

He further added that it is not only the dressing that was different, but the religious aspects of the South African context.

"*There's the religious aspect in South Africa that I prefer because you don't see people; like in Nigeria it is too strict and here if a person is like this time we out and if you go overboard they get up and leave; like in Nigeria it's hard to get up and go no matter what."*

Another participant also mentioned that:

Participant 6: *"It seems a lot of Black South Africans lose their heritage. The richer a South African gets, the more they become western. It's not general but in Nigeria whether you are rich or poor you still want to keep to your roots but here in South Africa the more you want to forget your roots."*

It is thus evident that though these participants may not be affected by the cultural differences in a bad way, they do take note that the differences play a role in how they interact with South Africans. It may also seem that some African international students view South Africa as a country that has lost its cultural roots and has succumbed to western values. Though the participants might have felt that these cultural differences did not necessarily affect their behaviours, they acknowledge that such differences existed and contributed to their overall adjustment experiences within the university environment and the South African context as a whole.

Diversity

South Africa is known world-wide as a diverse nation. Upon arrival students are likely to immediately catch on to the diversity aspect, not just outside institutions but within the learning spaces as well. The students found diversity to be a challenging phenomenon in their adjustment to the university.

The following are some of the responses of the participants that had good experiences of diversity.

Participant 6: *"I really like that there are the official languages. I tried to learn Zulu but it's not going that well. But generally I like the national anthem and the diversity."*

Another participant commented that:

Participant 8: *"Not bad hey, because I grew up in Botswana though I am Zimbabwean. I learned in a foreign country. I then went to an Indian school, Muslim, so I'm used to it."*

When further asked whether he did not experience any discrepancies he responded:

"Well there was, South Africans are different people from Botswana people. Especially in Botswana, it was mostly Indian and Botswana people, here you find different cultures and languages."

The third participant also expressed her views of the diversity.

***Participant 12**: "Well, I actually like it, I appreciate it and its one of the reasons I wanted to come here in the first place. It's something that I like but I find it difficult to go towards people and share this diversity."*

Though the responses showed aspects of diversity that some students found interesting, other participants held different perspectives. One participant highlighted that she did not feel that diversity existed within the university environment, as noted in her following comment.

***Participant 10:** "There's absolutely none. I don't think people here…like we stick to our own. So if I came from Lesotho I' gonna associate myself with Basotho speaking people…so it's like they still hang out on those social circles or because of religion. But diversity I wouldn't say people mix much, so diversity here I don't think is present, not just in terms of your citizenship but just in terms of people themselves in the university."*

Another participant also shared her negative experiences of diversity within the South African context.

***Participant 1**: "At first it was overwhelming, because where I come from there isn't much diversity. There are different languages, as well as attitudes, behaviours of people, cultural values and racial issues. So it was overwhelming. You don't know how to act around people; you don't know how to interact with people."*

Diversity was experienced differently. Some of the participants had good experiences while others had bad experiences. The differences in opinion raised questions on how the participants made an effort to adjust to the prevailing diversity in the university. Some of the participants shed some light on how diversity affected them during their stay in South Africa as well as how they coped with the diversity

Participant 4: *"I think to some extent, it has helped me become aware and feel that I'm somewhat different. It makes me aware that there are so many different people that are hard to get to know and the best way I dealt with it was getting to stay in my lane. Like I don't go all out to get to know people and a lot of people that I got to know was because of the proximity…in terms of academics, accommodation, language."*

Another participant also shared a similar idea though not using the same strategy.

Participant 5: *"Along the line I coped with it. It helped me because I have friends among those who think they are not Black."*

Participants reported that various aspects of diversity affected their adjustment in the university. There were factors of diversity that could not be avoided because of being in a diverse student population and there were aspects of diversity that international students chose to avoid. As such, diversity was regarded as a challenging factor that students encountered in South Africa.

Discrimination

Another theme that emerged alongside diversity and cultural differences is that of discrimination. South Africa comes from an apartheid era and is now democratic as a nation. It seems through the participant's opinions that discrimination or forms of racism are inevitable in a country undergoing transformation. Most of the participants noted that such forms of discrimination still exist though other participants may have not faced such experiences.

Participant 1*: "…to be honest, where I come from, my home area is not so common to a White person. We don't really interact with them. You don't find them in those spaces, there's like separation of some sort. You'll find them isolated in a different area and when you get to Wits you find the first person you interact with is a White lecturer and it's something you are not used to…."*

This comment highlights aspects some international students faced as their backgrounds did not prepare them for experiences such as racial discrimination. This comment is a stepping stone in that it reveals that a participant's background plays a significant role in how international students perceive discrimination or racism. Not all the participants experienced discrimination;

however, those that may have experienced it reported that it had a certain impact on how they interacted with other people within the university environment.

Participant 3*: "The first thing I saw was the differences between Black and White people in terms of racial discrimination. Like the people group themselves according to their races. It felt weird that people are not talking to each other. And when I came and started talking to a White person and they acted weird or they would talk to you then after start ignoring you."*

Another participant also noted the differences that occurred.

Participant 4: *"The only difference I have seen is on your skin colour. So I think I find myself treated as a Black South African is treated."*

One participant seemed to have experienced racial discrimination not only in the South African context but also from the United States.

Participant 5: *"Well, I applied to one of the schools in Texas… when I called, the lady asked me where I am from and I said Nigeria and she spoke as though she had issues with Nigeria."*

He further added the following when asked whether he experienced the same issue in South Africa:

"The only thing I faced here at the institution was that when you are Black, people treat you like you are inferior, like you want to get something out of them. They make you feel like you are a second world class citizen."

Another participant commented the following:

Participant 11*: "Racism will always be there. They act like they do like you but you can see that they don't when you interact with them. It's not about being Zimbabwean but it's about being Black because you can see it and everybody notices it and they say they are not racist but racism will always be there…."*

Not only did participants experience racial discrimination, some participants noted that other forms of discrimination tended to exits within the South African context.

Participant 10: *"I feel like for students who are southern African, the treatment is different from students who are from the East or West African. I feel like East and West African students are treated, I don't know, it's not the same, but I feel that southern African students are treated better in comparison to Eastern and Western students"*

Another student also noted that other forms of discrimination tended to be between the same racial categories, as noted below:

Participant 12: *"When you get friends with some people these people don't like… for example, when you are like friends with, I don't know, like maybe White people but like Afrikaners, like these people tend to stay together a lot and won't even mix with English people."*

One more student also noted the forms of discrimination between international students and the local students.

Participant 3*: "Treatment of foreign student when I came here it wasn't fair. I don't see the fairness of international students paying more than other students because we are doing the same course and we get the same material and same answers to everything. I wonder why they discriminate against fellow Africans."*

Though not all students' comments were reported under this theme, it is clear that racial discrimination and to some extent other forms of discrimination were part of the experiences international students faced within South Africa. Some of their backgrounds may have prepared them for the racial tensions whereas other participant's backgrounds contributed to the shock with regards to the racial tensions that occur even within university environments. Thus it was also evident that students succumbed to the pressures of the racial separation and clung to their own racial groups.

Academic challenge

Some of the international students faced academic challenges whilst others found the learning environment conducive. Related to academic performance were factors such as accommodation, forms of transport to and fro the university, crime and homesickness.

Only two participants commented on facing challenges with regards to their studies. It seemed as though the majority of the participants faced minor difficulties in their learning. Both comments are reported below.

Participant 13: *"Well, apart from school work, no!"*

Participant 10: *"People complain about adjustment from high school to varsity, I had adjustment problems from first year to second year. I just feel that first year is an illusion, like the way it is structured, the academics… it feels like this is manageable and then you get to second year and it's just like what is going on… tutorials disappear, people just become more competitive. It's just a hostile environment."*

Accommodation problems seriously affected participants. It was also difficult to get accommodation in the university residences. The university accommodation fees were regarded as high and unaffordable.

Participant 5*: "I had to move out because I had problems with funding."*

Participant 13: *"Ja I think accommodation it's something that we need to deal with because it's very difficult… I don't know if they provide options for outside campus, because as an international student if you get accommodation on campus you need to pay everything upfront and that becomes a problem."*

Not all participants faced problems with regard to accommodation; other participants had sponsorships or had a family member already residing in South Africa. When asked whether they faced such an issue these participants reported that:

Participant 1*: "No, my husband had accommodation."*

Participant 13*: "My uncle was here so I stayed with him for a couple of weeks before I found a place here in Braam."*

One participant mentioned that she may have not faced any accommodation issues because of her personal preferences.

Participant 10*: "I didn't wasn't to stay in residence, so I didn't have accommodation issues."*

Participants reported that transport problems affected their studies.

Participant 12: *"Well, I used to take the taxi bus to travel, which was fine and I found it quite funny because we used to take it with friends and with a lot of South African people. So I used to take taxi bus quite a lot, it works well but you just have to know people who know how it works because sometimes we end like in places we didn't want to be; so you just have to know otherwise it was okay."*

One participant noted that he faced an issue when it came to knowing how to use the South African roads and how to give a sign with fingers to drivers of taxi buses to give them an indication of the destination.

Participant 7: "*One day I wanted to go to Pretoria and I don't know the way. So I used the GPS and I missed somewhere else with my car and I passed the place; so I got scared and returned home and went another time with my African friend."*

Participant 9: *"I still can't get over the transport thing, fine there are a lot of options but they seem like a lot of admin in terms of uber…. So like everything was weird because back home you could like travel for R6.50 then go to town. The transport system was a little easier, so here I find it harder to go to places."*

Participant 14*: "Sometimes the buses are late, you wake up early but you get to campus late. It takes, to some extent, two hours to get home especially if you miss one; you have to wait for the next one."*

Crime was reported to be a big problem for international students in South Africa; they could be targeted by criminals.

Participant 12: *"We had several problems like people breaking into houses and the people being at risk of murder, so it's like not great."*

House break-ins were not the only recurrent problems; other criminal acts such as mugging were commonly reported by international students. The students may have heard of incidences of that nature prior to their arrival in South Africa.

***Participant 8**: "I almost got mugged. It was me and my brother and five guys came unto us and it was late in town. Then we always see these incidences."*

***Participant 11:** "Ja, I have been mugged; my friend has been mugged. So jait's not really a nice thing'"*

Theft of personal belongings was reported. Laptops and cell phones are usually targeted. It would be difficult for the student to study when their laptop or cell phone containing important academic material is stolen.

***Participant 9:** "Ja I did, my phone. I don't know how it was stolen; maybe I might have put it in an open pocket or something and then the next thing it was gone."*

Homesickness

Homesickness may also be noted as one of the experiences international students face when they live away from home. Most of the participants that raised homesickness as an adjustment problem did miss home. Such were the comments made by four participants stated below.

***Participant 3:** "Missing home obviously"*

***Participant 8:** "Yes, I do especially first semester. During the break I gave myself two weeks to go home."*

***Participant 9**: "First Year was the hardest year. I missed home so much, but I guess it's because I've been at home for my whole life, so being in a different place was just weird for me``.*

***Participant 2**: "Emotional issues like being away from home, like my dad was sick and couldn't talk over the phone and you imagine yourself being away and they facing that alone… so when things don't go well back home, it deeply affects you emotionally because you feel that if you were back there you would do something."*

Social support

Social support helps the student to stabilise in a new environment. In this study social support was shown in social interactions among students and the desire to help each other. The students had networks among peers and people from their home countries who supported them in times of need.

When asked about their social interactions the participants responses were as follows:

Participant 4: *"I think I am more closer to people who have a resemblance of my culture, in terms of language and skin colour, it's not that I chose this people but it's because I click better with them."*

Participant 1*: "But I interact more with people I identify with, from my home country. I identified with them because we had similar interests, similar backgrounds, similar experiences, so it was easier to interact with them."*

Some participants also pointed out that it's not only the cultural background that brings them closer but also the geographical backgrounds that contribute.

Participant 9: *"At least I came with my best friend from home, so it was easier to have someone to relate to."*

She further added some other interactions she had:

"…there was another friend from home… so at least there were other people from Lesotho that I was engaging with."

Participant 8*: "…Most of my friends are Zimbabwean, whom I found this side."*

Some participants mentioned that their interactions were with South Africans.

Participant 7: *"…after a couple of days I made some friends, some African friends. So I was not scared and I mixed up with some Black African guys also."*

Participant 10*: "I befriended South Africans."*

Participant 11*: "The other friends that I met are South Africans."*

Other participants indicated that they preferred to interact with classmates.

Participants 14: *"The majority of people I know are classmates, then we talk and keep in touch."*

Participant 3: *"When we have group projects that's when you have to talk to people and from there you start making friends."*

One participant stated that societies within the university facilitated social interaction among local and international students.

Participant 5: *"Well, I joined a mountain climber society…I started making some friends."*

From the responses given by participants, it is apparent that social adjustment was a by-product of social interaction and social support.

Institutional assistance

The assistance offered to international students by the university contributed immensely to student adjustment. Universities are expected to play a role towards student adaptation in as much as the student is expected to seek help or direction in their studies. When asked whether they thought the university had done enough to ensure that interaction students adjusted to the new environment, four participants agreed with the statement.

Participant 1*: "I wasn't in orientation week. I learnt my own environment but I got help from my department."*

Participant 5: *"Yeah, when I first came we had so many workshops. Yeah, like I remember the first time I came, I went through Senate House and the first office I went to was International Office. There was a White lady, so nice, she gave me a map and during the 5-minute interaction she had already explained so much, so that kept me going."*

Participant 14*: "Ja they did enough because in first year they used to have first year programmes. I attended a few on Saturday. CCDU I didn't go there much in first year, but I used to attend extra tutorials."*

There were students who disagreed that the university was helpful. Their responses were recorded as follows:

Participant 6: *"When I came I didn't get help from anybody, luckily I had my roommate, but most international students don't seem to get the assistance needed to find their way. But*

there should be help but based on the number of workers at International Office and the number of international students, they can't really help."

Participant 8: "*No, for example, they don't do much to help international students; like we had a week off, so for local students it's easy to go home and for international students that travel is exhausting and long and not worth it, so we were just here and doing nothing for entertainment."*

Participant 12*: "No, I think that no, not really. I think that they will help you with administration stuff and everything but like every people who taught me how to behave and what to do are friends or people I was in contact with before coming here."*

Some of the participants had mixed views.

Participant 4*: "No I think so. I think attending counselling sessions; okay they do help in terms of providing counselling sessions and facilities, so that's the only way and I actually thought that they would bring people together but it's like you are here and you on your own."*

Participant 10*: "Well, the support structures are there like within the institutions but I don't necessarily use them…like I know as international students we have like where they help you how to fill out your permit and so forth, like we know of systems that they have in place, but it`s just going out of your way."*

She further added that:

"I think it's my personality, maybe it's because I have more background knowledge of South Africa but if I was to put myself in another person'sshoes who is an international student, I don't think that the system and resources are catered for."

The university had structures in place to help students but the international students had to take ownership of their adjustment needs.

Participant 2: *"I didn't get that much help from the university; I helped myself in the university environment…maybe I didn't look for help but managed to adjust on my own."*

Student help seeking behaviours contributed positively to towards student adaptation at an international university.

Coping strategies employed by international students

The coping strategies employed by international students included improvement of social interaction skills, self-empowerment, and utilisation of student assistance facilities offered by the university. Participants` responses on how they managed the adjustment process were as follows:

Participant 1: "*Well, I think you try to learn how people behave and you study them and try to situate yourself in the environment and you try to pick up a word or two so that you can identify. Then try to be more sociable and interact with other people and it helps you understand the society. But the workplace has helped me a lot because I work with South Africans and we are always interacting and you become comfortable."*

Participant 10*: "I befriended South Africans, and then like when you befriend people or hang out with people in that area, you are able to catch on things quickly."*

Participant 13*: "Well, I went out a lot, ja you go out and meet a lot of people and you talk more…so I think going out more and interacting with people made it easier to adjust."*

From the above responses it is evident that interacting with people in a new environment helped international students to adjust to the new environment. The interactions also formed part of the social support system necessary for integration, adjustment and adaptation.

Being able to adjust in a new environment comes with a sense of self-empowerment. This coping strategy is illustrated through the following recorded responses of the participants.

Participant 3: *"Well, it was through determination and telling my mind that I am here for something. I came to do what I have to do and finish what I have to do and not be pulled down by things that affect me, just to stand up and move forward."*

Another participant also shared a similar viewpoint.

Participant 9: *"Well, you just tell yourself that you are going to make it, because you can't disappoint the people back at home."*

Another participant highlighted his point of view on how he adjusted to the environment, showing that many self-empowering ways may exist in conjunction with the individual's personality.

Participant 6: *"Personally I adjusted well…Eventually I picked up academically. I'm a pretty practical person, so when I'm in a situation I work out something to overcome it. I don't really see things as problems but I find solutions to it."*

Thus the above responses point out that some individuals employ self-empowering mechanism that keep them going and help them eventually adjust the way of life in South Africa.

Utilisation of university student assistance programmes reduced the severity of the challenges that international students faced in the university. Some of the participants realised that universities had various programmes earmarked for student health, learning and development. They had to take advantage of the student assistance programmes offered by the university some of which were donor funded.

Participant 4: *"Attending sessions at CCDU has helped me because it helped me with a platform that I can express exactly how I feel and that I can't express to somebody else and I keep in touch with family and friends back at home."*

Suggestions for improvement

This theme highlights the views of the participants with regards to the changes they would have liked to see happening within the South African university environment. The responses were recorded as follows:

Participant 3*: "In accepting students, they first consider South African students and I was actually surprised when people told me that foreigners were not accepted for Medicine and… that there was no place for international students. So I don't understand why there'sdiscrimination…."*

She further added to her statement:

As well as in terms of documents, I feel that for varsity students they should allow them study visas… so they shouldn't put restrictions on medical aid and not insist on paying yearly, so they should just make it monthly."

Participant 10: *"I`d firstly start with the finance system, that's my biggest problem because most people come here not necessarily because they have money… but your parents send you here because… they know the education system here is better… I would change the registration process; it's the worst…as opposed to them having one place where all these things can be done."*

Participant 11: *"I think I would start at the Fees Office; people think we come here because we have money, no we also struggling. They should just make us pay the same fees as everyone else is paying."*

Participant 13: *"Well, apart from the registration which is the main concern, I think they could also make it online. Well, the visa thing, I still think they could find a way to make it easier and the area of bursaries. I do have some friends that find it difficult, there are lots of bursaries coming out but they all say South Africans. So it would be nice to have bursaries for us."*

Thus the above suggestions highlight the main problems international students seem to face in South Africa. Not only are these related to the financial system, registration and visa application processes, they may also be related to the information systems of the university, as seen below:

Participant 4: *"Well, I think firstly when people come here they should…have an orientation week so that people know where to get something…so that people know of social rules or informal rules about the environment, surrounding this place, like is it safe… and they should make efforts to bring international students together, because we face the same challenges. I think we would understand each other better and know the problems and deal with them there and then."*

Participant 2: *"I don't know if there could be support systems to help foreigners, especially on finances. People face a lot of challenges and sometimes things go wrong at home."*

Other participants mentioned suggestions that could help international students adjust in a university.

The participants advised that:

Participant 5*: "We are different from one another but the main advice is that bring enough money."*

Participant 9*: "Well, get in sync with the culture as much as you can and try to make friends with people from here…but try to make friends from here, learn as much as you can and observe. Don't be like 'I'll do my own thing' and not interact with anyone because it's not going to help you at the end of the day."*

Participant 14: *"I think the main thing is to keep up to what is happening; if you are isolated for most of the time you will be way lost…and it's like looking for a venue at this institution but if you can't ask anyone you most likely won't make it on time for the lecture. Check the emails, attend international…tours to show them around and do the work because mainly it's about the work."*

Participants in this study provided various suggestions that could improve adjustment among international students. Their suggestions were based on how they handled adjustment problems personally as students in South Africa. They were speaking from experience. These suggestions may also help universities in South Africa improve their recruitment and retention of international students in South Africa.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The themes that emerged from thematic content analysis which are discussed in this section are: reason for choosing to study in South Africa, first settling in experiences, financial constraints, registration process, language problems, visa application and immigration laws, cultural differences, diversity, discrimination, academic challenge, homesickness, social support, institutional assistance, coping strategies and suggestions for improvement.

The reason for choosing to study in South Africa emerged as a theme that provided an insight on why most of the students from other countries choose to study in South Africa. The theme highlighted the challenges the international students faced as they migrated to South Africa. The reasons that participants provided were in line with previous findings which showed that most of the students from African countries find South African universities more attractive than the universities in their own countries (Mudhovozi, 2011). Most of the South African universities have better facilities and some of them have world ranking (Pouris, 2007).

The challenge met by international students from African countries is that they find the South African universities to be more expensive than universities in their home countries. Accommodation, stationery and other living expenses are expensive. This is mainly due to the stronger South African currency as compared to the currencies of most of the countries in Africa.

Financial constraints emerged as a theme that highlighted the challenges international students faced in South Africa. Previous studies showed that international students could face destitution at international universities abroad (Nicholson, 2001). Similar experiences were expressed by participants in this study. Whereas international students overseas might have the opportunity to study and work part-time to raise money for tuition fees, accommodation and personal income, international students in South Africa face an uphill struggle due to stringent labour laws that regulate the employment of foreigners. The controversy is that a study permit is granted for the sole purpose of studying and not for work purpose. It implies that a work permit would be required for the international student to be allowed to work in South Africa. The findings support Baba and Hosoda (2014) who indicated the existence of financial access restrictions on international students.

It was clear from the participants` narratives that the registration process was long and arduous. The findings confirm what was reported in past research about the frustrating experiences that students go through during registration (Maundeni et al., 2010). The results support the findings reported by Mokua (2012) that differences in educational systems contribute to the challenges experienced during registration. As a result of the difficulties international students face during registration, most student protests refer to the abolition of the payment of huge upfront fees during registration (Pillay, 2016).

Language problems affect communication among local students and international students and successful interaction between international students and their lecturers. Most international students experienced language problems, not only pertaining to the English language but also the official languages found in South Africa. Some students in the study experienced language barriers as they came from countries that may not use English as the language of communication. Some of these students attended extra English lessons in order to learn English and how to communicate in South Africa. This point has been noted by Huntley (1993) stating that students who cannot communicate in English were likely to enrol for extra lessons. Yates and Wahid (2013) also mentioned that language proficiency tended to be the cause of adjustment problems international students faced in host countries.

Most of the participants experienced language barriers when it came to indigenous South African languages. If lecturers used examples in vernacular languages, Afrikaans or South African students communicated in their local languages during social or learning activities that made it difficult for international students to participate in the conversations (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Most of the international students felt lost and discriminated against when they found themselves in situations where another language is used for communication. Through language barriers, some students found themselves only associating with students they had a common background with and not South African students. This point is supported by Wang (2008) who highlighted that discrepancies in languages spoken by the international student and the host nationals contributed to miscommunication or limited communication between the two groups of students. Barriers to communication lead to maladjustment (Bentley, 2008; Huntley, 1993).

The visa application process and immigration laws made it difficult for international students to get study permits on time. For example, if an international student is under 18 years of age, he or

she is considered a legal minor. According to the amended Immigration Act Number 13 of 2002 and the subsequent Immigration Regulations promulgated ion 22 May 2014 that were introduced in 2015 require that the student should be accompanied by parents or legal guardian to travel to South Africa and be accompanied by parents or legal guardian when leaving South Africa for whatever reason (Department of Home Affairs, 2015).

The requirements are sometimes ambiguous but in line with international practices migration is bound to be hectic (Lee & Rice, 2007). Government`s bureaucratic systems are evident in travel restrictions and visa application processes. Although participants were cognisant of the need to comply with international immigration requirements, they found the whole experience as challenging.

Cultural differences were noted in terms of how people interacted but that did not affect academic performance but was experienced as a culture shock in case of close contact (Mokua, 2012). It was challenging to share a room with South African students who identified themselves as gay or lesbian among international students mostly from African countries. The South African law is clear and protects the rights of gays and lesbians but some African countries do not approve same sex union. Some of the participants who came from conservative environments mentioned that although the cultural differences existed, they realised that in order to adjust to the new environment, they needed to maintain their culture and yet acknowledge the South African culture, though not allow it to change them. Following the acculturation model, participants in this study experienced separation, marginalisation and assimilation (Wang & Mallingcrodkt, 2006).

Diversity among the student population was evident at the university. Challenges associated with diversity were expected by participants as they were aware when they travelled to South Africa that it is a diverse nation. For some students the aspect of diversity shaped their interactions and behaviours towards people (Mokua, 2012). The diverse learning environment afforded international students the opportunity to understand people from various regions and walks of life in a learning institution.

Racial discrimination was a challenge faced by international students. Participants in this study acknowledged that the South African society was consciously and unconsciously stratified

according to racial groupings. In many gatherings or functions, the racial groups easily emerge manifested in the way people sit in groups, chat to each other and interact socially. These racial groupings are seen in class, on the grounds and when groups of students walk out of the university to the shops. The results of this study confirm previous findings that the South African society is still racially stratified and xenophobic (Bayaga, 2011).

Academic challenge was encountered by student who came from countries that did not use English as a medium of communication. Participants reported that they had to learn how to speak and write in English privately and attend university lectures at the same time. International students experience such problems overseas (Andrade, 2006). They were familiar with the academic content but the use of English as a medium of instruction posed a challenge to international students.

Homesickness was experienced by international students. This is supported by Russell et al (2010) who reported that international students sometimes miss home, particularly those who left their home countries at an early age. Some of the participants came from politically and economically unstable countries hence the students could be worried about the welfare of their parents and relatives back home. Crime in South Africa could make international students miss home and the tranquillity that prevails in peaceful environments. Some of the participants in this study did not only face experiences of mugging, they experienced burglary as well in their residences. The findings are similar to previous studies which reported that foreigners are vulnerable to crime in South Africa (Harris, 2001).

Social support is crucial in student adjustment. Participants in this study reported that they received social support from peers, South African students and other social networks that they created. The findings are in agreement with researchers who argue that social networks help international students settle down and adapt in host countries (Misra, Crist, &Burant, 2003). Social support systems such as student communities and family networks help reduce emotional distress among students (Awang, Kutty, & Ahmad, 2014).

Institutional assistance is shown when universities provide services that help international students adapt to the university environment. Participants in this study had the perception that universities could provide more services even though they were expected to take the initiative to

seek help and to utilise existing resources provided by the university. The findings of this study were similar to past studies which showed that international students might not utilise fully to their advantage the resources provided by the university for their health and general welfare (Kambouropoulos, 2015). International students were found to be reticent about utilising counselling services to address problems relating to physical health, academic performance, social and psychological adjustment (Kambouropoulos, 2015).

The coping strategies theme shows the means by which international students adjusted to the prevailing environment. Most of the participants in this study developed strategies that they used to fit into the institution and accomplish the study goals that they set for themselves. This is in line with the person-environment fit theory which indicates that individuals in new environments should take the ownership to make themselves suitable to the environment otherwise they could fail to adapt and consequently they could be ejected from the new ecological space (Schmitt et al., 2008; Nolan & Morley, 2014). The social interactions help students and coping mechanisms reduced distress among international student as reported by Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) and Searle and Ward (1990). Self-empowerment and utilisation of student assistance facilities offered by the university contributed to student adjustment.

Participants in this study provided suggestions that they perceived could reduce adaptation challenges faced by international students in South Africa. It is expected that universities do consult international students to understand their problems. In this study, there was little consultation between the university and international students. Sometimes the international students felt that they were on their own trying to find their way in the university. It is common for international students to complain about being marginalised, ignored and neglected by the university without being afforded the opportunity to air their views openly about their welfare without victimization (Ryan & Viete, 2009).

Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the few questions asked to get responses from participants. It may be necessary to note that qualitative studies often rely on small samples in order to extract greater depths of data. The limitation of the sample noted in this

study was the representation of the student population within the university. It can be noted that the majority of the student sample was made up of African international students. Thus, this may bring about bias in the nature of problems that the international students faced at the university.

Another limitation to be noted may be that the interview questions may have been structured in accordance with ideas derived from previous studies. Instead, indirect questions could have been asked to yield novel ideas not asked from students before.

Implications of the study

The findings of the study highlight the key issues international students are prone to experience when they arrive in South Africa. The implications of the study point to the need for improving immigration laws, reception and settling in process for international students at South African universities.

Recommendations

Improving the adjustment process for international students may require further research. Future studies may need to focus on areas of improvement that involve both international students and university institutions. It may be necessary to recruit larger samples drawn from a number of universities in South Africa in order to have a more representative sample. A broader sample would provide more information on the needs of international students in South Africa. Some of the issues raised by participants seemed to be problems that were associated more with their countries or geographical location rather than problems that were caused by universities in South Africa. Thus it may be imperative that future studies focus also on recruiting samples from specific countries in order to understand and cater for challenges specific to different countries or geographical locations.

Conclusion

It can thus be seen that various issues that international students face when transitioning from one country to another are universal. Such issues were noted as those of financial constraints, language problems, registration process, visas application processes and discrimination. Not all international students face such issues but most international students may be prone to facing one or more of these challenges. Relocation is beset with cross-cultural transitioning problems. Thus, it is inevitable for international students to look forward to experiencing some kind of discomfort when they choose to travel to other countries to further their education. Various mechanisms may be adopted in order for international students to adjust to the new environment. Not all students may find themselves seeking assistances from universities; however, the majority of the students do require social support systems in order to adjust to any given environment. It is noted that interaction with people in a new environment facilitates student adjusting in any given environment. Self-empowerment strategies and seeking university assistance helped international students face fewer adjustment challenges at the university.

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Appendixes

Appendix A_____Information sheet

Appendix B_____Consent form (Interview)

Appendix C_____Consent form (Recording)

Appendix D_____Interview Schedule

Appendix E_____Demographics of participants

Appendix F_____Ethical Clearance

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4541 • Fax: 011 717 4559 • E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Appendix A

Information sheet

Dear student

My name is KegomoditsweMokgwasi. I am currently a student undertaking my Master's degree in Organizational psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting a research on adjustment problems faced by international students at the University of the Witwatersrand. The research aims to contribute to literature already conducted in South African Universities as well as contribute to my completion of the programme.

I invite you to partake in the study aimed at understanding adjustment problems faced by international students. The study shall take on the form of an interview, which should last not more than an hour. I will conduct the interviews on a one on one basis, which will be recorded. Because of the nature of the recordings, confidentiality will be taken seriously and no dehumanizing information shall be used against you. Anonymity is also guaranteed in that no identifying information shall be used in the writing up of the research report. Should there be a need to quote directly or use any information given by you, pseudo names shall be given (such as Participant A or Respondent B).

Participation in the study does not advantage or disadvantage you in anyway and is completely voluntary. You have the right to withhold information should you feel unable to answer a question. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time should you wish to do so.

Once the data has been collected and analyzed, a report on the findings can be made available for you to access.

Because recordings will be used and because of confidentiality and anonymity, the recordings shall be stored until the final write up of the research report and will be destroyed at a later stage.

Should you wish to contact me or my supervisor for further information, the contact details are given below.

Before we begin I may need you to read through and sign the consent forms to follow. These will confirm that you are aware that you will be recorded and that these recordings will be reported with the insurance of anonymity as well as confidentiality. Please detach and keep this sheet.

Kegomodistwe Mokgwasi: 073 563 9535 (Supervisor) Calvin Gwandure: 011 7174519

Email: kaygeemokgwasi@gmail.comCalvin.Gwandure@wits.ac.za

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4541 • Fax: 011 717 4559 • E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Appendix B

Consent Form (Interview)

I give my consent to be interview by Kegomoditswe Mokgwasi for her study. I acknowledge that:

- Participation is on a volunteer basis
- I can refrain from answering any questions.
- My responses will remain confidential, and will only be used when required.
- No identifying information will be mentioned in anyway, if needed a pseudonym (Participant A, Participant B etc.) will be used.
- I will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way.
- I take not that the results will be reported in the research report required at the end of the year.

Signed: _____

Date:_____

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4541 • Fax: 011 717 4559 • E-mail: psych.SHCD@wits.ac.za

Appendix C

Consent form (Recording)

I give my consent for my interview to be audio recorded by Kegomoditswe Mokgwasi for her study. I acknowledge that:

The tapes and the transcripts will not be used to identify me in anyway, and should there be a need to identify me, pseudonyms such as Participant A or Participant B will be used.

The tapes and the transcript will not be seen or heard by anybody else other than the researcher and the supervisor.

The tapes and the transcripts will be kept for safe keeping and will be later destroyed

Signed:_____

Date:_____

Appendix D

Interview schedule

Rapport questions

1. What made you want to study in South Africa?
2. How long have you been in South Africa?
3. What were your expectations?
4. What was your first experience in South Africa?

Interview schedule questions

1. What problems are you facing as an international student?
2. How do these problems pertain to finance, accommodation, immigration laws etc.?
3. How are you coping with the problems?
4. Does the university provide resources to help you adjust to the new environment?
5. How would you make your adjust to the new environment better?

Appendix E

Demographics of participants

Participant	Gender	Country	Level of education	Length of stay in S.A
1	Female	Zimbabwe	masters	
2	Female	Zimbabwe	masters	6+
3	Female	Canada		
4	Female	Botswana	Masters	2+
5	Male	Nigeria	PHD	2
6	Male	Nigeria	Masters	8 months
7	Male	India	PHD	2
8	Male	Zimbabwe	Undergraduate	8 months
9	Female	Lesotho	Undergraduate	1+
10	Female	Botswana	Honours	5+
11	Female	Zimbabwe	Undergraduate	8 months
12	Female	France	PHD	
13	Male		PHD	3+
14	Male	DRC	Undergraduate	5+