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UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Faculty of Humanities

School of Social Science

Department of Organisational and Institutional Studies

Research Report

The role of Student Support Programmes in assisting black students to navigate the institutional culture at the University of Witwatersrand

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA Organisational and Institutional Studies

The University of Witwatersrand

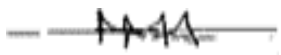
15 March 2022

Johannesburg

March 2022

Declaration

I, Mthokozisi Mthembu, declare that this Research Report is my own original work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Organisational and Institutional Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



_____(Signature of candidate)

15 March 2022

Abstract

Historically White Universities (HWU) have experienced an influx of black students since the demise of Apartheid. Addressing the scarcity of skills and underrepresentation of black people in South Africa's high skilled professions, this study looks at the country's higher education system as an underpinning factor to the problem. Black students experience potent challenges in these institutions that impede their academic efforts, the difficulty to integrate into their institutional cultures is ascertained as one of the most potent issues by the literature. As a response to assist students facing such challenges, universities have inaugurated Student Support Programmes (SSP). This issue has also necessitated that academic work probing the ways in which black students engage with the culture of HWU be undertaken. Work in this regard has indeed increased, however not enough has been done to ascertain the utility of SSPs. This study, therefore, undertakes to address this gap, probing the extentto which SSPs assist black engineering students to navigate the institutional culture of the University of Witwatersrand. The aim of this study is to ascertain ways in which SSPs can be recalibrated to render more effective support to black students, helping them navigate the institutional culture of HWU with more success. The study conducted qualitative interviews with 14 students and 6 employees of SSPs. Using Tinto's model of Institutional Action, the study found it insufficient to conceptualize institutional culture solely based on phenomena occurring within the demarcations where academic learning takes place. The argument of this study, therefore, is that SSPs are valid only to the extent that they deal with issues within the environment where academic learning takes place, they do not address issues that arise from outside of this context. The recommendation made is that SSPs shouldincrease the extent of support they render to students by taking the urban context of the university into account in their design and implementation.

Key words: Institutional culture, Historically White Universities, Student Support Programmes, the University of Witwatersrand

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List of Acronyms

ADU- Academic Development Unit

CAPS- Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

CCDU- Career Counseling and Development Unit

DHET- Department of Higher Education and Training

FYE- First Year Experience

HWU- Historically White Universities

IEB- Independent Examinations Board

IHL- Institutions of Higher Learning

NSFAS- National Financial Aid Scheme

SES- socio-economic status

SGB- Students Governing Bodies

SMT- School Management Teams

SSP- Student Support Programmes

STEM- Science, Technology,

Engineering, and Mathematics

UFS- University of Free State

UJ- University of Johannesburg

UKZN- University of KwaZulu Natal

WCCO- Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach

Wits- The University of Witwatersrand

Chapter 1: Underrepresentation of black Africans in High Skilled Occupations in South Africa- the case of black engineering student attrition

1.1 Introduction

This research project is undertaken in relation to the chronic scarcity of skills and underrepresentation of black[1] Africans in high skilled occupations in the country[2]. Amongst other factors, the study views this issue as an epiphenomenon of the poor throughput of black students in Historically White Universities (HWU). It therefore probes the experiences of this demographic in these institutions. There has been a laudable influx of Black students in HWU since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. This influx, however, has been accompanied with issues concerning the integration of black students in spaces substantially underpinned by white cultural values and systems. These challenges have proven catastrophic vis-à-vis the academic performance of black students, their throughput has remained a concern of scholars and policy makers for more than two decades.[3] To assist students facing such challenges, universities have inaugurated Student Support Programmes (SSP). This research project is concerned with the perceptions of black engineering students of the role played by these SSPs in assisting them with navigating the institutional culture at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits). The SSPS that are of concern in this study are the Academic Development Unit (ADU), the Career Counselling and Development Unit (CCDU), and the First Year Experience (FYE). The primary focus of this research project is institutional culture: the ways in whichblack students at Wits experience and are affected by this culture. This endeavor is undergone usingqualitative research interviews. The study also supplements this narrative by probing the effects of career guidance and educational background on the fortunes of these students, as these elements provide a context upon which the experiences of students can be understood.

1.2 Background

The scarcity of skills is not a phenomenon peculiar to South Africa. According to ManpowerGroup (2019), a world leader in innovative workforce solutions with operations in 80 countries across the continents, 54 percent of companies globally report talent shortages. This is the highest percentage recorded by the organisation in over a decade. Their annual talent shortage survey reported that South Africa's shortage currently lies at 34 percent, although below the world average, this remains a cause of concern (ManpowerGroup, 2019). These extant shortages of skills render this study imperative.

There is an inextricable relationship between scarcity of skills and the under-participation of blacks in South Africa's labour market, especially in high skilled occupations. During Apartheid blacks were deprived of skill accumulation opportunities (access to higher education), today the country suffers from legacies of this injustice.[4] These legacies are observable also in the country's basic education system. For instance, black learners suffer disproportionately from schools offering sub-standard basic education. Forty percent of black children attend quintile 1 schools, the poorest[5] in the country.In 2016 only 28 percent of black learners achieved results above 40 percent in Mathematics, andonly 9

[1] Black African people.

[2] Scarce skills refer to occupations where there are scant people that are either qualified or have experience which are employed or anticipated in future (DHET, 2020).

[3] The percentage of those initally enrolled that graduate after a specified time period. Poor throughput results from students dropping out, and academic or financial exclusion by the university, this is commonly referred to as student attrition (Otu and Mkhize, 2018).

[4] These legacies persist despite anti-discriminatory and affirmative action policies enacted over the years (such as Labour Relations Act, 1998 Employment Equity Act, 2000 Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act etc) aiming at redress (Gradín, 2019).

[5] Basic education schools in South Africa have been categorised into quintiles from 1 to 5. This categorisation of schools is based on the surrounding community's socio-economic status. Measures of average income, unemployment rates, and general literacy level in the school's geographical area are determinants of this categorisation process (DBE, 2016).

percent managed to get over 60 percent (Roodt, 2018). On the other hand, 80 percent of white learners scored above 40 percent in Maths, and more than half achieved marks above 60 percent. Furthermore, Roodt's study (2018) found that only 17 percent of learners attending quintile 1 schools qualified to enter university in 2016, whereas the matric pass rate for learners attending quintile 5 schools was over 90 percent, with more than half of these leaners qualifying to attend university (Roodt, 2018). These discrepancies carry on into Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL).

Stellenbosch University conducted a study from 2009 that traced students who enrolled into all universities registered on the Higher Education Management Information System. This study's findings were that only 36.9 percent of the students who enrolled in 2009 had graduated by the fourth year of study. These findings also indicated that the completion rate for white students lied at 71.6 percent, Asian students stood at 62.1 percent, coloured students at 53.8 percent, and black students at 53.5 percent: the lowest completion rate (Africa Check, 2016). Another study conducted by Mpanza (2017) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), looking at the 2009-2013 cohort of mining engineering students, found that less than 40 percent of students complete their Mining Engineering Diploma after three years. Furthermore, it illustrated that approximately 20 percent of these students dropped out in their first two years of study. This study indicated that a disproportionate number of these students were black. Thus, the aforementioned studies illustrate a continuity concerning throughput trends over the years. These trends translate into the labour market, resulting in an underrepresentation of blacks in high skilled occupations such as engineering.".

The annual report of the Engineering Council of South Africa (2018) displays an underrepresentation of blacks in professional engineering, a trend that persists to date.[6] Other STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields lament these shortages as well. The ManpowerGroup's 13th annual report published in 2020 indicated that there was a comparable shortage of technicians in the country, ranking technology 5th in the list of *Occupations Short of Skills* in South Africa, after engineering which ranked 4th. All the aforementioned figures form the bases upon which this study is undertaken, they underscore its relevance. It is incumbent upon the country's higher education system to ensure an adequate and representative supply of labour across the country's industries. Some universities have made strides towards engaging this responsibility.

The University of Witwatersrand has inaugurated numerous programmes to assist students with their academic endeavours, the three that are of concern in this study are the ADU, CCDU, and FYE. The ADU deals exclusively with Engineering and Built Environment mainstream students. It offers academic support through extra tutorials for each of the major courses in engineering. The ADU also offers mental wellness programmes, they assist students with time management and study skills as well (Student Support - Wits University, 2021).

The second programme is the FYE. This programme seeks to better first year students' experience of university, helping them acquire the skills they need for university life. The programme engages first years in a week-long orientation before the academic year begins, orienting them into their social and academic environment. The programme offers services such as life coaching, computer literacy, mental wellness, and leadership camps (Student Support - Wits University, 2021).

The third programme is the CCDU. "The CCDU provides a welcoming and safe space to students, based on an ethos of student-centeredness and holistic learning" (Student Support - Wits University,2021). This programme offers a variety of supportive services aimed at enhancing the wellbeing and academic success of students. These services include personal counselling and support groups, career counselling, psychometric career assessment, journey to employability programme, workshops and

[6] Schools in quintile 1 are non-fee-paying, they are the poorest, they are usually located in townships and rural areas. These schools have large class sizes, insufficient resources, and derelict infrastructures. These schools consist predominantly of black children, the teachers employed here are usually semi-skilled and less qualified (DBE, 2016). Quintile 5 schools on the other end of the spectrum are the most affluent schools, usually located in suburban areas. These schools are adequately resourced, have small class sizes, and have the most competent teachers.

trainings, and life coaching (Student Support - Wits University, 2021). Although theseprogrammes were inaugurated at different times, they were all necessitated by the context of SouthAfrica's social and education systems. Where there are wide gaps in the educational, socio-economicand cultural backgrounds of students. Despite all these interventions, however, students continue to underperform, rendering it necessary to probe the extent to which SSPs assist students in these IHL (DHET, 2020).

1.3 The main research question of the study

- To what extent do Student Support Programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students to navigate the university's institutional culture?

1.3.1 Sub questions

- To what extent is race a determinant of one's experience at Wits?
- In what ways does one's educational background affect their academic fortunes in university?
- Do black students from quintile 4-5 schools experience Wits differently to those from quintile 1-3?
- What assumptions underpin the design and implementation of Student Support Programmes at Wits university?

1.4 Rationale

Black students are often at a disadvantage compared to their white counterparts when transitioning into tertiary education in South Africa, where there are wide gaps in the educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of students. This disadvantage is exacerbated for black students that come from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. HWUs in South Africa were founded on white middle class society, the values, the architecture, and the ethos of these institutions today are still significantly reflective of apartheid (Kessi and Cornell, 2015). These racial and class dynamics shape the students' experience in these institutions. Successfully navigating the institutional culture of HWU requires students to be equipped with specific social and educational capital, commonlyacquired at private, quintile 4 and 5 schools (Kessi and Cornell, 2015). Black students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, therefore, face a myriad of challenges when navigating their way through university, leading to a high attrition rate for this demographic. It is also reported that imperceptible, yet pernicious, racism still exists in these institutions. Ameliorating the experiences ofblack students in HWUs, therefore, requires that the institutional cultures of these universities be transformed towards being more inclusive and conducive for individuals from all walks of life to succeed (Kessi and Cornell, 2015). This imperative agenda is the impetus of this study.

This research project focuses on engineering because it is a field crucial to the national development agenda, yet it experiences potent shortages of skilled labour. Achieng (2019) lists engineering as the second most in demand occupation in the country. Engineering plays a pivotal role in the improvement of social welfare in the country.[7] Chronic shortages in engineering impede the progress of ongoing work central to the growth of the country's economy. Despite the laudable number of students enrolling in engineering annually, approximately 1500 graduate every year, out of these it is estimated that half do not go into practice (Achieng, 2019).

The case of the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) is interesting first because it is one of the most prestigious universities in Africa, in 2020 the university was ranked 1st in the continent by Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU, 2020). Secondly, during apartheid Wits, although a HWU, was

[7] Engineers provide facilities for living, industry and transportation, roads, bridges, canals, railroad lines, airports, water-supply systems, harbours, tunnels, amongst other imperative constructions in a country that foster growth and development (Achieng, 2019).

the vanguard of IHL in the fight against apartheid segregationist policies in higher education (King, 2001). The institution continues to be grounds for much political controversy to date. After announcing a fee increment of 10% in 2015 for 2016, a largescale demonstration dubbed #FeesMustFall ensued (Mavunga, 2019).

The #FeesMustFall student movement which erupted in mid-October 2015 gained recognition at Wits university, it thereafter spread across the country's university campuses. The protest morphed to be against issues beyond finances, these included the use of English as a medium of instruction and calls for decolonising the curriculum in other ways. The protests, which achieved remarkable results, were characterised by vandalism, where school buses, university library, along with other properties were destroyed. One such achievement of this protest was the concession by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) where R967 million was allocated to the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to settle historical debt which was owed by 52 514 students (Mavunga, 2019). The most recent of these student protests began, again, at Wits University and spread across the country in early March 2021. Students were again demonstrating against fee related issues, students owing an amount above R10 000 were being required by the university to pay half of the outstanding fees before they could register (Nkanjeni, 2021). Many students were at risk of financial exclusion because of this, the Wits SRC saw it fit therefore to take to the streets in protest. This lasted approximately two weeks before universities started making concessions, enabling students to register despite their debt. The culmination of this protest saw the death of Mthokozisi Ntumba, a bystander in the protest. The 35-year-old was a husband and a father of four children, he was leaving a clinic in Braamfontein when met with three life-ending police rubber bullets (Nkanjeni, 2021). Besides financial exclusion which has witnessed the abovementioned efforts of resistance, students also face exclusion on academic grounds.

The Wits Facts & Figures (2019) displays throughput and attrition rates in the university by school and race. Figures included in this document indicate that out of 6455 students that enrolled into Engineering and the Built Environment in 2015 only 1330 (20,6 percent) graduated in 2018. The Humanities faculty enrolled 8657 students in 2015, from this number, however, only 2576 graduated in 2017 (29,7 percent). The faculty of Commerce, Law & Management saw 8604 students enrol in 2015, only 2802 (32,6 percent) of these students graduated in 2018. These numbers, however, include students who enrolled and were retained in the system in years prior to 2015, therefore the real number of those who graduated within the minimum timeframe from the 2015 first year cohort is much lower. These numbers indicate the extent of progress and constraints this study seeks to explore.

Previous works in the field of higher education in South Africa concur that failure to integrate into the environments of universities is a potent issue underpinning the below-par performance ofstudents (Letseka, Breier, and Visser, 2009). Financial constraints are equally as potent in this regard,however, these have been studied extensively in the field. Unlike finances, institutional culture, loosely defined as "the way we do things around here", still warrants further investigation in the South African context (Otu and Mkhize, 2018). This study hones in on three programmes at Wits, the ADU, the FYE, and the CCDU. There are, however, other programmes outside of the aforementioned that have been inaugurated and tasked with assisting students in the university, one being the Faculty Student Advisors (FSA). This study, though, limits its purview to the three aforementioned programmes as it is these that aretasked, primarily, with assisting students vis-à-vis integration to the university culture, career guidance, and academic performance (Student Support - Wits University, 2021). The FSA, although equally crucial offers general assistance to students, hence its exclusion in this study.

1.5 Significance of the study

Otu and Mkhize (2018) assert that work probing black students in HWU is not yet exhaustive, a more robust research agenda in this regard is still needed. They stress the need for research that probes institutional culture, moving away from student centred approaches that blame the individual for their inability to succeed. HWU share a common past vis-à-vis their apartheid history, they however,

possess disparate contextual realities (staff profiles, student demographic, geographical location etc) (Manik, 2015). The institution-specific approach espoused in this research project will, therefore, capture nuances that would be omitted in a cross-institutional approach. Although contextual realities of the country's HWUs differ, there also exists significant overlaps between them. Therefore,this study's findings will be useful in understanding the same phenomenon in other South African universities as well.

This study is centred on institutional culture, a very nebulous concept, academics have not yet come to an agreement regarding how best to conceptualise it (Tabensky and Matthews, 2015). Scholars such as Hiraldo (2010) opt for a very narrow conception which revolves around race, while scholars such as Vincent (2015) prefer a broader, multivariate conception which takes into account elements such as the built environment, monuments, as well as the discourses that circulate the university milieu. This study espouses this multivariate conception. It probes the ways in which dynamics of language, race, gender, and class manifest themselves discursively and materially in the university, and how these dynamics are experienced by students. To supplement the probing of institutional culture and provide a context upon which student experiences can be interpreted, this study also probes questions regarding career guidance and educational background.

This study is undertaken in relation to the country's transformation agenda. Transformation of the higher education sector in South Africa is an issue of paramount importance, endemic in much political discourse (Tabensky and Matthews, 2015). The study is also a response to the dearth of work probing the utility of SSPs in assisting students around the institutional cultures of HWU, rendering it a novel endeavor. The objective of the research project is to ascertain the role that SSPsplay in assisting students around the institutional culture at Wits. The findings of this study are envisaged to be valuable towards recalibrating SSPs towards rendering more comprehensive supportto student. All this is believed to be necessary, amongst a combination of other factors, to further mitigate the attrition rates of black students at university and increase representativeness in high skilled professions. This is important as it ultimately works towards the grander goal of growing the country's economy and combating endemic socio-economic disparities (DHET, 2020).

The project's hypothesis is that the assumptions underpinning the methods used by those in charge of designing and running SSPs need recalibration, given that the student environment is constantly morphing. These programmes may need to re-conscientize themselves of current student realities. Secondly, it could be the case that these programmes are not sufficiently advertised. Finally, underfunding could be bedeviling the operations of these programmes (Hallsworth, 2011).

1.6 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action (Tinto, 2010). Vincent Tinto has written extensively vis-à-vis higher education, developing influential theoretical frameworks such as the Theoretical Dropout Model (1973) and the Integration Framework (1993). There are also other influential theoretical frameworks in the field, developed by other scholars, which are pertinent to the study underhand, these include the Critical Race Theory (2001) and Nancy Fraser's Social Justice Theory (2008). These theories, however, are not apt for the scope of this study: their purview is too limited. Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action (2010), however, is apt in guiding the study underhand as, unlike most theories that view the individual as the sole determinant of their academic fortunes, this theory looks at institutional conditions and how these can be optimized to facilitate student success. This makes the theory apt for this study probing the extent to which Wits' institutional structures, specifically its support programmes, assist black students around the institutional culture of the University. In his theory, Tinto also pays special attention to students from low-income backgrounds, this likewise is germane to this study as it concerns itself precisely with this student cohort. Furthermore, Tinto's theory acknowledges multivariate conditions which are potent in determining the experiences students have in university. This study follows suit, acknowledging the multiplicity of institutional elements that determine students' experiences.

1.7 Methodology

This study espouses the qualitative research paradigm. It probes the institutional culture of Wits university through the lived experiences of black engineering students. The study employed a semi-structured, open ended interview schedule to spur the conversation towards answering its research questions, whilst also allowing room for respondents to render unanticipated information. The sample population of the study consisted of 20 participants: 14 students and 6 employees of support programmes. The student population was made up 7 males and 7 females, 3 students came from quintile 2 schools, 7 from quintile 3, and 4 from quintile 4. All the students interviewed were black undergraduates between the ages of 18-25. These students had to have been enrolled in theuniversity for a minimum of 3 years, as this cohort has experience of Wits' institutional culture that precedes the Covid-19 health pandemic. Distinction between the different engineering programmes was not made in this study, its participants, therefore, belonged to different programmes within the faculty of Engineering and Built Environment at Wits: such as Mining, Civil, and Mechanical Engineering.

The employee population consisted of 4 males and 2 females. The study interviewed 2 employees from each of the 3 programmes, 1 in management and the other directly involved with students with service delivery. All the employees had to have at least 3 years' experience, this way their insights would be based on the pre-Covid-19 epoch. This study employed snowball sampling and a door-to-door outreach at South Point buildings in Braamfontein for the student population. The participation of employees, however, was requested via emails sent to their respective programmes. All the interviews were conducted remotely, using Microsoft Teams and Zoom due to the Covid-19 regulations on movement. Furthermore, the study adopted an inductive research approach, this allowed the emergence of themes that were unanticipated in the study during the interviews.

1.8 Chapter outline

This research study is made up of six chapters. A brief outline of these is given below.

Chapter 2 reviews the most influential literature in the field. It looks at current debates around support programmes and institutional culture in South Africa and globally. Here, the study is situated within broader discourses, underscoring its contribution to the field. The chapter, thereafter, discusses the theoretical framework undergirding the study.

Chapter 3 documents the methodology of the study. It first delves into the philosophical framework on institutional culture. Thereafter, the sample population is enumerated, along with the methods through which they were recruited. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the interview schedule employed in the study, the content analysis process, reliability, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 delves into presentation of the findings of the study and more specifically documents the role of support programmes in assisting students around the institutional culture at Wits is documented. The chapter, thereafter, documents the educational backgrounds of students, along with the career guidance they received before enrolling into Wits. Finally, the different themes of Wits' institutional culture, which emerged during the interviews conducted, are documented.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study, documented in chapter 4. These findings are discussed in light of influential literature in the field. The chapter also delves into the educational backgrounds of students and the ways in which support programmes respond to these backgrounds. Furthermore, the effects of career guidance, based on research findings, is discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses the culture of Wits university from the lenses of the university itself and that of students.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of the study, recommending ways in which the concept of institutional culture could be broadened. The chapter further gives limitations of this study and areas that subsequently require further research.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the background of this research project, and noted the chronic scarcity of skills and underrepresentation of blacks in high skilled professions in South Africa. These two factors, however, were found to be interconnected. These dynamics of the labour force were then traced back to higher education in the country, probing the participation and success rates of the black student demographic in HWU. Findings in this regard alluded to an under participation of black students in these institutions, those who manage to access them were also found to have the worst throughput rates compared to students of other races (Africa Check, 2016). This was, thereafter, traced back to the country's basic education system. It was then found that this poor throughput is as a result of the poor academic backgrounds of these students, many of which come from quintile 1-3 schools. This hapless situation has received significant attention from scholars in the field of higher education in South Africa and political activists, however, not enough has been done to remedy it (Mavunga, 2019). Efforts which have been made in the regard include the inauguration of student support programmes to assist black students from poor academic backgrounds in HWU. Witsuniversity's support programmes include the ADU, CCDU, and FYE. Against this backdrop, this research project, therefore, probes the role of these support programmes in assisting black students with navigating the institutional culture of Wits. Findings from this study are envisaged to be instrumental towards addressing the scarcity of skills and underrepresentation of blacks in the country's high skilled professions.

Chapter 2: Literature probing the institutional culture of South Africa's institutions of higher learning

2.1 introduction

There exists a plethora of literature probing the engagement between black students and the institutional cultures of HWU. These studies have been undergirded by theories such as Tinto's Integration Framework (1993) and the Critical Race Theory (2001). One of the main areas of agreement in the field is the potency of institutional culture vis-à-vis the performance of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, one of the main areas of disagreement regards the conceptualization of institutional culture and notably its definition and compositions. Although there have been significant strides made in this field, there is still a dearth of work looking into the interplay between institutional culture and SSPs. This is the impetus of this research project. In this endeavour the project adopts Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action (2010) as its theoretical framework.

This chapter reviews instrumental literature in the field, especially that concerning the South African context. The chapter begins by discussing the concept of institutional culture, along with its relationship with transformation. Thereafter, the chapter delves into the role of SSPs in HWU, looking at their inauguration and relationship to the transformation agenda. Furthermore, the chapter looks at the effects of poor academic backgrounds and inadequate career guidance on the academic efforts of black students in IHL. The chapter, thereafter, delves into the theoretical framework guidingthis research project: Tinto's Model of Institutional Action (2010). Finally, the institutional culture of Wits university is explored in the chapter.

2.2 Institutional culture

Institutional culture is a nebulous concept, hard to define in definite terms. Efforts to define it, while couching it in the most colloquial terminology, have led to descriptions such as "the way things are done around here" (Jason Martin, 2006, p.3). This is explored more extensively in the following section of this chapter. The concept of institutional culture has been utilized across different disciplines by scholars seeking to understand the working dynamics which affect individuals in social settings, whether positively or negatively. Suransky and van der Merwe (2014) argued that the probing of institutional culture is a useful way of comprehending the complexities of organisational operations, they further noted that research in this regard is instrumental towards making sense of the non-rational and informal aspects of organizations. Christopher Meyers (2004), probing ethics in organizational settings, also instrumentalizes institutional culture. He argues that institutional culture helps define what are viable actions, what is the organisation's genuine mission, and what behaviours will be punished or rewarded within an organization. He advances that in order to ascertain the origins of, and change, unethical behaviour in organisations, there needs to be an understanding of what that organization's institutional culture is.

2.2.1 Conceptualizing Institutional Culture

Institutional culture is a multifaceted phenomenon inclusive of many different aspects, from the architecture of buildings to the medium of communication, all the way up to the ways in which lectures, social and political events are conducted (Vice, 2015). It is also experiential, resting on the lived experiences of individuals within an institution. Therefore, it is both relational and relative from one person to another based on their orientation (Steyn, 2007). Tierney and Lanford (2018) also indicate that this phenomenon is not monolithic but changes with time. HWU universities in South Africa, for instance, were built upon the values, ways of doing, and norms of white middle class society, the subsequent influx of black students, however, has resulted in the progressive integration of different cultures. For instance, Wits (2021) references the renaming of university buildings in the

midst of the #FeesMustFall demands, citing their renaming of the Central block to the RobertSobukwe block in 2017. Institutional culture is also not a top-down concept where individual actors have no agency, it is rather coproduced by the university and its constituents. In illustration of this, De Tolly (2020) references the ways in which the initiation ceremonies of some residences in HWU have changed, due to the presence of black students. To this point he cites how the English war-criesthat characterized these ceremonies have been replaced by African vernacular songs dubbed “amaGwijo” as the years have progressed.

Institutional culture has been regarded as a very potent element determining the success of students at universities, especially that of “new students”. As had been acknowledged in the preceding section, however, this is a contested reality and a highly nebulous phenomenon, difficult to pin down(Tabensky and Matthews, 2015). Luvalo (2019, p 190) describes institutional culture as, “the collective, mutually supporting patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institution of higher learning and provide a frameof reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus”. Adonisand Silinda (2021, p 90) see it as an entity that “not only seeks conformity, but also often acts to screen out and marginalize dissident voices as a dominant sub-culture, asserting its values and mindset as an informal institutional code of conduct, thereby consolidating institutional hegemony.”Louse Vincent (2015), on the other hand, identifies institutional culture on two interactive levels of understanding: the discursive and the material.

Understanding institutional culture through discourse is perceiving it as something that is narrated. To understand the culture of an institution, therefore, necessitates that one listens to the stories that the institution tells about itself and those of the individuals peopling it (Vincent, 2015). Vincent explains the materiality of institutional culture as the concrete cultural manifestation of cultural practices, identities, and subjectivities. This regards the built environment, monuments, architecture, urban planning, along with other artefacts and designs. Vice (2015) asserts that it is due significantly to institutional culture that black students struggle to succeed at universities in South Africa. She views institutional culture through the concepts of “being at home”, which denotes a positive and congenial space, and “being in one’s element”, which denotes being in one’s natural abode, where one feels enabled, nourished and is productive, as opposed to being alienated and uncomfortable (Vice, 2015). These notions entail that there be a fit between an individual and their environment.

The conceptualization of institutional culture espoused in this research project belongs to Steyn (2007). She views it as “the way of life in a university”, made up of the sum total effects of the values, attitudes, ways of interaction, collective understandings, and collective memories, perceived through the lived experiences of its constituents. This conceptualization is apt for this project as it also probes the institutional culture of Wits university through the lived experiences of its student population. However, the definition of institutional culture that is most instrumental for transformation in IHL is that of Kuhn and Whitt (1988, p130), they define it as “the collective, mutually supporting patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institution of higher learning and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus”. This definition is most pertinent to transformation because it indicates the elements that necessitate change in the efforts to transform the cultures of HWU.

2.2.2 The relationship between Transformation and Institutional culture

Like institutional culture, transformation is a nebulous concept, most fundamentally though it entails change, one that is deep and meaningful (Higgins, 2007). The need for transformation in IHL is of concern globally. Changes that take place within and around an institution necessitate a commensurate transformation that will combat potential threats to its functionality. For instance, the introduction of new technologies, a changing student demographic, and globalization are issues that have required IHL internationally to undergo transformation (Kezar and Eckel 2002). In South Africa,

however, the transformation discourse speaks primarily to redressing the legacies of apartheid in our IHL. Luvalo (2019) postulated that transformation and institutional culture are concepts that should be read interrelatedly vis-à-vis the higher education sector in South Africa. The direction that this transformation ought to take, according to most academics, is one that approximates the ideals outlined in the country's 1996 constitution, one that intentionally divorces the notions promoted in the apartheid era (Higgins, 2007).

The calls for transformation of higher education in the country are tied to the inception of creating a new democracy dispensation (Luvalo, 2019). Such an agenda saw the inauguration of a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1995 by President Nelson Mandela. The role of this commission was to formulate a policy framework for transformation, titled *A Framework for Transformation*. This report was foundational in the development and publication of the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation in 1996, and the Education White Paper 3 *A Programme for the Transformation of the Higher Education System* in 1997 (Adonis and Silinda, 2021). In the next two decades from the inauguration of the first document, the country witnessed the tenures of 4ministers of education who collectively developed 7 white papers, 3 green papers, 25 bills (17 being amendment bills), 35 Acts, 11 regulations, 52 government notices, and 26 calls for comments (Adonisand Silinda, 2021). Policies continue to be developed in this regard, yet substantive transformation continues to be a herculean task. Although staff and student demographic profiles continue to diversify over the years, meaningful transformation of the institutional cultures of universities continues to be elusive.

There are continuous calls for the transformation of the higher education sector to become more inclusive and allow for individuals from all walks of life to experience it as a congenial space. Mzindle (2015) called for the integration of traditional African beliefs and practices in universities as a part and parcel of transformation. His study pointed out that students felt like their traditions and cultures were marginalized in universities, perceiving them, therefore, as 'unaccommodative' spaces.Some universities are now heeding this call, however, the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) for instance is said to have a traditional healer (Isangoma) at its on-campus clinic, assisting students withissues requiring indigenous and traditional understanding (Mzindle, 2015).

Despite these efforts, there have been numerous student protests in the last decade pursuing transformation in South Africa's IHL. In 2009 students at the University of Limpopo demonstrated against accommodation issues, staff quality, student victimization, and academic exclusion. Similar protests erupted at Wits university against fee increments and in the University of Pretoria against the lack of political representation of black people in influential offices. The year 2015 was a milestone in this regard, seeing movements such as #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall call to decolonise the curriculum, and the release of a documentary titled Luister at Stellenbosch University(Adonis and Silinda, 2021). Nonetheless, there are still reports of racial discrimination in South Africa's HWU.

2.2.3 Manifestation of Racism in HWU

Matthews (2015) undergoes to discuss racism in HWU in relation to institutional culture and transformation. In this regard, she proposes the concepts of "white supremacy" and "white privilege", defining "white supremacy" as a conscious and more overt form of white domination, while "white supremacy" is a constellation of psychical and somatic habits developed throughtransaction with a racist world. The latter is said to be more prevalent today, although cases of former have not ceased to exist. The two, however, are equally pernicious. Matthews (2015) draws distinction between the two to say methods of transformation need to be suited to the specific way

in which white domination manifests itself today. Her discussion displays that racism is not restricted to a set of conscious beliefs about the supremacy of white people but extends to the way of being in the world that privileges whites while disadvantaging and dehumanising blacks (Matthews, 2015). In an effort to display this to those who are in denial or genuinely cannot perceive it, Matthews extrapolates from Mcintosh's "invisible knapsack" concept (McIntosh, 1988). This concept posits that white privilege is "like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports,

codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks", which helps white people manoeuvre the world more easily than black people. In her extrapolation, Matthews (2015) develops a list of privileges enjoyed by white staff in universities. This list contained statements such as "my students are not surprised to find someone like me lecturing them and tend to accept me as an authority on my subject", and "I'm not worried that people think I was appointed just because of my race" (Matthews, 2015). These are two of fourteen privileges that white staff members enjoy in universities comprising Matthews' list of special provisions conferred by the "invisible knapsack".

Likewise, Vice (2015) perceives HWU as spaces that have not fundamentally transformed and characterized by the abovementioned forms of racism. She makes reference to Rhode University (Rhodes), citing SRC members who expressed that issues such as financial and academic exclusion are almost exclusively black issues in the university. These members also problematized the "whiteness" of residences at Rhodes, citing an incident where a warden told black students animatedly watching soccer to "stop acting like monkeys". Suransky and van der Merwe (2014) also cite an incident that occurred at the University of Free State (UFS), one of the oldest HWU in the country, which only accommodated white students until 1993. In this incident four white male students recruited five middle-aged black cleaning staff to participate in a project they were to display at an annual cultural evening. The story line of this video depicted a mock initiation ceremonywhere activities such as a beer-drinking competition, dancing to traditional Afrikaans music, sprintingdown an athletics track, and participating in a mock rugby practice took place. The most humiliating and controversial part of this video was a scene where one of the students seemingly urinated in a concoction which the black workers were made to eat while kneeling. This video ended with the message, "At the end of the day, this is what we really think of integration." Mayhem ensued in the country when this video reached the public eye through YouTube, the State was demanded to take action (Suransky and van der Merwe, 2014).

In the post-apartheid era racism in HWU has become predominantly subtle, rendering it difficult to articulate. Matthews (2015) cites black staff members who expressed that this imperceptibleness of racism often makes them consider for a minute if they are not mad, if they are not being paranoid, perceiving things that are not. This subtleness of racism can be perceived also in the experience of Anathi Canham who, in his first-year studying law at Rhodes university, had to act out a court case with a group of white students. When deciding who would play which role, it was suggested by one white student that he play the witness, which has the most minimal presence, while the other white students took on more prominent roles. Likewise, Thando Njovane (2015) recalls an incident where, during a discussion about "noble savages", a white student turned to her, the only black person in the class, and said "Oh, Thando you can be our noble savage", presented as a joke.

2.3 The role of SSPs in assisting students in HWU

Barr and Keating (1985) describe support programmes as theoretically based plans which guide action taken towards the realization of specific goals in IHL. Wirtz and Magrath (1979) adopt a similarline of thinking in this regard, defining SSPs as planned responses towards a need for action. Focusingon academic support, Adams (2006) defines support programmes as interventions that attempt to optimize the academic performance of students from poor academic backgrounds. This research project espouses Adams (2006) definition of SSPs. The acknowledgement of students from poor academic backgrounds as the targeted recipients of such interventions gives this definition relevance in the study being undertaken. These support programmes are designed differently in IHL. They can be bridging courses, foundation courses, orientation sessions, supplemental instruction, academic counselling, language support programmes, non-academic support programmes, study skills courses, mentoring programmes or peer support programmes amongst a myriad of interventions.

Support programmes in South Africa were inaugurated in the early 1980s as a response to the growing number of black students in HWU, they were "developed to assist students without the necessary background to be able to benefit immediately from lectures and tutorials" (Boughey, 2010:p 7). When

black students enrolled in HWU, they lagged behind their white counterparts with regards to the social and educational capital needed to succeed in university (Bourdieu, 1977). The apartheid designed system of basic education for "non-whites" did not equip black people for the academic demands of university, this is still the reality today as students from impoverished backgrounds generally perform worse that their affluent counterparts (Taylor and Yu, 2009). This issue was the impetus for the transformation agenda in South Africa's IHL, which has sought to re- orientate these academic institutions commensurate with the 1996 constitution (Adonis and Silinda, 2021). Rendering them spaces where students from all walks of life feel a sense of belonging.

SSPs such as the FYE, ADU, and CCDU at Wits are policy interventions that are part and parcel of the measures that the university has employed in the pursuit of a supportive institutional culture. These programmes work towards transforming the environment, rendering the prerequisite support for historically disadvantaged students to succeed (Scott, 2018). Kuh et al (2006) suggested that universities pay careful attention to the design and implementation of such programmes, as the wellbeing and success of students from poor backgrounds is largely contingent upon them. Paul (1991) noted that an open admission policy is insufficient in responding to the needs of disadvantaged students if it is not accompanied by student support systems. Morrow (2009) also argued that students, mostly black and coloured, require support programmes and an enabling learning environment to cope through the higher education system successfully.

Nqadala (2007), reflecting on the instrumentality of the programmes, posits that they are mechanisms that promote the development of an effective teaching and learning environment. The programmes render the institutional environment a space that is conducive for the well being and holistic development of students. They ensure that a student's experience of the institutional environment is healthy, breaking down barriers to learning such as the failure to acclimatize academically and psycho-socially, amongst other ways. The technological support offered by programmes such as FYE at Wits, for instance, assists students who had never encountered computers before to get acquainted with these technologies, mitigating struggles and therefore the prospects of alienation and disconnectedness (Isaacs, 2007). In this regard, Benton's (2003) study underscored that the presence and utilization of these programmes by students results in emotional wellness and increases the prospects of stundents completing their studies.

The ability of SSPs to identify threats to students' wellbeing and academic success through early assessments, and provide timely interventions, renders a different dimension to the institutional culture of universities (Ntakana, 2011). They ensure that students receive the most apt support, ameliorating their transition into their new academic environment. For instance, the peer interactions that some of these programmes facilitate, especially in first year, play a pivotal role in assisting students transition, getting them connected and feeling at home (Calder, 2004). In a study conducted by Ntakana (2011) 81 percent of the students considered indicated that support programmes assisted their transition and acclimatization into university. The findings of a study conducted by Reynolds-Adkins (2008) also suggested that personal adjustment and social integration into the university are as important, if not more important than academic factors as far as student retention is concerned.

Tinto (2010), like the scholars discussed above, viewed student support programmes as a *sine qua non* for students, especially those from low-income backgrounds. The types of programmes Tinto advocates for are those that are committed to the students they serve. Those that put student welfare before all other institutional goals that the university might have. These programmes should be committed to the education of every member of their student population regardless of race, gender, or class. They must be committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities within the institution, in which all students are integrated as competent members. The aim of these programmes should be ensuring that all students who arrive on campus feel valued and like full members of the university community (Tinto, 2010).

2.4 The effects of Career Guidance on student performance

A fundamental reason for education is the empowerment of individuals to succeed in their quest for a meaningful career path. A pre-requisite for this is that these individuals are adequately guided in their career choices. Many students drop out of university due to misguided career choices; these are people who leave high school with only a vague understanding of career choices available to them (Ramrathan and Pillay, 2015). They do not receive adequate information to know the career paths that fit their unique talents and passions. Even if these individuals manage to make it through the system and graduate, they are faced with the predicament of being stuck in a career that they despise (Moodley and Singh, 2015).

Letseka (2009) surveyed dropouts to find out from them why they opted for that route. Eighty percent of those surveyed indicated academic failure, resulting from a mismatch between theindividuals and their fields of study, as the primary reason. Students enrol into university without sufficient knowledge of the field of study they are enrolling into, especially students from underprivileged schools who have never attended a career expedition. These students, usuallyhalfway through their first year, realize that the career that had chosen is not congenial, opting thereafter to dropout. Ramrathan and Pillay (2015) suggest that students apply for many courses, ranking them according to their preferences, when they get rejected for their course of preference, they do not look elsewhere, take a gap year, or go upgrade their marks. They take their second or third option instead, and it is these options that they end up dropping out. There are a variety of forces that lead students to take courses that are not congenial when enrolling into university, sometimes it is because of their parents and at other times it is pressure from their communities. Attending university is a lauded endeavour, these students then see it best to study something they are not passionate about rather than to be idle for a year and be viewed by their parents and communities as failures (Ramrathan and Pillay, 2015).

2.5 The effects of poor educational backgrounds on student performance

The education system in South Africa is a cause of concern. The South African Child Gauge indicated that 58 percent of children are unable to read fluently and with comprehension when finishing Grade 4. The study also indicated that out of 100 leaners who enter school, only 60 make it to Grade 12 (matric) and write their exams. From these, approximately 37 will pass, and only 12 of them will do well enough to access university. From those who manage to get into university, only 4 will graduate within 6 years (Nonjinge, 2018).

Government basic education schools in South Africa have been categorized into quintiles, from 1 to 5. This categorization of schools is based on the surrounding community's socio-economic status. This is based on measures of average income, unemployment rates, and general literacy level in the school's geographical area (DBE, 2016). Schools in quintile 1-3 are usually non-fee-paying, they are the poorest, they are usually located in townships and rural areas. These schools have large class sizes, insufficient resources, and derelict infrastructures. They consist predominantly of black children, the teachers employed here are usually semi-skilled and less qualified (DBE, 2016). Quintile 4 and 5 schools on the other end of the spectrum are the most affluent schools, usually located in suburban areas. These schools are adequately resourced, have small class sizes, and have the most competent teachers.

Letseka (2014) asserted that the dysfunctionality of the country's quantile 1-3 schools significantly disadvantages their learners, as they do not develop numerical and literacy skills to the same degree as those from quintile 4 and 5 schools. This leads to them being under-prepared for higher education studies. Issues in quintile 1 to 3 schools include the lack of the most rudimentary pedagogic and content knowledge competencies from teachers, their late coming, and absenteeism (Nonjinge, 2018). When these students enter university they encounter a completely foreign and alienating environment, university is often their first real encounter with "white culture" associated with big buildings, projectors, and computers, amongst a myriad of other elements (Krause, 2005). Students who attend quantile 1-3 schools are predominantly English second or third language speakers, unlike

those who attend quintile 4 and 5 schools. Having English as the medium of instruction in HWU significantly disadvantages these students, learning and constructing new knowledge in Englishmeans they first have to translate everything to their home language before attaining an adequate understanding of it (dos Reis et al, 2019).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework that guides this research project is that developed by Vincent (Tinto, 2010), who has grappled with this subject from the early 1970's to date. Tinto's work isprimarily based on the United States'(US) urban 2 and 4-year colleges. He has, however, done work based on South Africa's higher education system, drawing parallels between it and the systems in theUS (Tinto, 2014). The primarily focus of his work is student persistence along with curricular and pedagogical innovations designed to ensure student success. The demographic of interest in the plethora of Tinto's publications is low-income, under-prepared, and underrepresented students. Thisrenders his work apt in guiding the conduction of this research project as it is also concerned with an equivalent demographic for the South African context. This section begins by probing Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action, underscoring the elements which render it an apt theoretical framework for this research study. Thereafter, the section discusses the institutional culture of Wits university as told by the university itself.

2.6.2 Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action

Tinto's theory was derived from the social constructivist understanding of learning. This paradigm postulates that learning is key to success, this implies that regardless of whether students persist in university or not, they will not succeed unless they learn. His theory was bred in an academic climate where there had been extensive work done in academia via-a-vis student attrition in institutions of higher education, there was, however, a dearth of work seeking to provide an action plan for institutions to ameliorate student throughput rates (Tinto, 2010).

Although access to university has increased significantly over the years, and demographics who were unable to attend these institutions historically are growing in the student population of universities, there are still racial and class inequalities vis-à-vis the proportion of students who graduate (Tinto, 2010). Tinto's Theory is, therefore, a response to this reality, pursuing to translate access into meaningful opportunity for success. This aligns significantly with the pursuit of this research project, as the problem it seeks to ultimately address is that of the underwhelming number of black students who graduate in high skilled professions, specifically engineering.

In the pursuit of remedying the inequalities that exist in higher education and achieving greater student success rates, Tinto took a disparate approach compared to scholars such as Bourdieu (1977). Bourdieu, theorizing on students' success in IHL, proposes the concept of habitus. This concept fundamentally concerns a set of attitudes and values, possessed by the dominant, affluent, class in a society. These values and attitudes are primarily with regard to education, they are transmitted to individuals within family settings. Bourdieu's (1977) theory, therefore, proposes that students from low-income backgrounds enter university lacking these attitudes and values, impedingtheir academic efforts in this regard. Tinto, however, shifted his focus away from the individual onto the institution and its systems. He identified four conditions within institutions that could hinder or enhance student performance giving institutions an action plan to make themselves as conducive as possible for student success. These conditions are expectations, support, feedback, and involvement(Tinto, 2010). Along with these conditions, he went on to enumerate different types of actions that institutions can undergo towards realizing this goal. These conditions and types of actions assisted the formulation of questions in the interviews probing the role that support programmes play in assisting students around the institutional culture at Wits.

2.6.2.1 Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action: Student Expectation

Tinto argues that students' expectations of the university's environment, socially and academically, determine the trajectory of their actions thereon forth (Tinto, 2010). Students from low-income backgrounds are usually the first in their families to attend university, they therefore enter the university environment not knowing what to expect. Students from more affluent backgrounds, however, often have an idea of what to expect based on conversations with family members who are graduates. This postulation is congruent with Bourdieu's (1977) notion of cultural capital. He argues that students from low-income backgrounds' social context does not equip them with the cultural capital required by universities. Students from affluent backgrounds, however, get equipped with this cultural capital, they therefore have a better experience of higher education than their disadvantaged counterparts. This proposed cultural capital concerns familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, especially the ability to understand and use "educated" language (Bourdieu, 1977). Students from affluent backgrounds, therefore, have a better chance of succeeding in university as they are better prepared for the challenges that lie ahead of them.

The type of institutional action that Tinto advocates for vis-à-vis this subject matter is the proactivity of staff members in communicating the institution's expectations of students. He postulates that when students are informed in this way, good academic performance follows (Tinto, 2010). This condition is within the purview of the research project being undertaken. The project probes a support programme that seeks to achieve this condition at Wits university: the First Year Experience programme. This programme provides mentors for first years, who conscientize them of the institutional environment of the university, giving them advise, assistance, and guidance according to their needs.

2.6.2.2 Tinto's Theory of Institutional Action: Student Support

Student support is a crucial precondition advocated by Tinto, it is not enough to have high expectations of students in the absence of support structures that will assist them in meeting these expectations. The absence of support is detrimental to the performances of students, especially those from low-income backgrounds. Studies have found that there is a relationship between the degree to which students perceive a university as supportive and the growth of their academic competence. Tinto breaks down support into three categories: academic, psychosocial, and financial(Tinto, 2010). This section, however, discusses academic and psychosocial support, as it is these that the study grapples with.

2.6.2.2.1 Academic Support

Congruent with Spady's (1970) view that connects students' attrition to intellectual development, Tinto views academic support as most essential in ensuring student success. This type of support is especially crucial during the first year of study when student dropout is most prevalent. The gap between the academic demand of high school and university is very substantial and a number of students enrol into university under prepared for its academic demands. The type of institutional action that Tinto proposes in this regard is the inauguration of tutorials, study groups, and academic support programs. In post 1994 South Africa, Wits university launched a significant number of programs towards the need of academic support. This research project looks at the Academic Development Unit (ADU) as it is tasked with primary responsibility over Engineering students. Commensurate with the propositions of Tinto (2010), this programme offers tutorials, along with other programs, to assists students with their academic performance.

2.6.2.2.2 Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support is also of essential when it comes to the facilitation of student success in university. Many first-year students are experiencing being away from their families for extensive periods for the first time in their lives as young adults. This takes a toll on their well-being. The formation of new social relationships with peers and staff members is, therefore, imperative in attaining a sense of belonging to their new environment. Failure to formulate these affiliations is often

detrimental to students' psychological wellbeing, leading to poor academic performance and eventual withdrawal from university (Tinto, 2010). This postulation is commensurate with that of Spady's (1970) who asserted that social integration was a prerequisite for optimal performance in IHL. The type of institutional actions that Tinto proposes in combating this issue are counselling, and mentoring. Wits university inaugurated the Career, Counselling and Development Unit (CCDU) to attend to this need of psychosocial support. Commensurate with the suggestions of Tinto, this programme has a team of psychologists who provide counselling to students.

2.6.2.3 Social and Academic Engagement

Commensurate with the postulations of Bean's (1980), student engagement is a potent condition in Tinto's model. The more engaged students are, academically and socially, the greater their chances at successfully navigating their way through the institution towards graduation. This is especially true during the first year of study when students are insecure of their membership in the new environment. Involvement throughout the first-year acts as a foundation which subsequent affiliations and engagements with peers and members of staff are built upon. This is true for allstudents who enroll into university, regardless of ethnicity or race. Academic and social isolation is associated with poor performance and a high likelihood of dropping out (Tinto, 2010).

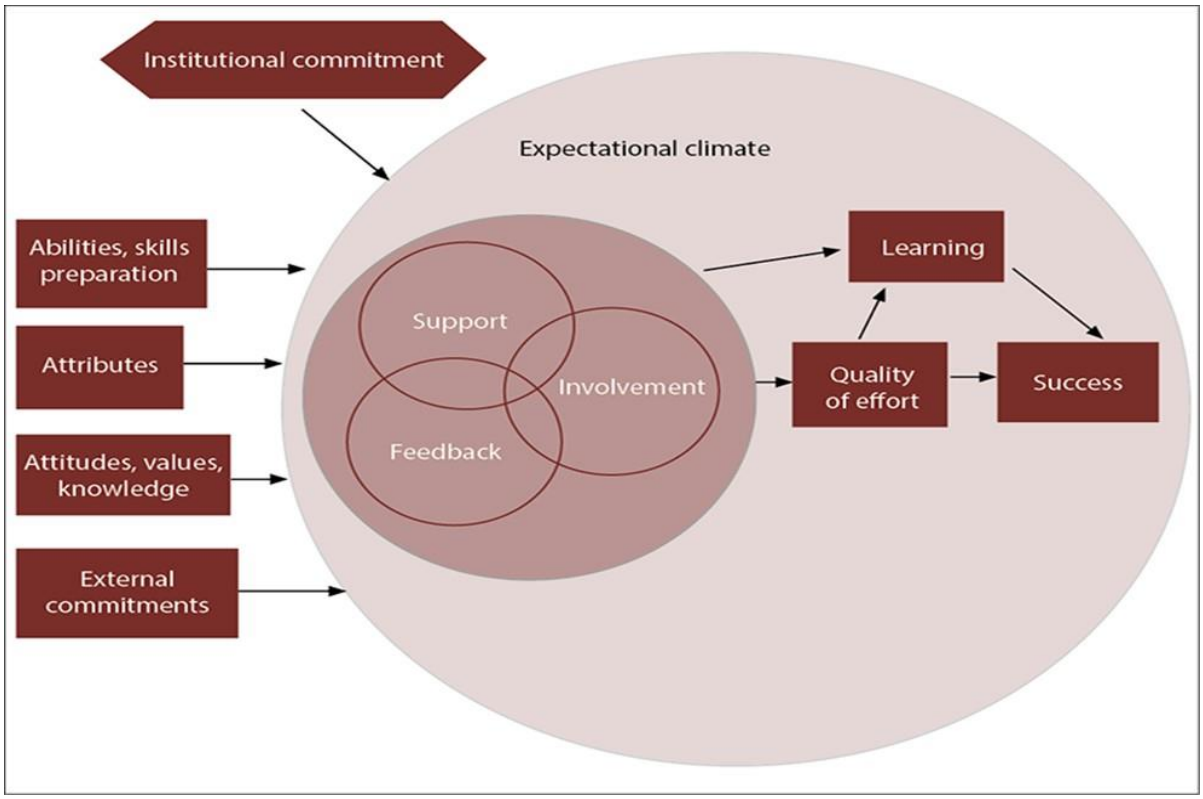
The type of action that Tinto advocates for vis-à-vis student engagement is the establishment of academic and social communities within which students can engage with their peers and faculty members. Their involvement in such relations is directly associated with them realizing a sense of belonging in the institution. The FYE orientation program purports to meet this need through games and challenges. These facilitate engagement between students and mentors, integrating them socially towards realizing a sense of belonging.

2.6.2.4 Student Assessment and feedback

An institution that prioritizes assessment and feedback experiences more student success than those without these systems in place. Feedback allows students and staff members to be aware of their current performance and be able to adjust their behaviours for better outcomes. This is especially crucial during students' first year of study, given the gap between high school and university academic demands. Students need to be awakened to the amount of effort required of them to succeed in their new environment, feedback enables this (Tinto, 2010).

Assessment and feedback from the institution can take different forms, it could be through entry assessments of learning skills, monitoring of student progress, and a variety of classroom assessment strategies that gauge the performance of student in class. Entry assessments are integral as they allow the institution to be aware of the academic competency of individual students and thereafter allocate them to the fitting courses and support programme that will render to them the needed assistance. The monitoring of student progress is essential in the same sense, these monitoring systems can ascertain the type of assistance that students need based on the degree of their progress. At Wits university the ADU instrumentalizes entry assessments and monitors students' progress. These measures help the programme to render the most apt assistance to individual students based of their ascertained need.

Figure 1: Structure of a model of institutional action



[Extracted from Ross (2014, p 120)]

2.7 The institutional culture of the University of Witwatersrand- according to the university

Wits university is situated in Johannesburg, a city regarded as the economic and industrial heartland of Africa. It is an open public university which cherishes academic freedom and the pursuitof truth (Wits, 2022). The university considers itself as one that makes no distinction between class, wealth, race, or religious beliefs: an egalitarian social and political environment. It states as its priority the pursuit of diversity, fostering dialogue and interaction between different cultural communities within its environment (Wits, 2022).

The university's Institutional Culture Committee (ICC), which oversees the transformation of the university, defined institutional culture[8] as:

> The lived experience of the university by all those who inhabit it, including students, academic staff, management, support staff, workers and members of the public who come into contact with the institution. Institutional culture should be understood to encompass the policies and practices (tangible and intangible) that mark the daily and long-term experiences of those who share and pass through the university's spaces (Wits, 2022, p 1).

According to the university's website the primary principle that underpins its work is intellectual excellence guided by international standards (Wits, 2022). The university is currently ranked 2nd in the continent, after occupying the 1st spot for the past few years, and 275th globally (Head, 2021). As part of its purposes, Wits seeks to provide a high-quality, supportive research and educational environment for students and staff and to retain its legacy of high-level achievement and excellence. This intellectual excellence is closely accompanied by intellectual integrity (Wits, 2022). The university sees all its constituents as active members in an intellectual community whose work is required to

[8] The conceptualization of the institutional culture of Wits university in this research project takes into account the characteristics that the university identifies itself with. In this regard, the limitation is that this conceptualization does not delve, with great depth, into historical-cultural aspects of Wits as a white, "liberal", and English-speaking university in the apartheid context and its transformation thereon forth, as documented by scholars such as Murray (2016).

uphold the highest standard of intellectual integrity.The university's stated goals include ensuring that its graduates achieve levels of skill, knowledge andunderstanding that are comparable with that of graduates from the best universities around the world (Wits, 2022). To demonstrate strides in this regard it cites being a home to four recipients of the Noble Prize: Nelson Mandela (peace), Sydney Brenner (medicine), Nadine Gordimer (literature), and Aaron Klug (chemistry). Wits further states that it has produced over 200 000 alumni since its inauguration in 1922, 50 of which have been awarded prestigious National Orders by the Presidency since 1994. Even in 2021 continuation in this trajectory persists: The 2021 Mail and Guardian Top 200list of trailblazing young South Africans included several Wits staff, students, and alumni (Wits, 2022).

Other commitments, enumerated on the university's website, include tolerance of difference, academic freedom, democracy, equality, freedom from racism and sexism, fostering a culturally diverse, intellectually stimulating and harmonious environment. Furthermore, it commits to academic autonomy, collegiality, debate and critical engagement, and supporting, developing, and unifying its staff and student population (Wits, 2022).

The university also prides itself on being a vanguard in social, political, and humanitarian endeavours, citing its anti-segregation protests in the apartheid epoch and establishing the first clinical trial in the continent for a Covid-19 vaccine in 2020 (Wits, 2022). From its inauguration, the university has committed to upholding a policy of non-discrimination, which faced its greatest test when the apartheid government enacted the Extension of the University Education Act in 1959, seeking to enforce university apartheid. Here the Wits community embarked on vigorous demonstrations against the Act and has to date maintained this political stance (Wits, 2022).

The university has demonstrated this stance today by renaming various buildings in the university's campuses. In 2016 the Senate House was renamed the Solomon Mahlangu House in commemoration of the liberation struggle stalwart (Wits, 2022). The Central Block was renamed the Robert Sobukwe Block in 2017, commemorating his services to the university and his contributions against apartheid (Wits, 2022). Such strides have become common across HWU in the country. In 2008, Rhodes underwent the renaming one of their buildings to the Stephan Bantu Biko building (Vice, 2015).

This is Wits' institutional outlook and approach to its student population. The institutional culture of this entity, however, is also shaped by its students, whose perceptions and experiences vis-à-vis this culture are discussed more extensively in chapter 4 and 5 of this research project.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has covered the concept of institutional culture, the role of SSPs in higher education, the ways in which educational background and career guidance affect black students' experience in HWU, the theoretical framework guiding the study, and the culture of Wits university. The literature surveyed in this chapter underscored the elusiveness of the concept of institutional culture. It further delineated the intricate relationship between institutional culture and transformation which renders the two phenomena conceptually inextricable. Thereafter, it was ascertained that SSPs were inaugurated as part and parcel of the transformation of institutions of higher learning in South Africa. These programmes aimed to ensure that black students in HWU receive the necessary assistance to succeed. Furthermore, the study found that HWU have made laudable strides towards the transformation agenda, however, most of them are still far from actualizing its ideals as racism continues to contaminate their environments. The chapter also discussed Tinto's Model of Institutional Action, discussing the conditions of support, assessment and feedback, involvement, and expectation, which are the pillars of this model. Finally, the chapter delved into the institutional culture of Wits university, finding academic excellence to be its most prominent pursuit.

This literature review indicates the scarcity of work regarding the role of SSPs in assisting black student navigate the institutional cultures of HWUs. Also, most work examining students at HWU employs a cross-institutional approach. This research project is therefore a response to Manik (2015),filling in

the gap by probing the role of SSPs vis-à-vis assisting black students navigate the culture of HWU and undergoing an institution-specific study. Such an endeavour captures specificities necessary for an adequate reformation of programmes if necessary.

Chapter 3: A qualitative inquiry on institutional culture in higher education

3.1 Introduction

This research project seeks to explore the extent to which student support programmes (SSP) assist black engineering students in navigating their way around the institutional culture at the Universityof Witwatersrand. The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological processes and theoretical assumptions underpinning this research project. The methodological framework, research instruments, sample population, ethics, content analysis, reliability, and limitations are all discussed here. The chapter situates the project in the interpretivism paradigm of research.

3.2 The research paradigm undergirding the study

The conceptualisation and definition of a paradigm is a terrain that has witnessed much contestation in academia over the years. The conceptualisation that has come to be espoused by many scholars, however, has been that of Thomas Kuhn (1962). Drawing from Kuhn's definition, Brady (2011) postulates that a paradigm is a theoretical perspective which comes to be accepted by scientists of a particular discipline, it is founded upon the discipline's past acquisition, and directs the trajectory of research. This trajectory encompasses the specification and choice of what to study, the formulation of hypothesis, and the selection of the most apt empirical research technique. This study falls within the interpretivist paradigm.

It postulates that social reality must be interpreted rather than observed: upon encountering data, a researcher undergoes to interpret that data using their subjective knowledge and skills before arriving at a conclusion (Brady, 2011). This means that there will often be subtle differences betweenthe interpretations of different researchers even when grappling with the same data. When researchis conducted in this paradigm, qualitative methods are employed. This research project employs qualitative interviews as the data collection instrument. In keeping with the philosophy of the interpretivism paradigm, the data gathered through these interviews is not considered as objective realities, but data which still needs to be interpreted by the researcher through apt content analysis processes. The paradigm and instrument employed in this study is fitting as the study seeks out the lived experiences and subjective perspectives of students and employees of SSPs. This cannot be realized through quantitative research processes as these are useful when generalizing rather that delving into the specificities of phenomena.

3.3 The study's approach in understanding Institutional culture.

Institutional culture is a contested reality. Scholars in the field of higher learning such as Vincent (2015) and Vice (2015), acknowledged that the concept encompasses so many disparate elements that it cannot be defined conclusively. It is a slippery, elusive concept and scholars who debate vis-à-vis its nature usually do so with different conceptualizations in mind. This research project is a contribution to this field, seeking to ascertain the ways in SSPs assist black engineering students around the institutional culture of the University of Witwatersrand.

This study aligns with Melissa Steyn's conceptualization of institutional culture (2007), loosely defined "the way of life in a university". She postulates that it is composed of the total effects of the values, attitudes, ways of interaction, collective understandings, and collective memories, viewed through the lived experiences of the people who man the institution. This understanding of the concept led the study to espouse the qualitative research paradigm, probing it through the lived experiences of black engineering students at Wits university. The study envisaged that the students' accounts of their personal experiences and their perceptions of dynamics such as the ways in which race determines

one's experience navigating Wits, would surface the most prominent cultural elements of the university. It also envisaged that probing the instrumentality of SSPs in this regard would expand the picture painted by students' perceptions and experiences. This was, therefore, the methodology adopted by the study in breaking down and understanding institutional culture throughqualitative interviews.

3.4 The sample population of the study

The first sample of the study consists of engineering students enrolled in the university. The demographic of interest is black students who attended quintile 1-3 secondary schools, as these are envisaged to experience issues regarding background education, navigating to institutional culture, and career misguidance more acutely than students who attended quintile 4 and 5 schools. Students who attended quintile 4 schools were, however, interviewed as well, for the purpose of juxtaposing their experiences to those of students from quintile 1-3 schools. This allowed the study to capture differences between the experiences of the two cohorts vis-à-vis navigating the university's culture. The students interviewed were all undergraduates who had been in the university for at least 3 years as they have experience of the university that precedes Covid-19. Lastly, these were students who had utilized at least 1 of the 3 SSPs under review in this research project: the Academic DevelopmentUnit (ADU), Career Counselling and Development Unit (CCDU), and the First Year Experience (FYE).

In total, 14 undergraduate students, consisting of 7 males and 7 females, were interviewed. All the student participants were between the ages of 18 and 25. Four out of the 14 student participants were students who had attended quintile 4 schools, this number was kept relatively low because

their experiences served as they are not the primary focus of the study. In this research the genders were purposively balanced out to capture, should there be any, differences in the experiences of males and females. The assumption was that there would be differences between the experiences of the different genders, given that issues such as sexual assault affect females significantly more than males in university spaces. However, the findings did not yield any gender specific articulations in relation to navigate the Wits institutional culture.

Students were reached through a combination of snowball sampling and a door-to-door outreach. In the outreach students were purposively selected, only those who had been in the university for at least 3 years were requested to participate. There was intentionality, as well, in ensuring that there was a balance of genders in those that were requested to participate. After an interview, some students offered to reach out to friends which they knew would be interested in the study, others were asked to do so, some agreed. A lot of students were requested to participate in the study during the outreach, more than the stipulated number needed for the study. This was done becausethe researcher envisaged that approximately half of those who would agree to participate would endup not participating. This was indeed that case as only 45% of those who had agreed ended up participating, these however made up the 14 which the study had intended to interview.

The second sample population for the study is 6 purposively selected key informants (employees) working for the ADU, CCDU, and the FYE student support programme. These programmes were chosen in this study because these three assist students vis-à-vis adjusting to institutional culture, academic demands, and career guidance. In each programme two key informants were selected. The first of the two informants were individuals who are in the managerial staff of these programmes, this enabled a strategic reading of the interventions, giving insight into the assumptions that underpin the programmes' services and structures. The second group of informants were employeeswho engaged with students directly, such as tutors, this enabled insights from the implementation processes. Getting perspective from management and implementers offers insights from different viewpoints, proffering depth to the study.

A request was sent via email to the pertinent SSPs to interview their employees. There was no age criterion for this sample population, however, participants were selected on the basis of a minimum 3-year experience in the programmes. There were no specifications regarding gender with this sample population because the programmes had a limited number of employees who were available to participate in the study. The overall population did, however, end up consisting of a mixture of the genders: 4 males and 2 females.

3.5 Research instruments employed in the study

This research project employed two semi-structured, open-ended interviews, one for students and the other for employees of SSPs. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews are apt in offering in-depth understanding of phenomena, in this study they gave the researcher insight into the granularities of black students' experiences with Wits' culture and SSPs. Semi-structures, open-ended interviews allowed the researcher to further probe information that could enrichen the study during the interviews. The student interviews focused on the backgrounds of students, their experience of Wits culture, their experience with the abovementioned student support, and career guidance. This instrument included questions such as *"Do you believe that being black makes you experience Wits differently to a student of another race?"* The employee interviews focused on two aspects, the first was the theory behind their programme. This concerned the assumptions that underpin their policies, their main objectives, and the strategies put in place to realize these objectives. The secondaspect concerned the experiences that employees have had with black engineering students. Questions asked in this instrument included *"What assumptions underpin the methods used by thosedesigning and running the programme?"*

The main task of interviews is to understand the meaning attached to concepts, this makes this instrument very apt in getting the story behind the experiences of participants. It is therefore a fitting instrument in this research project as it solicited the experiences of black vis-a-vis the institutional culture at Wits. The interviews conducted were open-ended because this avails room for unanticipated information, they were also semi-structured so that the researcher can spur the conversation in a direction that benefits the objectives of the study. The questions of the interviews were formulated in a way as to make them as comprehensive as possible, covering the main themes of the study drawn from the literature review process: institutional culture, background education, and career guidance.

Interview questions focused on the individual's subjective experiences.. The student interview asked questions such as "What cultural values and principles stand out for you in the way things are done in the university?" Although the study isfocused on students' experiences of the institutional culture at Wits and the role SSPs play in assisting them navigate this culture, insight from employees of the programmes offers context from which to interpret the sentiments of students. Employee interviews asked questions such as, "Basedon your observation and experience working with the programme, what issues do the black cohort struggle with the most at Wits university?"

The student and employee interviews were conducted sequentially, with the students' interviews being conducted first. Interviews were conducted in October and November, just before the final examinations, and in December. October and early November were auspicious times for student interviews compared to mid and late November, in this period students had not yet begun with examinations and were still staying in residences with internet access that enabled the interviews tobe conducted via online platforms i.e., Microsoft Teams and Zoom. During examinations these students would not be able, nor willing, to participate in the interview as they would be consumed with examinations. After examinations students go home, most of the cohort targeted in this study go back to homes that do not have Wi-Fi, network connection, and others do not even have electricity. This

would therefore hamper the efforts to reach these students, hamstringing the study.

The employee interviews were conducted in late November and early December. At the peak of examinations, mid-November, these programmes are very occupied, attending to the many and varying needs of students, they therefore struggled to fit in an interview in their hectic schedules. Unlike students going home to connection-less areas, most of these employees remain reachable when the academic year ends. One interview was held on the 20th of December, a time where most students want to hear nothing about school or academics. Late November and early December were therefore auspicious times to engage this sample population because their services were less in-demand during this epoch, and most are not yet disconnected with their work. The interviews were administered online due to Covid-19 regulations, via Microsoft Teams and Zoom, although primarily through Teams. These platforms are convenient as most students and staff have become adequately acquainted with them since the outbreak of the pandemic in March of 2020. Microsoft Teams also allows for the recording of meetings, and it automatically transcribes the meeting content in the process, this rendered it a very convenient platform for the study. The interviews were also conducted with cameras off as per the requests of participants. All the interviews, from Teams and Zoom, were recorded to accurately capture the responses of participants. These recordings replaced notetaking during the interviews as this can become a distraction for the interviewer and the interviewee, altering the nature of the answers given and their capturing by the researcher. All the interviews that were conducted took between 20-40 minutes.

3.6 The Content Analysis

The researcher in this project envisaged that unanticipated information would emerge from the interviews to be conducted. This resulted in the espousing of inductive content analysis. This method of content analysis allows categories and names of categories to ensue from the raw data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). It has been developed over the years by scholars such as Philip Burnard (1991) and Ian Dey (1993). This approach ensures that information is solicited from the participants without preconceived categories being imposed on them or the findings. This method of content analysis involves open coding, creating categories and abstraction (Dey, 1993). During the conduction of interviews in this study the researcher noted down recurring words and sentiments from respondents which served as tentative notes informing the open coding and creation of categories in the post-interview analysis of data.

In the analysis the data was first read iteratively, this ensured that the researcher gained an understanding of the whole data given before moving to the next step of analysis. During this phase, information that was not pertinent to the study was filtered out. Thereafter the researcher conducted a word-by-word analysis, codes were derived this way. Key words were highlighted to capture certain concepts emerging from the findings, and labels for codes were derived from this process. The codes derived were categorized into meaningful clusters, enough clusters to sort large numbers of codes. Thereafter, the researcher developed definitions for each category and code.

Furthermore, a selected number of quotations that were identified to evidence the themes that emerged from the interviews were extrapolated for presentation and discussion in chapter 4 and 5. Quotes from different participants were distinguished using their gender, the quintile in which their high schools fall under, and a participation number between 1-7. For instance, Student M1, Q3 means this was the first male participant who comes from a quintile 3 school. The same process wasused to distinguish between employees, for instance, Employee CCDU, M1 means this is the first male employee who works for the CDDU.

3.7 Ensuring reliability in the study

The quest that takes primacy in a research project is that of substantial and trustworthy results. Reliability is defined by Nueman (2003) as a dependable and consistent account of data. When undergoing quantitative research, a researcher endeavours to show that their research instruments are consistent and that errors and biases, from the respondents' side as well as the researcher's, are in absentia. Although seemingly appropriate, there is actually no guarantee that the research instruments employed were adequately understood by respondents, therefore the responses received could be inaccurate, limitations of this nature are present also in qualitative research.

There are various influences, such as anxiety, that are present during data collection of qualitative research that obscure the nature of responses given by participants. To combat these threats, the researcher in this study assured participants that there is no need to be anxious as the study was merely soliciting their subjective experiences and perceptions, there was therefore no right or wrong answers. Participants were requested to reflect and give an account of their own experiences.
Further efforts in this regard included engaging participants in a conversational manner, as opposed to being on a formal interview that may prompt the need to impress or provide what may bedeemed as correct responses.

The researcher is also not without their biases, which poses a threat to the accuracy of data. During the data collection stages the researcher might have injected biased probing questions which could alter participants' responses. Efforts were made in this research project to avoid such instances: the interviews employed in the study were all recorded, this allowed the researcher to reflect on his questioning and the responses of participants iteratively, addressing biases when apparent. The data analysis process, however, is also not without its limitations.

Researchers bring their own preferences and experience to the research project (Dawson, 2007, p.114). When, for instance, research data in interpreted by different individuals, differences will be apparent in their interpretations, based on their political views and methodological preferences, amongst other idiosyncrasies. Although differences in interpretation are invertible, Miles and Huberman (1994) postulate that there ought to be reasonable quality control from interpreters of data: differences in interpretations should not be too substantial to the degree that opposing conclusion are reached. This entails that the interpretations of two researcher should overlap substantially at various potent points, indicating that the "process of the study is consistent and reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.278). The researcher, in this study, employed this logic in his interpretation of data: juxtaposing his and another experienced researcher's interpretation of the study's data to ensure that the two were substantially consistent across various points. The interview schedules employed in the study were also piloted prior to the conduction of the actual interviews with participants to ensure that they were understandable and could be undergone within 20-50 minutes.

3.8 Ensuring validity in the study

Research validity refers to the research measuring what it intends to measure. Qualitative research endeavours to give fair, honest and balanced accounts of social life from a viewpoint of someone who lives it every day (Neuman, 2003, p. 185). Validity is a crucial aspect of research as credible conclusions are dependent on the examination of relevant data. To ensure that the gathered data was valid for the study, the researcher sent participants questions beforehand and offered to discuss any question that they did not understand properly with them. The purpose of the study was also reiterated for the participants before the interview began, this helped the participants understand how to answer in ways that were germane to the study. If during the interview participants still appeared to struggle with understanding a question, the researcher rephrased it in different ways until participants felt confident in their understanding.

In qualitative research it is often the case that authenticity becomes a parallel pursuit to validity. In this research project the researcher offered participants the option of undergoing the interview in vernacular, if they felt it necessary. This improved the authenticity of their responses as participants felt more comfortable then and had more vocabulary to freely express themselves. Some of the participants, therefore, interchanged between isiZulu and English during the interview sessions.

Validity in qualitative research can be broken down into 4 different subcategories: descriptive, interpretive, internal, and external validity. Descriptive validity is the process of ensuring that the reporting of gathered data is done accurately and non-judgmentally (Maxwell, 1992). Interpretive validity concerns whether the articulations of respondents have been understood and interpretedwith soundness theoretically and methodologically. Interpretive validity is achieved when the researcher has understood and accurately interpreted the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of respondents (Maxwell, 1992). In qualitative research, internal validity is realized when the natural events of the research process are not altered, and the researcher does not impose themselves in ways that influence the respondents' responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). External validity concerns the transferability and generalizability of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure that these validities were achieved, the researcher employed measures such as reading numerous data analysis articles (Boyatzis, 1998; Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Wolcott, 1994) and replaying the interview recordings iteratively to ensure that he did not introduce any biases into the data collectionstage of the research project.

3.9 Limitations of the study

This study faces some limitations. The first limitation concerns the circumscription of the study to 3 SSPs at Wits as there are other assistive programmes outside of these. The Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach (WCCO) which hands out groceries, for instance, was mentioned by a significant number of students as crucial. It was not discussed, however, as it is not within the ambit of this research project. Secondly, the study limits its purview to engineering students. This means that its findings will not necessarily be generalizable across the black student population at Wits, as there are peculiarities with every faculty that sculpture students' experiences.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 health pandemic posed limitations to the study as it necessitated that interview be conducted remotely as opposed to face-to-face. This meant that participation in the interviews was subject to the availability of internet bundles or Wi-Fi, limiting the pool of participants available for the study. Conducting interviews remotely also made them susceptible to disturbances that are evaded in face-to-face interactions. For instance, one interview was cut short by load shedding, when the power came back on the student was no longer able to participate in the study due to time constraints. The recruiting of participants was also made difficult by this pandemic, academic learning was conducted remotely, therefore students were not on campus as they normally would be. This meant that the researcher needed to get access into different student accommodation to access participants, this involved more administration than approaching them on campus. Conducting interviews with cameras off also rendered the interviews impersonal, making it more difficult for the researcher to create an unintimidating atmosphere, conducive for students to freely express themselves. Furthermore, the researcher was unable to access documents and statistics to evidence the information shared by employees from the SSPs considered in this study. These documents were considered confidential and could not be shared out by the employees. Thiswas limiting in the pursuit of validity in the study.

The final limitation of this study is that it solicited only the experiences of student who were still enrolled at Wits, this is very determining vis-à-vis the nature of information collected in the study. Students who have persisted in the university for more than 3 years will not necessarily tell a story of

Wits that is akin to that of those who failed and are no longer in the university system. Those who persisted are those who have benefited from the support structure that be, they are therefore more likely to give positive reviews of these as opposed to students who failed to persist. The exclusion of sentiments from students who failed to persist therefore hampers the comprehensiveness of the study. These limitations indicate that the subject matter examined is intricate beyond the scope of this research study, warranting more academic probing going forward.

3.10 Ethical considerations observed in the study

Wits University advocates that all research should follow the very highest of ethical standards as research integrity is integral when producing high quality research. Before the study embarked on the research, an ethics clearance was sought after to enable the research to engage the community members of the university. This was done by submitting the research protocol of the study to the Health Research Ethics Counsel (HREC)-Non-medical for clearance prior to the conduction of the fieldwork. This is essential to ensure that the research will not have a negative effect on its participants. The ethics counsel at Wits declared the study harmless, issuing out a clearance certificate to the researcher. It is imperative that all research using people as its sample is reviewed by an ethics committee, this ensures that the fitting ethical standards are being adhered to.

Adherence to ethical principles protects the dignity, rights, and welfare of the participants of a research project. The participants of this study were briefed on the study, its orientations, objectives, and use of the information they were about to give through the participation information sheet that was shared with each participant. Thereafter they were informed about the conditions of their participation: the fact that the interviews will be recorded, and that they could withdraw at any moment should they feel uncomfortable to continue. The participants were assured of confidentiality: that their responses will be used solely for the purpose of the study and that they would be asked to consent if ever their information was going to be used in another study or for any other purpose than the compilation of this research projects. The participants were thereafter asked to consent to these conditions through informed consent sheet first and thereafter by stating their consent verbally, which was captured in the recorded interview sessions. Prior to the recoding of the interviews the respondents were asked if they had any further points of clarity before the interview commenced, this allowed them to ask questions regarding the interview questions and everything else that possibly made them uncomfortable at that moment in time. Respondents were given an option to remain anonymous if they were not comfortable with disclosing their identities. The recordings of the interviews are stored safely in a password protected computer.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology of this research project. The study was situated in the interpretivism paradigm of research, seeing the employment of a qualitative instrument of research, namely open-ended, semi-structured interviews. The methodology adopted in breaking down and understanding institutional culture was thereafter discussed. The participants of the study, students and employees, were recruited via snowball sampling, a door-to-door outreach, and direct requests via email. The study employed inductive category development in content analysis, allowing themes and categories to emerge from raw data as opposed to being preconceived. The researcher also employed various measures towards the realization of reliability and validity in the conduction of thisstudy. There were significant limitations encountered during the field work of the study which necessitated that there be methodological changes, seeing a shift from a mixed methods to a qualitative tradition of research. Other limitations concern the restrictiveness of the scope of the study, the focus on institutional culture, career choice, and background education limits insight into other factors that are likewise potent impediments faced by black engineering students. Factors such as finances are not explored in depth in this study, yet a significant number of students mentioned itas a constraint during interviews. This necessitates that the subject matter of this project be undertaken by further studies to

account for factors such as finances and the role of SSPs, outside ofthe 3 considered in this study, in assisting students vis-à-vis institutional culture of HWUs. The research project has adhered to ethical conditionalities of conducting research, an ethics clearance was received from the Health Research Ethics Counsel (HREC)-Non-medical, and participants were informed of all that they needed to know prior to participating in the interviews.

Chapter 4: The experiences of black engineering students navigating the University of Witwatersrand.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the interviews that were conducted with engineering students and employees of Student Support Programmes (SSP). This chapter begins by exploring the sentiments of students vis-à-vis the role played by the ADU, CCDU, and FYE in assisting them navigateuniversity life. Thereafter, the chapter delves into themes that emerged vis-à-vis educational background to provide a backdrop against which to understand the sentiments of students.
Furthermore, the chapter looks at the ways in which students engaged with different elements of the university environment as they navigated their way around the university, along with the perceptions and experiences of employees of SSPs assisting these students in this regard.

4.2 Students' perceptions of SSPs at Wits

This study sought to answer the main research question "To what extent do Student Support Programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students around the university's institutional culture?". In this endeavor the study found that SSPs assist students around different elements of the university to a significant degree, however, their efforts are restricted to the environment where academic learning takes place. Problems that students encounter outside of these demarcations, which have a bearing on their wellbeing and functionality, are not taken into account in the design and implementation of these programmes. These problems are enumerated in subsequent sections of this chapter and discussed more extensively in chapter 5.

Furthermore, this study did not find any substantial differences between the experiences of students from quintile 1-3 schools, nor between the responses of males and females. The sentiments of employees were also found to be commensurate with the those of students vis-à-vis their experience with the university's culture and SSPs. The differences that were found in the study, however, were between students from quintile 1-3 and those from quintile 4. Students from quintile 4 tended to notbe first generational students and they had better English language proficiency than students from quintile 1-3 schools. This, however, is discussed more in depth in chapter 5.

The argument of this study, therefore, is that SSPs are valid only to the extent that they deal with issues within the environment where academic learning takes place, they do not address issues that arise from outside of this context. Furthermore, black students from quintile 4 and 5 schools are better equipped with the social and educational capital necessary for good performance in university. The study's suggestion, in this regard, is that SSPs should increase the extent of support they render to students by taking the urban context of the university into account in their design and implementation.

The general perception of the students interviewed in this study was that SSPs at the University of Witwatersrand played a major role in assisting them around the university, especially with regards to academics. The ADU, CCDU, and FYE were all cited as helpful and crucial to acclimatisation into the culture at Wits. The ADU service that received the most appreciation from students was the tutorials that they proffer. Students appreciated the small group setting of these tutorials, as opposed to the overpopulated lectures. Here they could engage with the tutor personally and receive timely assistance when failing to understand concepts. Students also felt less anxious in this setting. The ADU instrumentalizes their "At risk" program, which identifies students who are at risk of failure to attend these tutorials. This program reaches out to students based on early assessments they write at the beginning of the academic year (Employee ADU, M2). The services proffered by the ADU, however,

go beyond academic support. For example, a significant number of students spoke about food that they had received from this programme during financial struggles. One student expressed:

> The only programme that I have encountered is the ADU…I know the wonders that they do for engineering students…the ADU programme does provide food, and that food helped a lot of people (Student M6, Q3).

Beyond the food, students cited instances where they received engineering drawing equipment such as a board, rulers, and technical pencils from this programme when they did not have their own. One student says they reached out to the programme 15 minutes before a drawing practical commenced and received timely assistance, by the time the practical started they were at the venue with all the equipment they needed (Student M3, Q3)**.**

Regarding the CCDU, students found the individual psychotherapeutic counselling services most helpful. They appreciated having someone to talk to when going through difficulties. Most of the students interviewed in this study had never spoken to a professional about mental health issues before, the CCDU was their first encounter with psychosocial support. Two students reported being diagnosed with general anxiety for the first time thanks to this programme. Students did, however, mentioned services of the CCDU beyond the psychotherapeutic counselling, such as the career guidance service. One participant (Student F1 Q3) referenced a friend who, like many other students, had been misguided and found herself in a course that did not fit her interests. She then made use of the career counselling services of the CCDU, wrote an assessment test, and was aligned to career paths that were better suited for her.

Two services of the FYE received equal appreciation from students: the technical skills development and the mentorship programs. Most students from quintile 1-3 schools encounter computers for the first time at university. The technical skills development program is therefore essential, equipping students with basic computer literacy skills such as switching on a computer, logging in, and using Microsoft Word. Most of these students had also never set foot at Wits prior to orientation week (O-week), unlike students from upper quintiles who had come to Wits before for career exhibitions and the likes. Having mentors to familiarize them with the university environment and conscientize them of what to expect once the academic year commenced was therefore instrumental. The students interviewed in this study also made mention of the utility of Programmes such as the Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach (WCCO), which hands out groceries to students. This programmes, however, is not within the ambit of this research project.

The study did, however, find barriers to the uptake of the services of the 3 SSPs considered in this study. For example, one student cited the stereotype that blacks do not need therapy as a barrier that kept him from utilizing the CCDU services (Student M2, Q2). Another student cited the lack of confidence in the ability of these programmes to actually "fix" their problem (Student F5, Q2). An Employee of the ADU (M1) cited email overload as a barrier in this regard as well: students receive a lot of emails daily especially with the online of learning and teaching that intensified due to Covid-19 regulations, causing them to not open those relating to SSP services (Employee ADU, M1). An Employee of the CCDU (M1) also commented on the issue, citing the academic workload as a hinderance: students struggle to set aside time in their tight schedules to attend support programs (Employee, CCDU, M1). The study found that SSPs are sufficiently advertised through emails, however, more could be done in the regard (Student M3, Q3). The CCDU has, therefore, gone on to employ social networks such as Facebook and Instagram to expand their student reach, however, not all students are aware of their accounts (Employee CCDU, M1). Despite these attempts to be visible and accessible, students noted that individuals need to reach out to these programmes to benefit from them, otherwise they will suffer alone (Student F7, Q3). This was true especially of programmessuch

as the CCDU, as no one is able to assist or offer support on mental struggles unless one speaks out.

When asked the all-encompassing question, *"Do you believe that your utilization of these programmes has helped you get around the culture of the university with more success?"* at the end of the interview, every student answered "yes", one of them expressed:

> First, it's those supportive programmes…tjo! there are so many supportive programmes atWits...I think that's one thing that makes Wits stand out…from the get-go you know aboutWits the first thing is you get introduced to those programmes (Student F3, Q3).

Commenting in this regard, an employee of the CCDU expressed:

> Generally…it is an environment that offers students a lot of areas of support…sometimes student don't always access the support…sometime it's because they are experiencing a lot
>
> of academic pressure and they don't have time to participate in all the other activities that are happening (Employee CCDU, M1).

This was one of many areas of agreement across the interviews, SSPs were clearly perceived as useful and a prominent characteristic of the university. As discussed above, these programmes offer a wide range of services, at the core of which lies academic support such as tutorials and the "At risk"program. Other services such as the provision of drawing equipment, the FYE's computer literacy classes, and the CCDU's psychotherapeutic counselling, buttress these academic intervention towards enabling students to perform optimally. Beyond these areas of need, the programmes wereacknowledged for their responsiveness in addressing social issues as well: providing food parcels to students in need.

4.3 Educational background

The abovementioned SSPs were inaugurated to bolster the efforts of black students from poor academic backgrounds in HWU. These backgrounds have a bearing on the ways in which students experience university. For instance, students who had never engaged a computer before coming to Wits occupy a disadvantaged position relative to those who have owned or have access to one, asthe pedagogy of the university requires students to be computer savvy. These backgrounds are, therefore, an important context upon which to understand students' experiences navigating Wits university.

4.3.1 Academic support: Building on uncertain foundations

This research study found that public schools in quintile 1-3 differed with regards to academic support, largely due to the country's fragmented and uneven basic education system: an epiphenomenon of apartheid (Amnesty, 2020). The study found that some schools went to great lengths in rendering academic support to their students, one respondent, when reflecting on this, called it "motherly love" (Student M2, Q2). They shared that teachers would conjure up other formsof assessments when students fell behind, to ensure that they had a decent Continuous Assessment(CASS) mark. It was also very common in quintile 1-3 high schools to have afternoon classes, especially for subjects such as physical science and mathematics (Student F2, Q3). These classes would extend on to the weekends as well. Students reported that schools within the same geographical area would also bring their grade 12 leaners together at a convenient venue for these weekend classes. This was a lauded endeavour because it allowed learners to receive the best assistance available, as only the best of teachers would be summoned to educate these large groups.Furthermore, it was reported that summer and winter study camps were held by these schools, where students would receive the same kind of academic assistance, only at a greater scale (Student F4, Q3). One of the students noted:

> As for guidance it was too much…those people were playing roles of parents…every time they gave us work they came after us…they would discipline us to make sure we do the work…even when we didn't

> submit they would try by all means to make another form of assessment to make sure we had a CASS mark at the end…it was more like we were doing itfor them, where as it was for us…motherly love. (Student M2, Q2).

However, this was not the case in every school, as this agency and initiative is largely contingent upon the will and interest of Students Governing Bodies (SGB), School Management Teams (SMT), and principals. The Basic Education system (grade R to grade 12) in South Africa is performance driven, a monitoring system was therefore inaugurated to hold schools accountable for the performance of their leaners. When learners perform poorly, the principal, SGB, and SMTs need to compile and submit a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) to ameliorate this situation to the Department of Basic Education (DoE) (Amnesty, 2020). The schools discussed above, which are proactive in rendering academic support to students, are therefore, those who have SGBs, SMTs, andprincipals that are interested in their learner and school performance and possibly also concerned about these systems of accountability. However, this is not consistent as some students felt that teachers did not take their education seriously because they are from the townships. These teachers did not show much confidence in them and their ability to make something of themselves (Student M7, Q3). In these schools the culture was extremely toxic as well, the kind of environment where only the most tenacious of leaners make it out. These were schools where the infrastructure was derelict, teachers were often absent, and gangsterism was prevalent (Student M4, Q2). One studentexpressed:

> Ayy! my school was corrupt…something that I had to learn was discipline...when you're in an environment whereby everyone is corrupt…you can easily adopt the mindset of being corrupt, the police had to come often to discipline the learners at our school…incidents such as drug abuse...there were gangs and each and every Friday there's a fight…in 2018 one learner got stabbed and died.. there was too much going on...teachers were afraid of learners because they always had knives on them…in terms of uniform they used to wear whatever they want...you find that someone is wearing a jean at school (Student M4, Q2).

These are the academic foundations which black students from quintile 1-3 schools come to university with which necessitating the emergence of SSPs such as the ADU, CCDU, and FYE at Wits university. Support programmes, therefore, function to equip learners from these continually disadvantaged quintile 1-3 schools with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the demands of Institution of Higher Learning (IHL). This study found that the challenge posed by the lack of academic guidance was further exacerbated by a scarcity of resources in these schools.

The unavailability of crucial resources such as textbooks, computers, and physics laboratories were potent impediments to teaching and learning in quintile 1-3 schools. The academic efforts of leaners were significantly constrained by these circumstances. For instance, it happened that leaners who had to share textbooks did not live in the same location, they therefore had to divide the textbooks and exchange on predetermined days (Student F4, Q3). This administration curtailed the amount of studying the learners could do on a given day. The absence of adequate laboratories for physical science was another significant struggle, learners could not conduct experiments, they had to depend solely on theory and explanations from their teachers (Student M3, Q3). As aforementioned,most quintile 1-3 schools do not have computers as well, their learners, therefore, lack the prerequisite computer literacy for university. This becomes a determining impediment as these institutions expect them to be digitally savvy, this was especially the case during the Covid-19 healthpandemic which necessitated a move towards online classes. The abovementioned impediments of inadequate academic support and scarcity of resources result in leaners from quintile 1-3 schools lagging significantly behind their counterparts from more affluent backgrounds. This is aggravated bythe fact that they also receive less career guidance than these counterparts, during the interviews some students cited not having attended a single career exhibition prior to enrolling at university.

4.3.2 The career guidance of students from disadvantaged background

Career misguidance is a phenomenon that Wits university is well cognizant of, interventions such as the abovementioned career counselling offered by the CCDU were inaugurated in response to this extant issue (Boughey, 2010). These interventions conscientize students who have never attended career exhibitions of career fields that are at their disposal, guiding them towards the one's that best fit their interests. When students have been adequately orientated around a career path, they are able to anticipate what lies ahead, enabling them to tackle the concomitant challenges better (Moodley and Singh, 2015). This study, however, found that students from quintile 1-3 schools come to university and enrol into courses that do not align with their interests due to a lack of career guidance. One student expressed:

> I wasn't adequately guided in choosing the career that I have taken…there's a lot of things that I discovered when I was now at Wits that I didn't know back then…and sometimes you think aboutgiving up…or you think "ayyy this is not my path. (Student F7, Q2)

Other students reported being advised towards engineering by family and friends merely because it is a well-remunerated field. Coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, where the responsibility to change their family's financial circumstances lies solely on them, this becomes a sufficient incentive for these students. They, therefore, do not have the luxury to consider their most congenial career paths, rendering their experience of university more difficult and strenuous than it would have been had they chosen a course that fit their interests. One female student, for instance, expressed that her passion was social work, her family's economic struggles, however, necessitated that she pursues a well-remunerated career, hence she chose engineering (Student F5, Q2). Students interviewed in this study also reported growing into the engineering field despite it not being a career path that best fits their interests. One student noted:

> …nothing at all [no prior knowledge of the course]…not in the slightest of ways.. now that I'mhere after all this time studying it, and getting to understand it, I think yes there is [a fit], butnot a natural one, it's just due to circumstance because it's the only thing I do understand and I've grown to like it…now that I am here…I don't think I would have chosen anything else, if I could go back, I would still choose this again (Student M5, Q4).

Like the student quoted above, some students reported that they would not choose another career path even if given the opportunity (Student M7, Q3). The lack of career guidance contributes to understanding students experience in university. Against this backdrop, the following section presents the experiences of students transitioning from the uneven basic education characterised bythe quintile system to world class and regionally acclaimed universities such as Wits.

4.4 Transitioning

The educational backgrounds of students from quintile 1-3 schools, along with the career guidance proffered to them, are contextual barriers that are very determining vis-à-vis their transitioning toIHL. Students' experiences in this regard are documented in this section.

4.4.1 Adjusting to living alone away from home

Prominent adjustment challenges experienced by students that were interviewed in this studyincluded time management, discipline, and budgeting. One student expressed:What would happen was that…I didn't know that every day I had to think that what am I going to cookbecause I was my own chef so time management was very crucial…and money…budgeting and time management was something I saw had to come alive...from 1-2 its lunch…from 2-5 its labs…I had to make sure that I cooked the day before…because I cannot go from 8 am without food…I would try by all means in the morning to have breakfast…so I had to manage my time because I had to come back again and do some cooking…so yeah it was going down…I had to be responsible.. (Student M2, Q2)

It took most students a couple of months to get a grip on time management and to instill in themselves the discipline to choose schoolwork over leisure. Again, some of these students are recipients of scholarships such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) which give them multiple allowances for textbooks, study gadgets, living expenses, and traveling. They are, therefore, exposed to lump sums of money without the prerequisite financial literacy and money management experience. Subsequently, students get overwhelmed by this purchasing power and end up spending these allowances carelessly, seeing them run out of money significantly before thenext allowance date. Learning to budget and develop the necessary financial acumen, therefore, becomes a crucial but elusive necessity, taking students their whole academic careers to realise. Thisis an element that was not found in the interventions of the SSPs considered in this research project.Outside of the abovementioned adjustment difficulties, the most cited struggle regarded Wits' academic demands.

4.4.2 Adjusting to the academic difficulty at Wits

The academic demand of Wits received the most attention from students and employees when considering the most prominent characteristics of the university. When asked about values which they believe the university upheld the most, 12 students mentioned academic excellence and integrity. This was commensurate with the claims of the university as it states intellectual excellence as its primary pursuit (Wits, 2022). This pursuit of academic excellence, however, comes at a great cost on students, one respondent who struggles with anxiety recalled an incident where she had a panic attack during an examination, which necessitated that she be transported to campus health services (Student F7, Q3). Students also reported that what they are taught during lectures is often insufficient to even attain a pass mark: 50 percent, making it a basic requirement to go beyond what is prescribed.

This study found that the students who study engineering at Wits were those who were top achievers in high schools, despite being impeded by a scarcity of resources and insufficient academicguidance. Upon enrolling at Wits, however, these students are met with new challenges, experiencing academic difficulty to the point of failure at times (Student M4, Q2). One student expressed that the academic concepts which they had been taught in high school differ with university academic jargon that is specific to disciplines: physical science was no longer what they knew it to be, this was frustrating for them (Student F4, Q3). Although all students experience this difficulty when transitioning to university from high school, one student (M3, Q3) expressed that learners from quintile 1-3 schools enter university with a greater knowledge gap than those from upper quintiles. SSPs' response to this struggle against academic demands include the abovementioned tutorials and "At risk" program of ADU. An employee of the CCDU also commented concerning this academic difficulty, stating:

> It is also very pressurizing academically in some programmes…I would imagine a lot of the engineering students experience that…I have seen many of them as well (Employee CCDU, M1).

Reflecting on this academic pressure, one student also expressed:

> I'm a reserved person right…that personality really needed to go away…one thing I realized is that being in varsity you need to make friends…you need to know people because you cannot get everything done on your own…sometimes you're in class and you can't understand…but then a peermight be able to explain it better…so that personality needed to go away…I needed to make friends…for me to be able to do well (Student F5, Q2)

As mentioned by this student, the academic difficulty in the university engenders a culture of co-operation between students, this was a sentiment uniform across all the interviews conducted. Students found the workload too much to handle alone, the magnitude of demand necessitated that they build social networks which can be leveraged throughout the year (Student F5, Q2). These networks, however, were reported to be instrumental beyond academics, especially friendship. One

student expressed that, "Personally…in such a big institution it's so easy to feel so small and a little alone (Student M3, Q3)." Another student expressed:

> The transition wasn't so difficult in terms of the cultural environment…because I had a very close friend of mine, we both came here...whatever needed to tackle we tackled together...there wasn't atime where I felt alone (Student M5, Q4).

This sentiment indicates the instrumentality of friendship in evading loneliness and alienation in the university. Students who came to the university alone had the opposite experience, it took one Student (F6, Q3) over three months to make friends, due to the degree of diversity at Wits (Student F6, Q3). Coming from Umlazi, a linguistically homogeneous township in the KwaZulu-Natal province, she struggled with the multiplicity of languages spoken in the university. As a result, she kept to herself and walked around with earphones on, only taking them off during lectures, this alienation took a significant toll on her academic performance (Student F6, Q3). Beyond this obstacle, however, still lies the challenging dynamics that come with the urban context of Wits university.

4.5 The urban context of Wits university

Most IHL are situated in metropolitan cities with few satellite campuses situated in peri-urban areas, Wits university follows suit. It was established in 1922 at Milner Park, present day Braamfontein, on a site donated to the University by the Johannesburg municipality. The institution had 6 faculties at this stage: Arts, Science, Medicine, Engineering, Law and Commerce. In 1925 the Prince of Wales, King Edward VIII, opened the Central block, renamed the Robert Sobukwe Block in 2017. The expansion of the university ensued thereon forth with the acquisition of adjacent properties. Today the university occupies 400 hectares of land around Braamfontein, Hillbrow, and Park Town. Since this expansion, Braamfontein has increasingly become a student district (Wits, 2020).

This urban context was often found to be overwhelming by students interviewed in this study. Most of them come from small towns and villages, Wits was their first experience in a big, busy city. Upon arriving these students were overwhelmed by the stature of the buildings of the university, the thousands of people walking in different directions, along with the multiplicity of languages spoken (Student F6, Q3). Moving from a high school classroom of 30 learners to lecture theatres of 200 students was also intimidating, and a cause of anxiety (Student M2, Q3). One student expressed:

> I'm from a very small town…so first I was overwhelmed by the city…when I got to Wits it was just too big…it had people all over the place…you don't know where to go…who to talk to…and mostly you had to speak English and at that time I was not so very confident with my English, so it was a huge change, it was scary…it was overwhelming…and then a white person comes to teach you and their English is fast…it was overwhelming (Student F6, Q3)

This sentiment was shared by a significant number of students interviewed in this study; it took them a couple of months to get accustomed to living in the city. Students' place of residence also mattered, it was reported that the experiences of those residing in the university's residences differed from that of those who stayed in private accommodation around Braamfontein.

4.5.1 The ways in which accommodation determined student experiences

Students were divided regarding whether Wits was a welcoming and accommodative environment. Many of them felt welcomed only during O-week, thereafter "you are on your own" (Student M5, Q4). During O-week students had FYE mentors to show them around and get them accustomed to their new environment, this made them feel welcome and accommodated. After orientation, however, the students felt as though they were abandoned by these "guardians". Suddenly they wereleft to their own devices to navigate the university environment. Other students said where one resides, however, was very determining in whether they would experience the space as welcoming or not (Student M3,

Q3). When staying at a Wits residence, first years undergo initiation, where theywould wake up in the morning and have their residence leaders orient them to the campus space.
These first years were led in collaborative games, designed to cultivate an *esprit de corps* in the residences, engendering the formation of friendships. The residence leaders would also take them around campus, show them the sports grounds, the lecture venues, and inform them of operations such as the bus services. It was essentially an extension of the faculty-based orientation they received during their first week on campus (Student M3, Q3). It is difficult for students to not view the institution as welcoming and accommodative having experienced such guidance and integration into the university space. One student expressed:

> It would really be great if every first-year student stayed in the university's residences…those people made it so easy…they introduce you people you can talk to…academically they tell you how hard academics will be…they give you tutors to adjust to the university space…I didn't even know a computer at that time…so we got computer lessons…they have social events where you get to meet atleast first years…who are as clueless as you…staying in the university's residence was the best thing that ever happened to me in first year (Student F6, Q3)

On the other hand, students dwelling in South Point[17] buildings and other private accommodations around Braamfontein were omitted from such experiences. Many students experience a massive culture shock when they encounter Braamfontein, a part of town renowned for its vibrant lifestyle, night clubs, cutting the academic careers of some students short. Reflecting on this shock, a student referred to the street bashes that would take place along *de korte* street prior to Covid-19, they could not believe their eyes, the street was packed full of taxis which had people dancing inside, around, and on top of them. It was an absurd scene for a student who comes from a conservative village, where hardly anything happens[9] (Student F2, Q3). Another student expre**sse**d[18]:It was never something I was used to, where I come from it was mostly quite…so Braam was another level…ay there everyone is doing everything you can ever imagine…things I had never seen (StudentM3, Q3).

Yet another said:

> Where I come from it's a very chilled place…it's a small town…its chilled…no loud noises, no big building, no parties…when I come here now…the fashion…it was shocking to me…people partying…it was totally different…at first I was like "haaah really this is how people live here"…to me I was like thisis not the right thing to do, how can I be staying in this environment…(Student F2, Q3)

One student (F1, Q3) extended on this sentiment saying Braamfontein was "not for the feint hearted", she spoke of "chancers" who come and entice students with all types of allures, from "get rich quick" schemes, to a "soft life". An employee (CCDU, M1) also commented in this regard, saying:

> The issue of adjustment is bigger for the student who is not Joburg based**…**comes from a rural area**…** and hasn't been to one of the ex-model C schools**…**those students often have more problems adjusting issues.

This research study further went on to probe the dynamics of race in the university, to find out whether it was a determining factor vis-à-vis the experiences of students navigating the university.Findings in this regard are discussed in the following section.

4.6 Is race a determinant of a students' experience at Wits?

The study found that students perceived socio-economic background as the key determinant of one's

[9] It is, however, not only students in large city campuses that experience the culture of partying, drinking, and drugs. Students in all university campuses experience this to different extents. It therefore can be recognized as a youth subculture rather than an experience exclusive to students in Braamfontein. This research project underscored the relationship between this culture and the urban space because this was primarily how students viewed Braamfontein.

experience at university. When asked the question *"Do you believe that being black makes you experience Wits differently to a student of another race?",* 9 students responded "Yes", while 5 said "No". When those who said yes elaborated, they went on to speak of socio-economic factors rather than race, underscoring the relationship between race and socio-economic status in South Africa. There was only 1 out of 14 students that cited an instance of racial prejudice. She referenced a situation where she asked a lecturer a question and was immediately told to refer to her textbook,when an Indian girl came after her with a similar question, however, she was amicably attended to(Student F3, Q3). The rest of the students, however, spoke about the effects of coming from a disadvantaged background.

One student, for instance, pointed out that blacks are often at the forefront of the demonstrations against injustices witnessed in the university, saying this cohort of 'new students' constantly fight against financial exclusion in this institution with ever-increasing exorbitant fees (Student F5, Q2). Others expressed that white and Indian students are seldom first-generation students; they therefore have family members who can assist and guide them through university. A substantial number of black students on the other hand are first generation students, they, therefore, do not a family member or friend to conscientize them on what to expect prior to their first year or guide them throughout their academic career. Another theme that recurred in this regard was the differences in curriculum between public and private schools. Private schools often use the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) curriculum. This curriculum is considered by many teachers, parents, students and universities, in South Africa and abroad, as more challenging and comprehensive than the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Jo, 2019). It is, therefore, perceived as better preparation for university academics (Student M6, Q4). One student expressed:

> If you see the IEB curriculum...it's mostly done by white people…blacks in high school do the CAPS version…that things on its own…it supports the white people more because it prepares them for varsity…you find stuff that it is the first time you're encountering them. There are people in the first year who don't know what a computer is…I couldn't find a white child who was struggling to switch on a PC at the computer labs…most of the people struggling were black because of the background that they come from. Most of white kids own all the engineering equipment's that you need to succeed… from a solo scope to a power supply…those people they think on ideas and they work on them wherever they are…while you as a black child you have to hold on to the idea until the lab day comes.As for racism that's something I have never experienced. As for language barrier, being white it means this is your home language, that means you can read the question and understand what it wants, while being a black person it means you first need to translate to your mother tongue…sometimes youget mixed up in the translation and end up answering the wrong question in the right way because of what you thought it meant (Student M6, Q4).

This student's sentiments are representative of the various issues that were surfaced during interviews conducted in this study. All these concerns were, however, fundamentally socio-economic struggles rather than issues regarding race directly. The conceptual conflation of the two is indicative of the inextricable relationship between the concepts in the South African context.

When employees of support programmes were questioned in the same regard, they indicated the same relationship between class and race which was an undertone in students' responses. One employee (ADU**,** M3) referenced an encountered he had with a white male student. In this encounter **he** asked, *"why are you studying",* the student responded, *"I need this degree so I can go run my father's company."* This is one of the various reasons why the attendees of initiatives such as *Journey to employability*, a program offered by the CCDU which prepares students for employment, are overwhelmingly black. He further exclaimed:

> **I**n my over 8 or 9 years working in the ADU**…**the only interaction I have had with a white guy was during a tutorial**,** that's it**…**but in terms of the course thing that we do**…**it has predominantly beenblack people.

This employee expressed, however, that there are black students from upper classes who occupy the same privileged position as the white male student discussed above. Language, being a subcategory of race, was another factor that made race determining in the university.

4.6.1 Language as a subcategory of race

As had been mentioned by students and employees previously, diversity and having to communicate in English was a herculean task for many black students, one of them noted:

> Where I come from they teach English in siSwati and now I had to go and bite my tongue there… where I come from we were all darkies…so when I came there I went to a person who is a darkie andthought this person will understand me…only to find that they speak Setswana or Venda…I saw that "uhhhhh…here I have over committed myself mos…" and if I try to speak English my tongue wants to come out of my mouth man (Student M2, Q2).

This sentiment is indicative of the degree to which certain students struggled with English language proficiency due to a lack of exposure to it, coming from schools that used vernacular as the mediumof instruction. An employee of the CCDU also commented on this:Some students often come from poor backgrounds…quite often those students probably experience language difficulty more…they would usually have more challenges in terms of coping with the Englishthan the more urban black students (Employee CCDU, M1)

The gaps in conceptual knowledge that students from quintile 1-3 schools enter university, with due to the substandard education they receive, become exacerbated with the academic jargon used at university. This makes it all the more difficult for them to grasp the concepts being taught in lectures, impeding their academic efforts. The final theme that emerged in the interviews conducted was the politicizing nature of Wits university's environment.

4.7 Politics: Universities as a politically conscientizing spaces

This study found that a significant number of students came into the university apolitical, with time, however, the political activism endemic in the university drew their attention, conscientizing them into taking a political stance. One student noted that they were not interested in politics initially, in 3rd year, however, he met a friend who was emersed in the politics of the university (Student M4 Q4). Through this friendship this student was conscientized of injustices around the university and country as a whole, engendering his political activism. Another student shared the same sentiments,unlike the first student, however, they were not politicized through a friend. He realized that studentswho were demonstrating were fighting for a just cause. Citing the protest against financial exclusion that took place early in 2021, he expressed:

> …as time progresses you tend to see that this might be me in the near future…the thought of being in a similar situation made me to understand everything that was taking place…they are fighting for their right, which is education and no one is paying attention to them (Student M6 Q4).

Another student expressed that she was also not politically conscious when she came to Wits,however, she allied with students in the abovementioned demonstrations. She expressed:

> …I think it is a good thing for us as students to stand together and fight…because most of us come from disadvantaged families, and some of the students who were being excluded were in their finalyear, their families are looking to them to change the situation at home (Student F5 Q2).

The experiences of the students above underscore the pervasiveness of the historical culture of political activism at Wits university. This climate is a legacy that was left by the 1959 students whodemonstrated against the apartheid government when it attempted to enact the Extension
of University Education Act (Wits, 2020). It has subsequently produced student activists such as Floyd Shivambu and Mcebo Dlamini who were instrumental in struggles against financial exclusion at Wits

university in preceding years (Mavunga, 2019). These protests are consequences of the institutional culture at Wits: responses to the financial exclusion experienced particularly by black students in the university.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the different themes that emerged from the student interviews that were conducted in the study. Findings from the interviews indicated that support programmes play a very crucial role in assisting students navigate the culture of Wits university. In the area of educational background, it emerged that schools in quintile 1-3 differed regarding the academic support they render to their learners, some give "motherly" care, whilst others do very little in the regard. The scarcity of resources also impeded leaners in this regard, under-preparing them for university. Regarding career guidance, every student interviewed felt they did not receive adequate guidance, however, through support from programmes such as the FYE, ADU, and CCDU, they managed to persist. The biggest and most central characteristic of Wits university was found to be the difficulty ofacademics. Many students found this element to be "overwhelming", to the point of contemplating dropping out. This difficulty was, however, combated through collaboration with friends. Furthermore, an overwhelming number of students felt that race only mattered in the university as far as it indicated one's socio-economic background, their failure to speak of the two exclusively was,however, telling of the inextricable relationship between them in the South African context. The affluent have a head start over the disadvantaged, who are largely black, and are more capacitated throughout, due to their access to the necessary resources. The language barrier was also found to hamstring a significant number of students upon enrolling into the university. Braamfontein was another theme of Wit's culture that emerged in student interviews, students found the culture of Braamfontein to be very toxic: "Braam is not for the feint hearted." Finally, this study found that Witsuniversity was a politically conscientizing milieu, students who come into the university apolitical often leave having participated in some form of political activism.

Chapter 5: Adopting a broader purview for institutional culture

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study which were documented in the previous chapter. First, the chapter discusses the way in which Student Support Programmes (SSP) fit into the cultureof Wits university. Thereafter, the chapter delves into the concept of institutional culture, conceptualizing it based on the literature that was reviewed in chapter 2. Subsequently, the institutional culture of Wits, based on what the university says about itself, is discussed and contrasted with the experiences of black engineering students elicited through interviews.
Furthermore, the chapter delves into the urban context of Wits university: discussing the differences in experience that a university's geographical context renders to its student population. Finally, the chapter discusses Tinto's Model of Institutional Action, in light of the findings of the study, and the extent to which SSPs at Wits university assist students around the culture of the university. These above-mentioned discussions are all building blocks to the key findings of this research project: that the conceptualization of an institution's culture needs to be expanded to include the dynamics of that institution's geographical situation.

5.2 Relevance of Student Support Programmes in institutional culture

When the number of black students increased in Historically White Universities (HWU) it became apparent that they were underprepared for the academic demands of these institutions. This gap in conceptual knowledge resulted in the inauguration of SSPs, which became a part and parcel of the culture of universities in the country. The SSPs are interventions towards the transformation agenda which seeks to ensure integration, retention, and better performance for previously excluded students. The pursuit of a supportive institutional culture in South African universities today, therefore, speaks primarily to the presence of these programmes.

5.2.1 The effects of a sub-standard educational background

Findings from the literature review and interviews conducted in this study indicated that SSPs are a crucial element of a university's culture. In the South African context SSPs were inaugurated in the early 1980s as a part and parcel of the transformation agenda, which sought to render these institutions spaces where black students have an equal opportunity to succeed (Boughey, 2010). These programmes were, therefore, very much race conscious, rendering support to black students who enrolled into university underprepared due to the apartheid designed substandard basic education system they were subjected to (Boughey, 2005). SSPs continue to fulfil this function today, as black students from quintile 1-3 schools still enroll into university with a knowledge and skills deficit.

Letseka (2014) and Nonjinge (2018) asserted that the country's quintile 1-3 schools' dysfunction causes their learners to not develop the requisite knowledge and skills to succeed in university. Although this study found cases where some quintile 1-3 schools went to great lengths to educate their learners, its general findings were commensurate with this postulation. This study found that first year students from all quintiles experience academic hardship upon enrolling into university, however, those from quintile 1-3 schools experience it to a greater degree (Student M3, Q3). For instance, the lack of computers, physics laboratories, and having to share textbooks, significantly impedes the academic efforts and development of these learners. One student expressed:

> There are people in their first year who don't know what a computer is…however, I couldn't find a white child who was struggling to switch on a PC at the computer labs…most of the people struggling were black because of the background that they come from (Student M6, Q4).

It was interesting also that out of all the students who were randomly selected to participate in this study, none were from a quintile 1 school. Three were from quintile 2 schools, and 7 were from quintile 3 schools. It can be extrapolated from this finding that the lower a school's quintile, the less chances their learners have in academically qualifying for higher education, especially for high skilled careers such as engineering. This study did not find any significant differences between the experiences of students from quintile 2 and 3, nor between males and females. Students who came from quintile 4 schools were also encountered during the outreach for participants in this study, only 4 were considered, however, as they only served to juxtapose the responses of quintile 1-3 students, to capture differences in experience should there be any. The study did find differences in this regard.

Students from quintile 4 schools tended to not be first generational students. One student (M5, Q4) mentioned that they came to Wits because their sister had previously attended the university. When questioned on career choice, this student mentioned that they chose mining engineering to follow the footsteps of their father. He also mentioned that he did not struggle with navigating the university space in his first year of study as he was familiar with it, having come to Wits for career exhibitions before. Students from quintile 4 also had better English language proficiency than those from lower quintiles. During the interviews these students did not have as much trouble understanding the concepts being probed in the study: confidently sharing their perceptions. Students from lower quintiles, however, needed more assistance in unpacking the research questions. Thus, quintile 4 students, even though black, are better equipped for university due to their socio-economic background. One employee (ADU, M2) commented on this, saying:

> You can have a black student from a township versus a black student from the villages, those are two different people who will definitely have two different experiences…so the race thing has to be delved into more…

It is in response to these challenges faced by students from poor backgrounds that support structures become an imperative culture in South African universities (Tinto, 2010). Every student interviewed in the study corroborated this view, stating that their utilization of the ADU, CCDU, and FYE helped them navigate the culture at Wits, regardless of the quintile backgrounds. These SSPs work towards advancing the post-1994 transformation agenda in Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), which has resulted in the continuous increase of black students in HWU. This agenda entails the transformation of the culture of these institutions towards realizing a democratic, non-racial andnon-sexist higher education system. The pursuit of this agenda has seen the inauguration of committees such as the *Oversight Committee on transformation in South African Universities* in 2013,tasked with monitoring progress towards transformation in public universities (Suransky and van derMerwe, 2014). This racially conscious transformation agenda continues to be implemmented today, and this research study is a contribution towards ongoing academic discourse in this regard.

It is, therefore, undeniable that as black students from quintile 1-3 schools continue to enter university with greater gaps in conceptual knowledge compared to their counterparts from affluentbackgrounds, SSPs are a *sine qua non*. They address a need that continues to exist in South Africanuniversities, rendering them a necessary component of the cultures of these institutions. Wits, for instance, state as part of its purposes providing a high-quality, supportive research and educational environment for its constituents. These programmes are discussed in the following section.

5.2.2 The role of support programmes

The ADU received much attention from students, this programme takes primary responsibility for the engineering faculty. The programme goes to great lengths in closing the gaps in conceptual knowledge, suggested by Boughey (2005), which students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience in university. The students interviewed in the study lauded the tutorials offered by the

ADU, one student went as far as saying the programme does “wonders”. The study also found that the ADU went beyond academic support, students reported receiving food, drawing equipment, and time management skills from the programme. In agreement with Tinto (2010), the study also found that career and psychosocial counselling were instrumental to students’ integration into the university. The programme which offers these services at Wits is the CCDU. More than half of the students interviewed in the study found the CCDU to be very helpful. One of the students (F1, Q3) expressed how she would not have known that she suffers from anxiety had it not been for this programme.

The FYE was also lauded by the students interviewed in the study. It was recognized mainly for its mentorship and computer literacy services. A majority of the students who were interviewed had never set foot at Wits prior to the orientation week (O-week), they therefore benefited immensely from it. Here, the FYE mentors took students around Wits’ campuses, equipping them to navigate the environment when they had to do it on their own. These mentors also readied the students psychologically for the demands of the university, abating the shock that the students would experience once the academic year commenced. The computer literacy program also went a long way as many of the students from quintile 1-3 schools had never encountered a computer prior toenrolling at Wits. one student said:

> If you’re like me who comes from a disadvantage family, obviously the school you go to won’t have the necessary facilities to equip you with the skills you’ll need…I say that because when I got here at Wits I didn’t even know how to turn on a PC…I got here and I had to sign in, get my registration and print out that registration and I couldn’t do any of those.. we also had classes where we needed to draw using a PC, learning how to do research using a PC (Student F5, Q2).

It is important, however, to take into cognizance that the students who were interviewed in this study were those who enrolled into Wits prior to 2020 and were still in the university’s system. Theseare therefore students that benefitted from SSPs, hence the overwhelmingly positive reviews they gave. The students who had utilized the programmes and still failed would perhaps tell a different story, a story akin to that of those who were interviewed in Moodley and Singh’s (2015) study. The fact that the insights of these students were not gathered is one limitation of the study that needs to be taken into cognizance when interpreting its results.

Employees of these programmes concurred with the findings of Boughey (2010) and this study’s hypothesis that a scarcity of funds bedevils the operations of SSPs. Employees from all the programmes regarded in this study said they could reach further than they are able should they have more funds. One employee (CCDU, M1) expressed how the programme struggles to cater for every student who demands their services as they have a shortage of counsellors, their budget is insufficient to expand staff. It happens, therefore, that students who require their services end up not receiving the help they need. Despite these hinderances, the SSPs have been found to be imperative in rendering the university’s culture supportive for students.

5.3 Institutional culture

5.3.1 Conceptualizing institutional culture

This study, in agreement with scholars such as Vincent (2015), sees institutional culture as a concept that encompasses many disparate elements, from the discursive to the material, it is therefore difficult to defined in definite terms. This study however espouses a conception of institutional culture akin to that of Steyn (2007). It views this concept as “the way of life in a university”, comprised of the sum total effects of the values, attitudes, ways of interaction, collective understandings, and collective memories, perceived through the lived experiences of its constituents. When grappling with this concept therefore one is addressing numerous layers of norms, attitudes, and practices, some of

which are more tangibles than others. This adopted conception underpins the methodology espoused in the study: probing institutional culture throughthe lived experiences of students. The elusiveness of this concept is explicative: "institutional culture" is a term that attempts to name a social reality that continues to be under contestation (Vice, 2015; p 50). This study acknowledges not only the discursive but also the material aspect of aninstitutions culture, this being the physical space: the architecture, land scape, spatial configuration,and the material conditions tied to the socio-economic backgrounds that can enable or limit students' transition to IHL (Vincent, 2015).

Although there are certain elements that persist, a university's institutional culture is not fixed, it morphs over time (Luvalo, 2019). At Wits for instance, the university has been a political milieu from its early days of existence, in 1959 the constituents of the university took to the streets demonstrating against the segregationist policies that were being enacted by the apartheid regime inuniversities across the country (Wits, 2022). This spirit of political mobilization has persisted in the university to date, seeing the #FeesMustFall movement of 2015 and the 2021 demonstrations, which evidence students' agency in shaping the culture of universities. Other cultural factors, however, cease with time. An example is the *Knock Streak* where Knockando Residence students would run naked through Parktown to visit the women's residences after imbibing "Courage Juice" (liquor) (Wits, 2022). Because of this, first time students always experience Wits in ways that differ slightly from those who came before them. For instance, the 2022 first years will experience a different Wits compared to those of 2021, 2020, and even 2019 due to Covid-19. This health pandemic necessitated a move towards online learning, the university has developed an unprecedented dynamism as a result of this, making it more nuanced than before.

Institutional culture is also co-produced by the university and its constituents, students are therefore not only subject to it, they also are its producers (Higgins, 2007). One of the ways in which the university constructs its institutional culture is through policy interventions such as SSPs, which render the university an accommodative and supportive space. Students' contributions in this regard include discourse: stories that are produced, reproduced, and circulated around the university environment. The notions of "Course will chow you" and "Wits pushes you over the edge", extrapolated from the slogan "Wits gives you the edge", are examples of this. These are discourses that are explicative of the experiences of students in the university: experiences of academic struggleand being pushed over the edge "mentally, emotionally, and in every other way possible" (Lindi, 2017). Such discourse circulates the campus milieu through student conversations and reproduce theculture of difficulty. One student interviewed referenced an experience during her orientation week where she met senior students who spoke of how the course would "chow" her, she immediately perceived the space as unwelcoming as a result (Student F4, Q3). The university, however, has its own perception of its institutional culture.

5.3.2 The Institutional culture of Wits university

The university positions itself as an open public university which embraces academic freedom. It sees itself as egalitarian: welcoming to people from all walks of life regardless of race, gender, or religion. Diversity is stated as one of the university's primary pursuits, fostering conversations and building relationships between different cultural communities in the university (Wits, 2022). In its commitments, the university mentions the tolerance of difference, democracy, equality, and freedomfrom racism and sexism. The university also views itself as a place where uncomfortable but imperative conversation can be held, a milieu that welcomes debate and critical engagement, wheredifferent voices can freely express their sentiments (Wits, 2022). This is commensurate with the perceptions of students who reported that diversity and the embrace of difference were one of the most prominent values upheld in the university.

The university states intellectual excellence as its primary pursuit, endeavoring to produce graduates possessing skills comparable with those of graduates from the best universities globally. Towards this endeavor it references being ranked the best university in Africa, producing 4 Noble Prize winners, seeing 50 of its alumni awarded prestigious National Orders by the Presidency, andhaving numerous staff, students, and alumni enumerated in the Mail and Guardian's Top 200 trailblazing young South Africans in 2021 (Wits, 2022). This pursuit of excellence come at a cost, however, as students interviewed in this study reported being pushed to the point of collapse, forexample, one of them experienced a panic attack during an examination (Student F7, Q3). An employee (CCDU, M1) also acknowledged the effects of the pursuit of intellectual excellence citingthe academic pressure as a reason why students often do not have time to attend SSP programs.

The university also underscores its political activism as a significant culture. From inauguration, it has made a commitment to uphold a policy of non-discrimination. In this regard it references the efforts of its 1959 constituents who demonstrated against the Apartheid government when it promulgated the Extension of the University Education Act. To further display its embrace of different cultures and this political stance of non-discrimination, the university references the renaming of the Senate House to the Solomon Mahlangu House in 2016, and the renaming of the Central Block to the Robert Sobukwe Block in 2017 (Wits, 2022). Students, likewise, viewed the university as a space where there is room for political engagement, citing the #FeesMustFall demonstrations as a quintessential display of this (Student F4, Q3).

As part of its purposes, the university pursues a high-quality, supportive educational environment, so as to retain its legacy of high-level achievement and excellence. This culture of support is enumerated also in the university's stated commitments. In this regard, the university references its efforts in buttressing the efforts of science and engineering students towards realizing greater graduation rates in these fields, especially amongst historically disadvantaged demographics. Its SSPs are therefore designed and implemented with racial inequalities in cognizance: they are a response to the country's history of racial discrimination (Wits, 2022). One Student (F2, Q3) noted that the firstelement she found most emphatic in the university was these SSPs, she said there are so many that students tend to not know which one to approach when faced with hardships. One employee (CCDU, M1) also commented on this saying, "…generally..it is an environment that offers students a lot of areas of support…" The experiences of other students who were interviewed in this study, however, have gone further to highlight elements that complicate the notion of institutional culture at Wits university. This is explored in the following section.

5.3.3 Students' experiences of Wits culture

5.3.3.1 Academic difficulty

Academic difficulty was ascertained as the most prominent characteristic of Wits university based on the lived experiences of students. This finding was commensurate with principles stated in the university's website, intellectual excellence and integrity are primary pursuits at Wits university. This study's findings concurred also with Peterson et al (2009) who went to great extents grappling with the academic difficulties experienced by students from low socio-economic backgrounds in university. Students interviewed expressed that this was the area in which they experienced the biggest shock coming into university. The level of difficulty is high and the level academic guidance, as far as lectures go, is insufficient. There is very limited time but many modules. One student expressed that they are given a year planner at the beginning of the year which has test dates enumerated, these dates however do not get emphasized by the lecturers, they only say it ones. If the student fails thereon forth to keep record of the dates, they will suddenly find themselves writinga test accounting for 20 percent of their year mark, not having prepared (Student M5, Q). Another student expressed:

> For block one it was going down…also they used to not dive deep into the content, they just did touch ups…they would refer you to the text book…that's where I saw that I needed to form friendships so that I could manage to get help very much easy…the first three months it was going down…(Student M2, Q2).

This academic difficulty necessitates that students build networks amongst themselves that will assist their navigation of this difficulty. Sometimes they would work with friends and at other timeswith study partners, the former, however, appeared to be more prevalent. The need to form friendships which you can leverage throughout the academic career was mentioned in every interview conducted. The level of academic difficulty at Wits pushes students to join forces, tacklingit in twos or bigger study groups. One student mentioned that they needed to dispense with their introversion and put themselves out there, as this was the proven *modus operandi* in the faculty, sheexpressed:

> I'm a reserved person right…that personality really needed to go away…one thing I realized is that being in varsity you need to make friends…you need to know people because you cannot get everything done on your own…sometimes you in class and you can't understand…but then a peer might be able to explain it better…so that personality needed to go away…I needed to make friends…for me to be able to do well (Student F5 Q2)

Students who came to university with a friend were better equipped, they had a companion to tackle the academic and social challenges with. This importance of friendship was a theme which was not envisaged in the study. It was also one of many factors that determined whether students perceived the university as welcoming or alienating upon first contact. This corroborated Tinto's (2010) assertion that being socially engaged was determining towards students' wellbeing and functionality. The next section probes whether race was a determining factor in how students experienced Wits' culture.

5.3.3.2 The role of race in students' experiences

Students that were interviewed in this study were divided in this regard: most viewed race as a determinant of the experience students will have at Wits while others did not. All but one student, however, in their elaborations, went on to speak about socio-economic background rather than factors that concerned race directly. It was brought to light that those who have the wherewithal have a better experience: they have every equipment they need, better access to resources, less safety concerns, less hassles when having to study, better academic preparation for university, and better support systems at home. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds, however, often encounter a computer for the first time at Wits, begin the year without secure residence, have no one at home to guide them through university, are under-prepared academically, do not have textbooks and drawing equipment, have to cross night at on-campus computer labs, and often live in financial insecurity. Furthermore, with language being a subcategory of race, this means that black English second and third language speakers are disadvantaged in the university. Having English as the medium of instruction facilitates better access to learning for first language speakers, for leaners whocome from quintile 1-3 schools where vernacular was sometimes the medium of instruction, however, this becomes an obstacle to learning.

This conflation of race and socio-economic background suggests that race is not only a determinant when explicit forms of discrimination occur, but the relationship between race and SES implicate it in issues that regard economic backgrounds as well. This is because the country's apartheid history has ensured that socio-economic status is distributed along racial lines, making it very tricky to attempt to extricate the two concepts (Taylor and Yu, 2009). Students' acknowledgement of having heard of instances of racial prejudice even though they had never experienced it themselves, however, was still telling of the fact that these cases still occur in the university. The culture of hostility towards blackness has, therefore, not been completely overcome.

It could be the case that the students discussed above have been in racially discriminatory situations themselves but did not recognize it as that, due to the unconscious and subtle ways in which they manifest today as described by Matthews's (2015). Matthews (2015) referenced black staff of universities, who expressed that the subtleness of the manifestation of racism today renders it imperceptible most of the times, which causes the individual to second guess their experiences and consider for a moment if they are not being paranoid: perceiving things that are not. Although this is likely the case for the students interviewed in the study as well, the fact that 13 out of 14 of them did not report being racially discriminated against personally is evidence that the occurrence of it is not as prevalent and prominent as had been envisaged in the study. The following section discusses the ways in which the urban context of Wits university shapes the experiences of its student population.

5.4 The role of Wits university's urban context in shaping the experiences of students.

Students interviewed in this study spoke of Wits culture and Braamfontein culture inextricably. This was telling, it seems one cannot understand students' experience with a university's culture without considering the space beyond the walls within which academic learning take place. A university's geographical location significantly shapes the experiences of students. This is the contribution of this research study to field to explore u students' engagement with a university's culture, it is necessary that a broader purview that sees beyond the physical institution be espoused. For instance, the experiences of students in Stellenbosch University, located at an Afrikaner, oak-shaded neighbourhood, surrounded by the vineyards of the Cape Winelands and the mountainous nature reserves of Jonkershoek and Simonsberg, will differ significantly from that of Wits' students residing in the economic and industrial heartland of Africa (Sun, 2022).

Wits university is located in Braamfontein, on the edge of Johannesburg's inner city. The town's proximity to Wits University and the University of Johannesburg renders it a student centre and one of Joburg's fashion and culture hotspots. It is punctuated with night clubs, bars, restaurants, clothing shops and high-rise student accommodation (Mason, 2020). It has, therefore, become a leisure hub for locals and tourists alike, where they go to see, be seen and party until the early morning hours. It is a very youthful place with a big student community and an ever-growing population of young creatives who have contributed significantly to making the neighbourhood Johannesburg's hipster capital (Mason, 2020).

One student (F1, Q3) said Braamfontein was "not for the feint hearted". Most students experienced a major culture shock here, seeing their peers behave in ways they would never dare when home. One student acknowledged getting caught up in the Braamfontein lifestyle in their second year. The freedom got the best of him, he was out partying more than he invested in his academics, his grades suffered as a result (Student M1, Q4). Another student said they could not help but think of the space as "unrighteous", an environment they couldn't believe they had to stay in. As time passed, however, she grew accustomed to it all, noting that it became her new norm, a city she walked daily and no longer found anomalous (Student F4, Q3). This potency of Braamfontein's culture, its inherent distractions from academic activities that requires self-discipline, therefore, necessitates that it be taken into cognizance in the conceptualization and discussion of Wits university's institutional culture in relation to off-campus accommodation, especially for first year students.

When students get to Wits many different aspects of their lives change as they acculturate to the environment beyond the space where academic learning takes place. They need to develop time management skills, study discipline, reach out to their peers for academic assistance, as well as develop in ways that will assist their adjustment to living alone in Braamfontein. This includes adjusting to a fast city from a conservative village or location, learning to evade "chancers", learning to say no to "temptations", learning to cook, learning to budget, and a myriad of other lessons

encompassed in their transitioning. The experiences of these students therefore go beyond integration into the educational environment: Wits' institutional culture gets intertwined with that of Braamfontein. The urban context of the university, therefore, need not be neglected as it coproduces the university's institutional culture.

5.5 Tinto's Model and the reach of support programmes at Wits

Tinto's Model of Institutional Action is a very apt conceptual framework for this study, as it was designed with the student demographic that is focused on in this research project in cognizance: students from disadvantage backgrounds. The four conditions that promote student success identified by Tinto in his model (support, engagement. assessment and feedback, and expectation) emerged in the findings of this research project, corroborating their significance (Tinto 2010). Tinto argues that the trajectory of a student's actions in university is determined by the *expectations* they have of the institutions' environment and of themselves in it. This necessity of students to have a degree of perspective of a university they will be attending and what is required of them to succeed there was underscored by one student (M6, Q4). He argued that black students from low-income backgrounds are often first generational students, they therefore do not have family members who could conscientize them of university and what is expected of them prior to their first year. They are, therefore, at a disadvantage that students from affluent backgrounds often evade through the preparation they receive from family members who attended university before them. Students from these quintiles were also found to receive less career guidance than those from quintile 4-5 schools in this study. This curtails their academic performance as prior orientation around a career path, which offers an understanding of its expectations, enables students to engage its tasks better (Student M6, Q4).

Tinto (2010) also cites *support* as a necessary precondition for students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, to perform optimally in university. He underscored a crucial relationship between the presence of support structures and the growth of academic competence in students, emphasizing academic and psychosocial support. This study corroborated these assertions, one employee (CCDU, M1) expressed that Wits university is an institution that offers numerous areas of support to its student population, ensuring that they receive all the assistance they need for optimal performance. Students also shared this sentiment, one of them (Student F1, Q3), for instance, viewed the university as a very welcoming and accommodative environment due, specifically, to presence of these support structures. Also, every student interviewed in the study held the view thatSSPs played a crucial role in assisting them around the university, especially vis-à-vis academics.

The third condition that Tinto (2010) identifies as crucial to rendering universities spaces conducive for student success was *engagement*, he asserted that academic and social engage of students in the university augments their chances of success. This was viewed as especially true during their first year of study. According to the findings of this research project, the condition of engagement was met primarily through the FYE and the university residences' first year orientation weeks. The FYE's mentorship programme was reported as instrumental by students, it acquainted them with the physical and social environment of the university, allowing them to realize a sense of belonging.
Likewise, the residences' orientation week, through collaborative activities that that engendered an *esprit de corps*, integrated first year students in the university. Facilitating the formation of friendships with peers who are also facing the challenge of alienation in a new and foreign environment, which will later be leveraged in collaborations tackling academics. On the obverse, Tinto (2010) argued that academic and social isolation has a strong relationship with poor academic performance, an assertion confirmed by a student (F6, Q3) whose academic efforts were bedeviled by feelings of alienation and loneliness in the first semester of her first year.

The last condition that Tinto enumerates in his framework is *assessment and feedback*, asserting that these two elements allowed students and teaching staff to be aware of their level of conceptual knowledge, enabling timely intervention where necessary. The ADU's "At risk" program was most pertinent in this regard, it instrumentalizes early assessments to identify students that need the assistance of extra tutorials. This intervention was lauded by a significant number of students in this study, one of them (Student M6, Q4) expressed that, "…the [ADU] programme did wonders for me to succeed at Wits…those guys are there for you…and those guys are very brilliant." The findings of this study did, however, go beyond the demarcations of Tinto's model.

This study found that the dynamics of a university's geographical context co-produces its institutional culture. This significance of the geographical context is a finding that is not accounted for in Tinto's Framework (2010). In this way, this study contributes to the interpretation of Tinto's model, extending it to include the geographical location of a university as an element to be taken into cognizance when considering elements of its institution's culture that have a bearing on student performance.

This study also found that SSPs at Wits university go a long towards providing students with the assistance they need to navigate the university's culture. Students lauded the efforts of these structures and referenced numerous instances and areas in which they were sufficiently assisted. It was the case however that students felt that these programmes came short at times, some students expressed that some of the programmes are not far reaching enough: providing assistance only for the first week of the academic year. This study also finds these programmes come short because the scope of their services is limited to activities that occur within the space where academic learning takes place, they do very little to accounts for student's experiences outside of these demarcations. These programmes would therefore benefit significantly and render more comprehensive support to students should they adopt the broader purview of institutional culture suggested in this research project. Students will be better equipped by these support programmes should the urban context of Braamfontein be taken into cognizance in their design and implementing.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the relevance of SSPs in a university's institutional culture. It found these programmes were inaugurated to support black students who came from poor educational backgrounds at HWU. Their design and implementation is therefore race conscious, although they do not cater exclusively to black students. Thereafter, the chapter delved into institutional culture. This concept was described as a phenomenon that is not monolithic, it is constantly morphing, there are however certain elements of it that persist over time. It was also found to be co-produced by the institution and its students alike. The institutional culture of Wits university was also discussed, findings alluded to academic excellence as the primary pursuit of the university. The experiences of students however surfaced dynamics of Wits' institutional culture that serve to complicate the concept, these were academic difficulty, the instrumentality of friendships, structures that render the university a welcoming educational environment, along with the role of race and language.

Furthermore, the chapter discussed the role that the urban context of Braamfontein plays in shapingthe experiences of students at Wits university. It was also found that a university's geographical location is very instrumental in shaping the experiences students. For instance, the context of Stellenbosch University renders an experience to its student populations that differs, to an extent, from that of Wits' students who reside in Braamfontein. Finally, this chapter discusses Tinto's Model of Institutional Action and the extent to which support programmes at Wits assists black engineering students in navigating the institutional culture in the university. It was found that the study contributes to the interpretation of Tinto's model by annexing the category of geographical context when looking at the factors of institutional culture that impact the wellbeing and functionality of students. The chapter then proposed

that SSPs at Wits University would render more comprehensivesupport to its student population should they adopt this broaden purview of institutional culture, taking into cognizance the geographical context of the university.

Chapter 6: The implications of adopting a broader purview of institutional culture

6.1 Introduction

This research project sought to address the shortages of skills and underrepresentation of blacks in high skilled professions such as professional engineering in South Africa. It views the underwhelming throughput rate of this demographic in Historically White Universities (HWU) as part of the underpinnings of this problem. The study, therefore, probed the degree to which Student Support Programmes (SSP) assist black engineering students around the institutional culture of Wits university. This was pursued through qualitative interviews with students and employees of SSPs. This chapter summarizes and concludes the findings discussed in preceding chapters of the dissertation. Firstly, the chapter discusses the main argument of the study: the answer to the question "To what degree do Student Support Programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assistblack students to navigate the university's institutional culture?". Thereafter, it summarizes the study anddiscusses findings from the interviews conducted. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the contributions of this research project to the field of higher education in South Africa, underscoring itsvalue. Finally, the theoretical and practical limitations of the study are documented alongside recommendations for future research.

6.2 The argument of the study

The research question that this project was undertaken to answer is "To what degree do Student Support Programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students to navigate the university's institutional culture?" The finding and argument of this study is that SSPs assist students around different elements of the university to a significant degree, however, their reach is not extensive enough to tackle problems that students encounter outside of the demarcation within which academic learning takes place. These are issues that regard students' circumvention of the social dynamics of the university's urban context: Braamfontein. This context presents students with challenges such as the prevalence of crime, fraudulent schemes, and the lures of the nightclub lifestyle, amongst others. The university's student population residing in this urban context cannot escape this reality, it is inevitable for them to encounter these challenges whilst they pursue their academics at Wits. These issues play a crucial role in their academic fortunes as it was cited that the academic careers of other students are cut short by them (Student F1, Q3). Others, like the participant (Student M1, Q4) who reported getting caught up in partying and neglecting his academics in his second year of study, manage to escape this snare. Their academic journeys, however, remain maimed: having to complete their degree over a longer period than they would have. It is therefore necessary for SSPs to increase the degree of their support by taking the urban context of the university into account in their design and implementation of interventions.

6.3 Reexploring the remit of the study

The impetus of this research project is the shortages of skills and underrepresentation of black people in high skilled professions such as professional engineering in South Africa. The study sees it as incumbent upon the country's higher education system to rectify these labour demand and supply discrepancies resultant from the country's apartheid history. Looking at Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), the study noted that black students are not only less likely to qualify for higher education from high school, but those who manage to access these institutions have a low completion rate (Africa Check, 2016).

These are the legacies of apartheid in South Africa's education structures. It is an uneven and fragmented system that continues to favour the affluent over the disadvantaged, perpetuating extant inequalities in the country. There are, however, efforts that have been made over the years to combat these inequalities in the educational system, one being the introduction of SSPs in IHL. These programmes are part of the transformation agenda, seeking to render IHL spaces where students from all walks of life have an equal opportunity to succeed (Boughey, 2010). In this regard, Wits university

has seen the inauguration of the ADU, CCDU, and FYE amongst a myriad of others. The ADU deals exclusively with *Engineering and Built Environment* mainstream students. It proffers academic support through extra tutorials for each of the major courses in engineering. Its services also include a mental wellness programme, along with time management and study skills development (Student Support - Wits University, 2021). The CCDU provides students with personal counselling and support groups, career counselling, psychometric career assessment, a *journey to employability* programme, workshops and trainings, and life coaching. Finally, the FYE engages first year students in a week-long orientation before the academic year commences, its other services include life coaching, computer literacy, mental wellness, and leadership camps (Student Support - Wits University, 2021).

Against the backdrop established above, acknowledging the potency of the cultures of HWU, and recognizing the instrumentality of SSPs, this study sought to probe the degree to which SSPs assist black engineering students around the institutional culture of Wits university. It limited its purview to the 3 abovementioned SSPs (the ADU, CCDU, and FYE) and black undergraduate students in the faculty of engineering who have been in the university for at least 3 years. The study limited its purview to these programmes because they are primarily responsible for supporting students vis-à- vis academic guidance, career counselling, and integration into the university. The engineering field was chosen because it is crucial to the national development agenda, providing facilities for living, industry, transportation, roads, bridges, railroad lines, airports, water-supply systems, harbours, andtunnels amongst a myriad of other growth fostering developments (Achieng, 2019). The students considered needed to have been at the university for at least 3 years because their insights needed to be relevant beyond the covid-19 pandemic which necessitated a drastic change in teaching and learning in the past 2 years.

This study was guided by Vincent Tinto's Model of institutional Action (2010), seeing students' academic fortunes as not solely dependent on individual characteristics. It acknowledges the agency of institutional structure as well. The study also adopted Steyn's conceptualization of institutional culture which views it as the total effects of the values, attitudes, ways of interaction, collective understandings, and collective memories, viewed through the lived experiences of the people who man the institution. Given this conceptualization, probed the institutional culture of Wits university through the lived experiences of its students. It was envisaged that these experiences would underscore the most prominent characteristics of the university's culture. This conceptualization also guided the study to employ qualitative, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews as its research instrument.

These types of interviews are most apt in capturing the lived experiences of individuals, spurring conversation towards objectives, and capturing unexpected information. The study supplemented the experiences and perceptions of students with those of employees of the SSPs. Insights from these employees were envisaged to enrichen the study, proffering a more comprehensive understanding of students' engagement with SSPs. The interviews with students and employees were all conducted remotely due to Covid-19 restrictions: via Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The study's sample population consisted of 20 participants, 14 students and 6 employees of SSPs. These participants were reached through a mixture of a door-to-door outreach, snowball sampling, and email requests.

6.4 The main findings of the research

This study found that students from quintile 1-3 schools lagged behind their counterparts from more affluent backgrounds at university as the gap in conceptual knowledge of these students was found to be greater. This is a result of the dysfunctionality and lack of resources such as computers, physics laboratories, and textbooks in quintile 1-3 schools, which impede their learners from acquiring the knowledge and skills required to perform optimally in university (Letseka, 2014).

This study also found that there was no leaner from a quintile 1 school in its sample population, which was selected randomly, however, 3 were from quintile 2, 7 were from quintile 3, and 4 were from quintile 4. The understanding extrapolated from these numbers was that students from the poorest quintiles have the least chances of accessing higher education. The study found differences between the experiences of quintile 1-3 students and those from quintile 4 as well. Quintile 4 students tended to not be first generational students, they, therefore, have family members who could prepare and guide them through university. These students also experienced less difficulty understanding and answering questions asked in the interviews, indicating better English language proficiency. Students from quintile 4 schools, even though black, were, therefore, better equipped for university due to their socio-economic backgrounds.

The students interviewed in the study all agreed that the 3 considered SSPs played a crucial role in assisting them around the institutional culture of the university, with the ADU receiving the most attention. The service that was most appreciated by students from this programme was their tutorials, student expressed that these were very crucial especially in their first year of study. The CCDU's psychotherapeutic services were also found to be instrumental by students. Many of the respondents had never been to therapy prior to their encounter with the CCDU, they therefore received diagnoses such as general anxiety for the first time through this programme. The FYE services that received the most appreciation were their mentorship program and their technical skillsdevelopment program which acquainted students with computers. Most students from quintile 1-3 schools lack computer literacy, to the point of not know how to switch one on at times, the technicalskills development program, therefore, was imperative. The mentorship program was also crucial as the mentors acquainted students with the social and physical environment of the university, equipping them for when they needed to navigate the space on their own.

The findings of this study also alluded to academic difficulty being the most prominent characteristic of Wits university. This finding was commensurate with the study of Peterson et al (2009) who grappled with the experiences of students from poor socio-economic backgrounds vis-à-vis academic difficulty in HWU. It was surfaced by students that this difficulty was accompanied by a dearth of academic guidance from lecturers. This struggle gave rise to collaborations in the faculty of engineering. Students built personal and impersonal social networks which they could leverage throughout their academic careers to combat the heavy academic demand. Building friendships was noted as very crucial by every student interviewed in the study, the academic demand was too great to surmount single handedly. This necessitated those who are introverts to come out of their shells and learn to socialize, the failure of which proved detrimental.

Students were divided concerning the role of race in determining the experience that a student will have in the university. Some reported race as a determinant while others did not. The sentiments of all the students who elaborated, except 1, however, alluded to socio-economic issues as a determinant and not race directly. The conflation of the two concepts was indicative of the inextricable relationship between them in the South African context. Our apartheid history ensured that socio-economic status was distributed along racial lines. The finding of the study in this regard, therefore, was that race mattered, primarily, in as far as it indicated one's socio-economic status. Otherwise, overt racial discrimination was found to not be as prevalent as had been envisaged by the study.

The central finding of this study was that students coming to Wits transitioned not only into the university space but also the context around it, the big, busy industrial heartland of Africa: Johannesburg. They needed to adjust to the town of Braamfontein, Johannesburg's fashion and culture hotspots punctuated by night clubs, bars, restaurants, and clothing shops. A leisure hub for locals and tourists where they go to party until the early morning hours (Mason, 2020). An

environment said to not be for the “feint hearted” by one student (F1, Q3), referenced also for cutting the academic careers of some students short. Students’ experiences at Wits could not be extricated from their experiences at Braamfontein, they conceived of the two interconnectedly. This was indicative, Wit’s urban context needed to be taken into consideration when understanding students’ experiences in the university. The study found that the culture of Wits university cannot beunderstood outside of that of Braamfontein. A university’s institutional culture, therefore, is not restricted to the physical space where academic learning takes place, it incorporates the dynamics ofthe geographical space in which it is situated. For instance, Stellenbosch’s oak-shaded neighbourhood, surrounded by the vineyards of the Cape Winelands renders a different experience of university to its student population compared to Wits located in Braamfontein, although both are HWU. These contexts, therefore, matter.

6.5 The study’s contributions to the field

Otu and Mkhize (2018) asserted that research that probes black students in HWU is inexhaustive, advocating for more robust research to be undergone in this regard. They further go on to suggest a need for research that will shift from viewing students as solely responsible for their academic fortunes. Research that will probe the agency of institutional structures in this regard, a sentiment akin to that of Vincent Tinto (2010). This study is, therefore, a response to these suggestions. It addresses a gap that has not yet been filled in the academic terrain of higher education in South Africa. The study probes the ways in which black students engage with the culture at Wits university. In this, it adds to the body of knowledge engaging black students in HWU. The study is also an inquiryinto the systematic factors of HWU, probing the degree to which policy interventions, specifically SSPs, assist black students around Wits’ culture.

Contributions of the study also include its novel path of inquiry, probing the instrumentality of support programmes vis-à-vis institutional culture in IHL. There is a descent body of work probing the instrumentality of support programmes in universities. The body of work concerning the institutional cultures of HWU is also growing in the field, however, there is a dearth of work that concerns the interplay between SSPs and the institutional culture of HWU (Tabensky and Matthews, 2015). This renders this undertaking a novel endeavour. A valuable contribution to the field of higher education in South Africa, useful towards making the body of work present more comprehensive.

This study also contributes to the growth of institution-specific research in the field of highereducation in South Africa. HWU share a common past with regards to their apartheid history, where they serviced the white demographic exclusively. Their staff profiles, student population, and geographical situation, however, give them different contextual realities today. Institution-specific studies are therefore of value, they capture nuances that are omitted in cross-institutional studies (Manik, 2015). This make this study an undertaking that is of value to the field, it captured nuances that would have been omitted in a cross-institutional study.

One such nuance is the agency of an institution’s geographical context. This finding underpins the proposal that the conceptualization of the institutional cultures of IHL be broadened to go beyond the environment where academic learning takes place. That the university’s geographical context betaken into account as it contributes to the dynamics of its culture. This finding is the main contribution of this study to the field of higher education in the country: a university’s culture cannotbe understood outside of the culture of its geographical context. This finding also contributes to the interpretation of Tinto’s Model of Institutional Action (2010). It broadens it to include the geographical context of institutions as a significant element when considering factors that are pertinent to student performance.

The practical contribution of this study concerns support programmes. As had been hypothesised, the

findings of this study propose a way in which SSPs can be recalibrated to expand their reach. This proposal is that they broaden their purview according to the broadened conceptualization of the institutional cultures of universities. This means taking cognizance of the most prominent dynamics of the geographical context of the university when designing and implementing their interventions. This will render the support they proffer to their student population more comprehensive.

6.6 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

The first limitation of the study concerns the restriction of its purview to 3 SSPs at Wits: the ADU, CCDU, and FYE. This is a limitation because the university has other support programmes which are instrumental in assisting students around the dynamics of the university. The Wits Citizen and Community Outreach (WCCO) which provided students with groceries, for instance, was lauded by a significant number of students during interviews. It will therefore be of value for future research probing the subject matter of this study to take account of other programmes, like the WCCO, into consideration in their endeavours.

The second limitation of the study concerns generalizability. Being a qualitative enquiry and having a limited time frame within which it needed to be completed, this study could not consider a large number of people. These constraints resulted in the sample population being limited to 20 participants. This is therefore an area in which future research can improve. A quantitative enquiry into the same subject matter will be of value. Covid-19 was another potent limitation. Having to conduct interviews online came with its constraints. First, it happened that the electricity went out, due to load shedding during an interview.The participant had made time for the interview in their very tight schedule, when this happened, they were thereafter not able to reschedule another meeting. Leaving the study with incomplete insight into their experiences. Secondly, the conduction of interviews was contingent upon the availability of data. Future research should therefore undergo interviews face to face, this will minimize the potential of disturbances, ensuring that the insights of participants are captured intheir entirety.

The most significant limitation of this study, however, was its restriction to students who were still enrolled in the university. Students who were no longer in the university, unfortunately, could not be reached. The restrictions of Covid-19 limited the means through which the researcher could reach out to these students. This, therefore, meant that the students whose insights were solicited were those who have managed to persist in the university despite the difficulties. The demographic that could not be reached, students who were academically excluded or dropped out, would perhaps tell a different story regarding SSPs and Wits' institutional culture than that of the students considered in this study. It is, therefore, crucial for future research to consider the insights of students that failed to persist in the university, contrasting their experiences and perspectives with those of students who are still enrolled.

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Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

Title: The role of Student Support Programmes in assisting black students around the institutional culture at the University of Witwatersrand.

Name of Researcher: Mthokozisi Mthembu

Student Number: 1748366

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The research project explores the degree to which existing support programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students around the institutional culture in the university. This will be done by probing the perceptions and experiences of black students from the faculty of engineering and employees of support programmes.

The main research question of the study_

To what degree do Student Support Programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students around the university institutional culture?

Sub questions

- To what extent is race a determinant of one's experience at Wits
- In what ways does one's educational background affect their academic fortunes in university
- Do black students from quintile 4-5 schools experience Wits differently to those from quintile 1-3
- What assumptions underpin the design and implementation of Student Support Programmes at Wits university?

Questions

Demographic

1. For the sake of the recording and data organisation, could you please state your name and surname. If you're uncomfortable with this, we can use a pseudonym (fake name).
2. Please may you specify your gender. If you would rather not, we can do without it.

Educational Background

3. In which quintile does your secondary school fall under?
    a. Quintile 1- No-fee-paying, extremely poor infrastructure, mostly in rural areas, public
    b. Quintile 2- No-fee-paying, poor infrastructure, mostly in townships, public.
    c. Quintile 3- No-fee-paying, average infrastructure, mostly in cities/townships, mostly public
    d. Quintile 4- Fee-paying, good infrastructure, mostly in cities/suburbs, mostly private.
    e. Quintile 5- Fee-paying, excellent infrastructure, mostly in suburbs, private.
4. Please describe your secondary education experience.

5. How/why did you choose Wits?
6. How did you experience the campus space when you first arrived?
7. Please describe the experience of moving from your secondary school to a university like Wits.

Institutional Culture

8. Have you experienced the university space as welcoming and accommodative or have you felt out of place?
9. What cultural values and principles stand out for you in the way things are done in the university?
10. What aspects of your life have required change in order to attain a better fit between you and the institution?
11. Do you believe that being black makes you experience Wits differently to a student of another race?
    - Please elaborate.
12. Which elements of the culture at Wits have you found most difficult to navigate since your first year?
13. Please elaborate the impact this element has had on your academic fortunes.
14. Which 5 words would you use to best describe the culture at Wits according to your subjective experience?
15. How did you experience the environment of Braamfontein?

Career Guidance

16. Do you feel there is a good fit between you and the career path you have chosen?
17. Do you believe you were adequately guided into this career path?
    (a) From whom did you receive this guidance?
18. Is this the career path you had always aspired towards?

Student Support Programmes

19. What programmes are you aware of at Wits?
20. When did you become aware of these programmes?
21. Which ones have you made use of?
    - Did you find them helpful?
        - Do you believe that other students share this sentiment? (black students particularly)
    - Which of their services did you find most helpful?
22. When last did you make use of the programmes?
23. Do you believe that your utilization of these programmes has helped you get around the culture of the university with more success? If so, in what ways?

Appendix B

Employee interview questions

Title: Understanding the role of student support programmes at the University of Witwatersrand.

Name of Researcher: Mthokozisi Mthembu

Student Number: 1748366

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The research project explores the degree to which existing support programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students around the institutional culture in the university. This will be done by probing the perceptions and experiences of black students from the faculty of engineering and employees of support programmes.

The research question of the study_

To what degree do Student Support Programmes at the University of Witwatersrand assist black students around the university institutional culture?

Sub questions

- To what extent is race a determinant of one's experience at Wits
- In what ways does one's educational background affect their academic fortunes in university
- Do black students from quintile 4-5 schools experience Wits differently to those from quintile 1-3
- What assumptions underpin the design and implementation of Student Support Programmes at Wits university?

Questions

Biographical

1. May you please state your name and the programme you work for. (If you are not comfortable sharing your name, you may use a pseudonym)
2. What is the title of your job? And please share a little bit more about its specifications/scope.
3. How long have worked in this programme?

SSP Design and Implementation

4. What are the stated aims of your programme? (As reflected on its policies)

(a)What services does the programme offer?

(a) How is the programme structured?

5. How does the programme measure it's performance?
6. What assumptions underpin the methods used by those designing and running the programme?

7. What are the are the most potent challenges the programme has faced in the past 3 years?
8. What are the key student issues traditionally prioritised in the programmes?

(a) How have these shifted over the years?

9. What measures does the programme employ to ensure that the student population is aware of its existence and services?
10. Would you say the programme is under, over, or moderately utilized? Please elaborate on why you think this might be the case.

Experience with Black Students

11. From which faculty do most of the students who utilize the programme come from?
    (a) And for engineering students?
12. What is the percentage of Black students as recipients of your programme?
13. Based on your observation and experience working with the programme, what issues does the black cohort struggle with the most at Wits university?
    (a) How potent would you say these issues are in impeding these students academically?
    (b) Do you believe that over the years progress has been made in assisting these students surmount this struggle?

Institutional Culture

14. How would you describe the culture of Wits to a new student?
15. Would you say that the culture of the university is experienced in the same way across the student population (especially in light of race)?
16. As an employee at the university, would you say you experience the culture in the same way as students?
17. In your opinion, which part of your programme relates the most to the institutional culture of the university?