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INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

ABSTRACT

This piece is an empirical study of how students experience and conceptualise internationalisation of higher education at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), South Africa. The central question of this empirical study is, how do students experience and conceptualise internationalisation of higher education at Wits? The conceptual framework presents Wits within three domains, which are the Official, Pedagogical and Social, as the context within which the university operates. Using a qualitative methodology – phenomenography – that aims to explore the qualitatively different ways in which a group of people experience a specific phenomenon, in this case internationalisation of higher education, four main constructs about internationalisation have emerged from students' accounts:

(I) *internationalisation as Wits is striving to be a top global university*;

(II) *internationalisation as the presence of international students*;

(III) *internationalisation as an issue of mutual respect and acceptance*, and

(IV) *internationalisation as enhancing the students' learning experience*.

The argument is that, though students converge on these conceptions, their differences regarding the emphasis and significance points to a scenario of unbalanced institutional mediation, with strong mediation within the logic of dominant pedagogical practice in the university, constrained by forms of weak mediation in the social domain.

Key words: Internationalisation, Higher Education, Phenomenography, Students' Perspectives, University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)