

Intercultural peer group interactions, integration and student persistence
between Nigerian students and students from other countries at a university in
the Western Cape

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Abstract

As a Nigerian, I became interested in investigating how Nigerian students, from different cultural backgrounds are able to integrate and persist in their academic programmes. I used Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure as a foundation for my conceptual framework. I adopted a qualitative research approach as this provides opportunities for interpretations by both participants and the researcher. I purposively selected 20 Nigerian students who were at different stages of their Master's programmes at a university in the Western Cape province of South Africa, but only 12 students were available and interviewed. The data reveals a significant relationship between intercultural peer group interactions, formal social integration and student persistence, while there was no significant relationship between intercultural peer group interaction, informal social integration and student persistence. Furthermore, informal social integration was partially related to formal academic integration and student persistence. Finally, it emerged that informal academic integration was also strongly linked to social integration and academic success. Due to the limiting nature of a research paper, the research has been restricted to the Nigerian experience to allow an insider perspective.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- ***Academic integration***

Academic integration refers to a student's ability to achieve an acceptable grade performance in the academic system as prescribed by the institution.

- ***Inclusive classroom***

An inclusive classroom is a classroom where the diversity of each student is taken into account, and no student is excluded from the benefits of being a member of the classroom.

- ***Integration***

This is attained when an individual is able to establish membership within a community by sharing the values of the community.

- ***Intercultural interaction***

Intercultural interaction is the communication that takes place amongst people from different cultural backgrounds

- ***Intercultural peer group interactions***

This refers to the interactions that occur amongst peers from different cultural backgrounds within a community

- ***Intent to persist***

For the purpose of this research, intent to persist refers to the intention of the students who have not completed the programs they registered for, but intend to complete it at the same institution.

- ***Peer group interactions***

Peer group interactions, refer to the general interaction/communication amongst peers

- ***Social integration***

Social integration occurs when membership is established within the communities of a society. For the purpose of this research, even if friendship with an individual is

established both in the formal and informal spheres of the community, it means social integration has occurred.



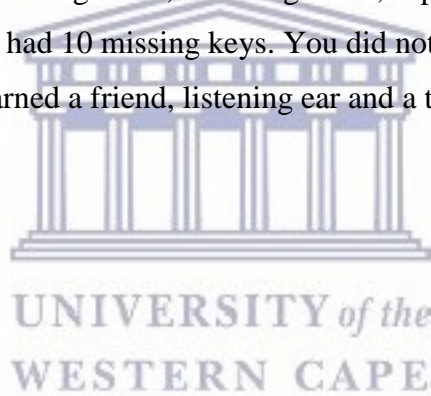
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I owe the completion of this research paper to God almighty who granted me strength to carry on when I could have given up.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master in Adult Education and Global Change at the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Marian O Babalola

Signed:

May 2018



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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

South African higher education institutions have experienced high influx of international students in recent years. Students from other African countries are the majority of these international students. According to the Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2015), 40,350 foreign students registered for contact modules at South African universities. The DHET aims to increase the number of enrolments in the post school education and training sector to meet the needs of skills required for the development of the country. To achieve this, they aim to increase the rate at which the key skills necessary for economic growth and social development are delivered by retaining foreign students who have been trained in South African universities at a postgraduate level. This will not only contribute to the development of the country, but will also contribute to the country becoming a knowledge economy. However, despite the high number of international students at South African higher institutions, especially at the Master's degree level, there are several factors mitigating the integration of these students. Apart from institutional barriers to their integration, factors such as differences in culture, language and beliefs are hindrances to the integration of international students, which can inform their decision to persist or to drop out.

As noted by Tinto (2016), a student's sense of belonging to a campus community helps them to persist at the university. He emphasises the need to view a student's integration from the perception of such a student and how they interpret their experiences. Hence, this study seeks to discover the experiences of Nigerian students in a master's programme and whether their interactions with South African students and students from other countries impact on their integration and persistence.

Although earlier researchers focused on departure as a result of student negligence, it was proposed that departure or non-persistence in higher education was the sole responsibility of the student (Berger, Ramirez & Lyon, 2005). However, during the late 1960s and 1970s, researchers such as Panos and Astin (1968) and the work done by Tinto (1973) redirected the focus and located departure within contexts of various barriers, which ranged from psychological, situational and financial to institutional. In 1993, Tinto developed a Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure, which was interactional in nature. He claimed that even though several researchers had carried out studies and developed models of student

attrition, those models were mainly psychological in nature and often placed the burden of departure on the ability and actions of the individual (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (see Appendix E), which builds on his earlier study (1975), arose from a need to identify the main factors and the nature of the interaction involved in the processes that undermine student persistence in higher institutions.

Tinto posits that the different aspects of this model interact, in the sense that the student's pre-entry attributes influence their goals and commitments which in turn come into play in their transitioning into the formal and informal systems of the institution. Their successful transition in turn brings about social and/or academic integration and persistence until graduation, while barriers to integration could result in the individuals weakened intentions as well as commitment and there is a likelihood of departure.

In this study, I have chosen to look at the relationships between three concepts, peer group interactions, integration and student persistence and test to validate the interactions between the variables of Tinto's (1993) model. Hence, I have introduced a variable, which is "intercultural peer group interaction", to understand how Nigerian students are able to negotiate peer group interactions in maintaining their intentions and if it has undermined or encouraged their integration and persistence (see Appendix F).

Rationale

As a student and tutor at a university in the Western Cape since 2014, I observed that there was a need to investigate the nature of peer group interactions between Nigerian students and students from other countries as research shows that peer group interaction is pertinent to social and academic integration and student persistence (Tinto, 1997). I developed an interest in investigating the experiences of Nigerian students in respect to separating from their known communities and transitioning into a new system in a new environment. Of particular interest was the fact that peer group interactions are important and directly linked to integration, as it is suggested in Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure. I wanted to know if and how Nigerian students persisted in their programmes. Also, I sought to know how they were able to negotiate their interactions and integration, being fully aware of the usual difficulties experienced by students from other cultural backgrounds in other

communities. Finally, I wanted to investigate how they were able to integrate into the systems of the institution to the point of persisting, with particular focus on what aided their persistence and what undermined it.

Research problem

When international students are not integrated into an institution's academic and social communities, their academic success is undermined and possibilities of the students not persisting increase. Inattention to intercultural peer group interaction could contribute to international student departure.

Even though researchers have pointed out the disadvantages of a researcher being an insider because it is believed that researcher as an insider will be biased (Simmel, 1950; Kanuha, 2000; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, being an insider will not be a limitation to my research as the questions I asked were informed by my conceptual framework as well as literature. My analysis was also done with the themes that emerged from data which prevented me imposing any personal views or biases.

Research aims and objectives

Aims

This study investigates peer group interactions between Nigerian students and students from other countries at a university in the Western Cape in order to find out the extent to which international students experience social integration and how it affects their student persistence. I also sought to identify ways that new theoretical insights from this study could influence university policies and practices that undermine or encourage international student's integration and persistence.

Research questions

Main research question

What is the nature of the relationships between intercultural peer group interaction, social integration and student persistence?

Sub-questions

- What is the nature of intercultural peer group interactions between Nigerian students and students from other countries?

- What is the nature of intercultural peer group interactions and social integration?

Anticipated findings

My study will generate new theoretical insights into how student persistence can be achieved by identifying the factors that undermine and those that promote the integration of international students.

It will also give insight into the nature of peer group interaction that is necessary for integration.

Overview

Brief introduction of the following sections

Section 2

Section 2 includes the description and explanation of my conceptual framework, Tinto's (1975,1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure. It also explores literature relevant to the different concepts used in my research.

Section 3

Section 3 describes the qualitative methodology approach employed for the research. It also includes a description of my research instrument and the recruitment of my participants as well as the process of data gathering.

Section 4

Section four contains my data analysis. It displays the transcribed data and how the data is analysed through the use of thematic data analysis.

Section 5

Section 5 consists of the summary of the research, the findings, recommendations and the conclusion of the research.

SECTION 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Section 2 comprises my conceptual framework. It gives a detailed definition and description of my theoretical model and the concepts I extracted from the model. It also explains other related concepts as well as literature and studies that are relevant to my study.

Theoretical perspectives

I used Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993) as a foundation for my theoretical approach (diagram in figure 1). I focused on concepts such as peer group interactions, social integration and student persistence. In addition, I have subsumed 'intercultural peer group interaction' under the concept of 'peer group interaction', as this is a phenomenon I saw as central to my study.

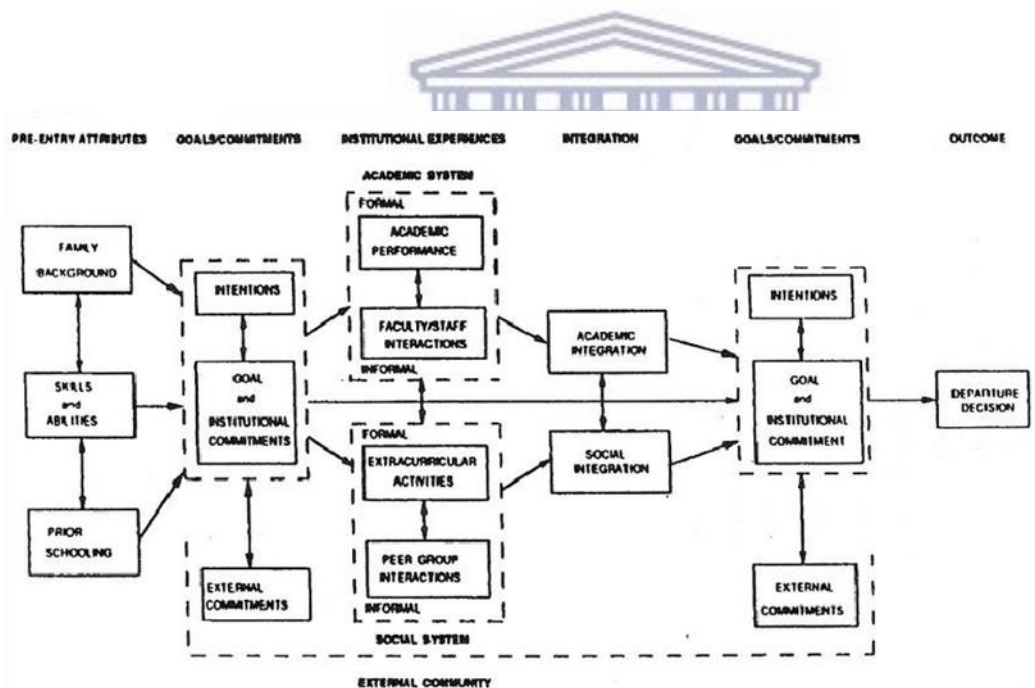


Figure 1.1 Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993)

Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure outlines the stages involved in the intention of an individual to persist or depart from a higher education institution. He explains that individuals do not depart or make decisions to depart solely as a result of the individual's 'personal failure' as informed by previous literature. He acknowledges that even

though some existing theories and researchers (Rose & Elton, 1966; Heilbrun, 1965) have identified factors such as psychological reasons, lack of adequate skills needed for succeeding in an academic environment, social inequality, financial instability, as well as organizational dimensions as contributory to an individual's decision to depart, these are not the only reasons for student departure. He maintains that there is an interactional relationship between the different factors that lead to student departure. In particular, he points to the limited focus on the active role played by the institutional systems, especially the social setting in a student's decision to depart (Tinto, 1993). If the social system is favorable to the student, and the latter integrates through successful peer group interactions, there is a likelihood for the student to persist.

In describing the association of the individual with other members of the institution, Tinto (1993) adopts the use of a social anthropology study of rites of passage by Van Gennep (1960), to describe the three stages of separation, transition and incorporation involved in establishing membership in traditional societies. Tinto (1993) suggests that a person's successful integration into a community might be predominantly dependent on the individual leaving another community, transitioning into the new one and becoming integrated through successful interactions with peers and other social systems of the institution (1993).

The first stage which Van Gennep (1960) describes as the separation phase involves leaving the previous community and cutting off or limiting interactions with members of the previous communities, in this instance, the local high school and the local areas of residence. Tinto (1993) states that there has to be a transition involved, a rejection of past norms and adoption of the processes of the college system. He acknowledges that some groups would find this stage more difficult than other groups, for instance, individuals coming from small close-knit rural communities, foreign students from other countries and ethnic or religious communities. Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure outlines these as the family background, prior schooling as well as the skills and abilities an individual brings to the higher institution.

The second stage is the transition stage in which the individual has not fully incorporated the new patterns, values and ways of doing things in the institution. Tinto (1993) explains that the smoothness of the transition stage in the institution is dependent on how different or similar the practices are from that of the individuals' past communities. He argues that their

success in previous communities does not guarantee their success in the new community, especially if the process varies widely and the individual's response to the stress experienced during the transition stage could influence decisions. However, he notes that the process is interactional, as the individual's goals and intentions have much to do with how individuals process and react to transitioning.

Tinto's model submits that some pre-entry attributes have an impact on the individual's goals and institutional commitments. These include individual attributes, pre-college experiences and family background. Individual attributes include: race, sex and academic ability; pre-college experiences have sub-variables such as: social and academic experiences, grade point average as well as social and academic achievements; while family background sub-constructs are: social status, value climate and expectation climate (Tinto, 1993; McCubbin, 2003).

Tinto (1993) suggests that individual commitment and goals can be described as an individual's commitment to a specific educational institution as well as to the programme of study. Furthermore, the model postulates that individual characteristics, including social and academic integration, also determine whether a student persists at higher institutions. He states that the interaction between students' individual commitments to their goals, determine their persistence or departure. The model places emphasis on persistence and departure as a result of the interactions between the individual and the institutions they attend. Tinto (1993) states that a student's view of his or her own integration is most important in measuring integration. He recommends that individuals' academic integration can be assessed through the individuals' views of their grade performance and their intellectual development. He explains that social integration is directly related to persistence and is most effective if it is done on the premise of formal social interactions more than informal social interactions. His model proposes that there are interactions among academic and social integration, goal and institutional commitment. While academic integration directly influences an individual's goal and commitment, social integration directly influences his commitment to the specific institution. Even though goals and institutional commitment are not necessary for persistence, sufficient goal commitment would make a student persist at an institution they are not committed to (McCubbin, 2003).

Several researchers have tested (Barnett, 2011), validated, revised (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Barnett, 2011) and critiqued (Brunsdon, Sheylin, Davies & Bracken, 2000; Bean and Metzner, 1985) Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure. Criticisms range from the perceived limitation of its applicability to traditional institutions and traditional type students, to claims that the model does not recognize the importance of finances to the persistence of an individual as well as the playing down of the social systems of the institution on the individual's decisions or intentions. For instance, Brunsdon et al. (2000) carried out a statistical analysis by using a questionnaire administered to 264 first-year university students to evaluate some of the key aspects of Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure. A year later, they reviewed the students, focusing on the voluntary and involuntary dropouts as well as those who persist. They concluded that their data could not be analysed effectively using their interpretation of Tinto's model because their assessment of the whole model and some of its aspects proved it to be inadequate. They suggest that an ethnographic and interactionist approach may be a more suitable approach to explore student attrition. McCubbin (2003) maintains that this could be as a result of the authors' assessment of their own conceptualization of the model rather than the assessment of the original model.

In addition, Torres and Solberg (2001) tested Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure by applying some of its variables. They administered questionnaires to 189 Latino students studying in the United States of America. The questionnaires included college stress measures, academic self-efficacy, social and faculty integration and intent to persist. Their results revealed that social integration did not predict intent to persist amongst Latino students. Furthermore, Duquette (2000) also applied the model to assess attrition in students with disability through administering questionnaires to all 36 participants and interviewing 17 out of the 36 participants on academic integration, social integration and individual characteristics. Their findings suggested that academic integration and individual character were both important determinants of intentions to drop out, but there was no direct relationship to social integration as the participants were supported and motivated by family. McCubbin (2003) proposes the possibility of a weakness of the social integration variable in the explanation of the attrition behavior within specific student population as seen in the Latino, minority group as well as students with disabilities in an institution. It is presumed that the sample type could be the reason for these findings as there could be specific behaviour and attributes to specific sample type.

However, a general misinterpretation of the variables and the model as a whole could be the reason for inconsistent results. Moreover, Tinto (1993) modified the conceptualization of the variables, academic and social integration to become indivisible as he considers academic integration as emergent from social integration. He emphasizes the need for a student to establish social relationships that would be a support system for sustained persistence in the early stages of college life, while he notes that social integration, or the lack of it, does not necessarily lead to decisions to drop out towards the end of the individual's programme due to the individual's commitment (Tinto, 1993).

Peer group Interactions

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure explains how interactions with people in an institution's academic and social system influence departures from the institutions by students who have different characteristics. Tinto (1993) argues that "Interactive experiences which further ones social and intellectual integration are seen to enhance the likelihood that the individual will persist" (p. 116). He emphasises the central role played by the members of the institution in their formal and informal capacities.

Tinto (1993) explains that contact with members of faculty is important to student retention. He, however, emphasises the need for positive interactions within the social system of the university as he claims that subsequent experiences that arise from interactions between an individual and other members of the university are directly related to the individual's persistence in the university. Moreover, he states that if an individual is not socially or academically integrated into the university communities through positive interactions, then the individual would most likely depart. Interactions amongst peers within the institution are viewed as the most important form of interaction that could influence the integration of the individual into both the social and intellectual systems of the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Intercultural peer group interactions

Intercultural interaction is of great importance in institutions of higher learning. This is firstly due to the global increased mobility of international students. In addition, there is an increase in the attendance of previously disadvantaged minority groups, who are from different ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds, attending universities and colleges. Intercultural communication is important for success in our present society (Teng, 2005). Despite the

globalized state of the world and the increased mobility of people from one region of the world to another, especially in terms of education and specifically for higher education purposes, there is evidence to suggest that engagement amongst students from different cultural backgrounds is limited (Volet & Ang, 2012).

Several studies have been done to establish factors that limit intercultural interactions amongst local and international students. For instance, Strauss and Young (2011) identify language as a barrier, while difference in culture is identified by Cathcart, Dixon-Dawson and Hall (2006). In addition, Harrison and Peacock (2010) note that anxiety in interacting with someone from a different culture could also be a militating factor. Having limited knowledge and capability in intercultural communication is also seen as having an impact on successful intercultural interactions (Daly & Barker, 2005). According to Hurtado (2001), there is evidence to suggest that interactions with peer students and faculty members of diverse backgrounds result in increased skills and writing abilities of students. This means that if a student is exposed to and interacts with peers that are from different ethnic backgrounds, there are chances of improved academic outcomes.

Although these studies have identified factors that could impact intercultural interactions, there is limited focus on the importance of intercultural interactions to social and academic integration and how this impacts an individual's decision to persist in the university. My study sought to fill this gap by investigating if and to what extent intercultural peer group interaction impacts on an individual's integration into the academic and social systems of an institution. This is to test Tinto's (1993) suggestion that even though the presence of interaction alone does not guarantee persistence, "the absence of interactions almost always enhances departure" (p. 117).

Integration

The third stage of incorporation is the student's integration into the social and academic systems of the institution. As explained by Tinto, integration into the institution occurs on two levels, as the individual has to be academically and socially integrated. Even though some institutions have recognized the importance of this stage of getting incorporated into the university systems, and have put some measures such as sports and societies, extra-curricular programmes and other social and academic functions in place to aid the integration process, there are still difficulties experienced by students in the negotiation of becoming integrated.

Tinto argues that even these activities do not erase the difficulties experienced by students in getting integrated into their new communities, rather, the daily formal and informal interactions with peers yield a result of successful integration. Moreover, Tinto (1993) makes reference to how this stage is even made more difficult for students recently removed from “familiar confines of family and high school” (p. 99). In my view, this stage would then be more difficult for foreign students who are faced with a new institutional environment but have to experience a double process of incorporation in comparison to their counterparts. Tinto (1993) advocates for external assistance for such students without which many would depart as a result of not being able to establish membership academically and socially. This is because the institutional experiences that take place within an institution’s formal and informal settings of the social and academic systems could undermine or aid student persistence. Tinto (1997) explains that an institution’s character is important in student integration, as institutions that are socially weak in character, due to fewer interactions amongst students (such as non-residential institutions) would undermine student persistence. Astin (1993) agrees that institutions and the actors within it that are committed to the student’s educational goals, encourage student persistence. Hence, there is an increased effort on the part of educational institutions to provide supplementary assistance to students in ensuring their smooth transitioning; this is done through orientations, increased interaction among peers through group tasks, and tutorials as well as seminars to enable them to engage with members of staff.

Integration is the most important concept in Tinto’s (1993) model. The model is often referred to as the Student Integration Model (SIM), because it proposes that being able to integrate into the systems of the institution determines the persistence of the individual. However, a number of researchers have contested the centrality of the influence of institutional experiences to student persistence as proposed by Tinto (1993). They suggest that the part played by external influences such as family background and family motivation to excel should not be ignored (Hernandez, 2005; Kember, 1995).

Brandes’s (2013) case study of the experiences of 27 Latino students, used Padilla’s (2009) students’ success line of inquiry as an alternative to Tinto’s model of institutional departure, with the aim of knowing why students persist which she states is different from understanding why students depart. Brandes (2013) found that students persisted due to being

motivated to be successful and developing coping strategies. He emphasised that the family educational background played a major part in the student's persistence even more than the institutional experiences.

Despite this discourse on the importance of an individual's family background on student persistence, studies such as Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) have shown that students' experiences at the college, especially as it concerns their involvement or integration, are more important in their persistence. Moreover, institutions that have been successful in retaining students are those that are sensitive to the students' academic, social and cultural needs (Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003).

Social Integration

Tinto (1993) describes social integration as the integration which occurs as a result of personal affiliations and daily interactions among members of a society. In explaining an individual's integration into the society, Tinto (1993) makes use of Durkheim's (1951) study on community and suicide. He describes egoistical suicide as one that occurs as a result of an individual's inability to integrate and establish membership within the communities of society. Tinto (1993) explains that successful integration may not occur if an individual's values are deviant and if sufficient affiliations are not established with other members of the same society, which would in turn result into social isolation. Furthermore, he argues that daily interactions could serve as a tool in measuring one's value against societal values, which could help in conforming to acceptable social behaviors.

In using egoistical suicide as an analogy for student integration and departure, Tinto (1993) emphasises the influence of social and intellectual communities in institutions on an individual's persistence or departure.

Furthermore, Tinto (1997) explains that social integration does not necessarily refer to being incorporated into the institution's social system as a whole but rather, being able to establish memberships in the institutions sub-culture, as he claims that what really matters is having daily interactions and forming friendships within the institution's community.

Academic Integration

According to Tinto (1975, 1993), the academic system of the college is concerned with an individual's formal education. Tinto (1993) describes it as "characterized by activities in the classroom and laboratories of the institution as well as faculty members and staff that are mainly concerned with the academic duties" (Tinto, 1993, p. 106). The academic system has two units, which are the formal and informal academic systems. The formal aspect is strictly concerned with what happens in the classroom and is purely academic in nature while the informal aspect has to do with the interactions between faculty/staff members and an individual. He explains that in most colleges a prerequisite for persistence is being able to maintain adequate levels of grade performance in the academic systems, failure of which leads to departure. Moreover, the informal aspect of the academic system is equally important to student success and persistence (Barnett, 2011). However, being able to integrate into the academic system of the college does not automatically translate into gaining membership into the social systems of the college. Also, an individual could become integrated into the academic systems of the institution and still depart due to a lack of the ability to integrate socially and thus become socially isolated.

Interplay between Social integration and Academic integration

According to Tinto (1997), the academic and social systems of institutions "overlap", and "is seen as emerging from student involvement with faculty and student peers in the community of classrooms" (p. 617). Even though the academic and social systems of an institution are depicted as separate entities within the institution's community in Tinto's (1975) model of institutional departure and further studies by Tinto (1993, 1997) have resulted in reconsidering the relationship between the two systems. He explains that despite the two systems having their own distinct characters, the two systems are nested within each other (Tinto, 1997). He states that "social communities emerge from academic activities that take place within the academic space of the classroom, doing activities that are also social in character, such as seminars, group tasks and tutorials" (Tinto, 1997, p. 620). The academic system is described as the educational setting, characterised by classroom and laboratory activities, with members of faculty and other staff that are also concerned with the educational aspect of a student's life. The social system is the setting that involves the student's daily activities, personal needs and interactions amongst students, in spaces such as the cafeteria, residences and other social spaces within the institution.

Tinto (1997) states that experiences in each of the systems may have separate effects on the individual. He also emphasises that establishing membership in one of the systems does not automatically translate to integrating into the other system of the institution. Moreover, becoming a competent member of one of the systems does not translate to persistence at the institution as one could become a competent member of the social system in the college, but not meet the institution's minimum "adequate level of grade performance" (Tinto, 1993, p. 108), which could lead to academic failure and departure. Similarly, if a student integrates into the academic system of the institution and is unable to establish membership in the social system, the student might still depart from the institution due to feeling socially isolated. Furthermore, Tinto (1993) posits that the structure and strength of an institution's academic and social system could be responsible for the rate of departure at such an institution. Non-residential institutions, where there is less interaction amongst students, are regarded as weak in respect of their local social systems.

Tinto (1993) advises that it is important to note how integration occurs in formal settings of a system as it may lead to similar integration in the informal setting of the system. He explains that a formal academic gathering is a space where friendships are established, as many students consider their participation in the formal academic and formal social spaces as helpful in their integration (Tinto, 1993). In addition, Tinto (1993) notes that formal social integration resulted in student participation in learning and persistence as it helped to develop supportive peer groups. He explains that the academic and social systems of the institution are interwoven in the classroom; hence, the students are able to integrate both academically and socially as the development of interpersonal relationships lead to academic engagement both within and outside the classroom (Tinto, 1997).

Persistence and intent to persist.

Persistence has been described in many ways by researchers and scholars in the field of adult education (Comings, Parella & Soricone, 1999). In the adult education sector, retention is usually used interchangeably with persistence, although some researchers propose different definitions of the concepts. For instance, Hagedorn (2005) explains that persistence is perceived from the perspective of the learner and retention is proposed to be an institutional term in viewing student persistence. Also, Levitz and Noel (2000) describe persistence as the completion of a student's academic goals. However, Comings et al. (1999) prescribe that persistence should be used in place of retention as adults can "persist in learning" (p. 24)

through other means even after dropping out or stopping out of the traditional institutional environment. He explains that persistence is a complex phenomenon, as an individual could stop out by deferring his studies and resuming it at a later date. The individual could also opt out, in this case, the individual leaves the institution because he has achieved a goal that might not necessarily lead to graduation. Other students could depart from an institution and transfer to another to complete their programme. Although they have departed from an institution of study, they have persisted in their studies at another institution. Finally, there are dropouts that do not complete the programme they enrolled for (Tinto, 1993).

Hence, Tinto (1993) defines persistence as a student's achievement of his academic goals. He explains that it results from having "supportive peer groups, gaining a voice in the construction of knowledge and shared learning" (Tinto, 1993, p. 609). He further explains that there is a likelihood that persistence is marked over time by a changing balance of academic and social integration. Bean (1980) explains that a student's persistence occurs as a result of the student's perceived sense of belonging to the institution that makes him integrate into the different systems in the institution.

Student persistence is important to students, institutions of study and a nation as a whole. For an individual, persisting until graduation results in personal development as well as economic and educational outcomes. There is evidence that the higher a person's level of education, the higher the rate of income (Ryles, 1996). Student persistence is also important to institutions as the ratings of a cohort's persistence have become an important prerequisite for prospective students and their parents in choosing an institution of study (Bean, 1980). Also, student persistence leads to an increase in human capital which is necessary in building a knowledge economy. The more educated a country's citizenry is, the more knowledgeable the country's economy is and this translates into a higher degree of the country's relevance globally.

Diverse perspectives on student persistence exist; some are sociological, psychological, financial and academic in nature. Tinto (1993) explains that not persisting can be attributed to factors that are sociological, like institutional experiences and students integrating into the systems of the institution. Astin (1993) has a similar perspective of the determinants of student persistence. He ascribes it to the extent and quality of the student's interactions with their peers, lecturers and other members of staff. Rendon (1995) also recognizes two precursors to persistence, which he explained as a student's successful transitioning into the

systems of the institution through programmes that guide them, as well as positive interactions with staff and faculty. In addition, Levitz & Noel (2000) recommend that faculty validation and staff interactions are as necessary for persistence. All these researchers make reference to the experiences within the institution as primary actors in the persistence of an individual. However, some researchers disagree with the total focus on institutional experiences within the institution as being more significant than external factors in student persistence.

Kember (1995) suggests that Tinto's (1975) model does not ascribe as much importance as it should to external communities, which he believes are more influential to student persistence than the model posits. However, Tinto (1993) explains that while the impact of external communities is important and is acknowledged by the model, it is not explored as the model only aims to explain the interactive and institutional processes involved in a student's voluntary departure. Furthermore, he describes the model as interactive and explanatory in looking at the voluntary withdrawals and not focusing on academic dismissal, but explores the factors that can undermine academic integration which could lead to academic dismissal.

The model posits that students do not persist due to intellectual inadequacies, difficulty in transitioning and integration, which could lead to isolation, as well as the lack of specified goals and commitment. In explaining the concepts of intentions (goals) and commitment, Tinto (1997) interprets intentions as a reflection of an individual's past experiences, which is used in assessing the possibility of achieving a future. Tinto (1997) terms it as a "barometer of the character of individual experiences" (p. 110). He further explains that commitment measures past experiences as well as aspects of an individual's personality (character of a person), which influences them in seeing tasks to completion and goal attainment. He advises that intention should not be perceived as being the same thing as commitment and it does not necessarily lead to persistence. This is because an individual could have high intentions but lack the personal character to be committed due to weakly-held norms and personal traits. Moreover, Tinto (1997) states that positive institutional experiences and commitment to goals are likely to result in persistence, while an individual's occupational goals that are directly linked to educational goals, would result in the individual persisting. Nevertheless, commitment to goals, as well as an individual's strongly-held norms determine the persistence of an individual, even in instances when processes of integration have not been smooth.

For the purpose of this research, the variables ‘persistence’ and ‘intent to persist’ are used, as some of my participants are at the conclusive stage of their programmes yet others will be at the early and middle stages of their programmes. Moreover, I asked questions indicative of institutional retention to understand if the student’s institutional experiences had any impact on their decision to continue learning after completing the present programmes they have registered for.

Intercultural Interaction

Intercultural interaction is considered as verbal and non-verbal communication between people of various cultures and belief systems (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2004). Several studies have explored the impact of intercultural interactions in the current atmosphere of global mobility, specifically in the mobility of students across countries, popularly referred to as the internationalisation of higher education. Interactions amongst culturally diverse people are important in higher education. The benefits of this include gaining competencies that would enable an individual to work in a culturally diverse environment and the opportunity to acquire more languages (Samovar et al., 2004).

In recent years, there has been a global movement of students from different parts of the world to others on the basis of tertiary education. Moreover, with the onset of knowledge economy in the global world (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1996a), a significant number of countries such as Canada and Australia have relaxed their migration policies to allow medium and high skilled migrants entry into their countries. The allowance given to migrant workers is to improve the human capital that would contribute relevantly to the status of their knowledge economy. The increase in the number of migrant workers in these countries bring about an increase in international students as well as faculty. Hence, it has become important to know about the experiences of people involved in intercultural interactions. These experiences could lead to successful integration into the community in which they find themselves yet, they could also undermine the academic success of such individuals (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

The issue of interaction is very important to student integration into the academic and social communities in an institution as well as to a student’s persistence. Tinto (1993) asserts that social integration is as a result of informal peer group interactions, interactions that occur

during extra-curricular activities and interactions with faculty as well as other members of staff within an institution. Hence, interaction within the institution's communities is the foundation for ultimate student persistence. This means that the ability of a student to establish appropriate interactions within an institution determines whether the student persists or leaves the institution (Hernandez, 2005).

Negotiating interactions become even more difficult for minority students whose cultures are not the dominant ones in the institution (Tinto, 1975). In order to succeed, these students would then have to adjust to and understand the expectations of the new cultures. Researchers such as Tierney (1992) suggest that competencies in being able to understand one's culture and the dominant culture in an institution is more acceptable than having to adapt or to reject one's culture in order to adopt the dominant culture within the institution.

In the study conducted by Hernandez (2005), the findings revealed that the participants who were of minority ethnic groups in the institution had to adjust culturally to their new college environment while they maintained their own cultural identities.

Being able to successfully interact in a culturally diverse environment is pertinent to a student's integration and persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993). An individual who is able to achieve this is referred to as a competent communicator (Hammer, Bennet & Wiseman, 2003).

Competent communicators are considered those that are able to adjust their orientations and behaviours to fit into communities that are not originally theirs for the purpose of attaining their goals (Hammer et al., 2003). A number of scholars have contested the very interpretation of competent communication as it is perceived to mean losing one's identity in favour of a foreign one or rejecting one's culture to be able to adopt a dominant one (Tierney, 1992). However, researchers have shown that there is need for an individual to be a competent communicator for the purpose of integration. It is suggested that there are different spectrums of adjustment into a new community. The further the individual has to travel to the community, the more effort he would have to apply to adjust to the new environment. For instance, if the individual's past community and his new community have languages that are cognate, the adjustment he has to go through for the purpose of interaction and integration

would not be as great as if the individual were from a country that had no relationship with his present community.

Notwithstanding, there has to be some form of reorientation to be able to interact with other people in the new community. Trice (2004) recommends “mixing it up” (p. 671) for cultural competency; that is being able to understand and imbibe some aspects of other cultures while maintaining one’s original culture. Furthermore, Trice (2004) suggests that programmes that enable frequent interactions amongst students of culturally diverse backgrounds would be beneficial to all the parties involved.

According to Zhao, Kuh and Carini (2005), students experience anxiety, loneliness and isolation in a different environment; hence, establishing friendships would be helpful in adjusting to a culturally-different environment. However, there is evidence to suggest that international students are prone to establishing friendships with other international students (Sam 2001; Zhao et al., 2005).

Chen (1997) describes intercultural sensitivity as “an individual’s ability to develop to a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication” (p. 5).

As proposed by Tinto’s (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure, peer group interaction is pertinent to successful student integration and student persistence. To be able to integrate into the academic and social systems of an institution, an individual is expected to be a competent communicator with peers, faculty and members of staff. This is because interactions enable a conducive atmosphere for learning activities and learning outcomes. To carry out academic duties such as group tasks and group tutorial assignments, there has to be some degree of interactions, which would lead to being a competent member of the group.

Krishnasamy, Hussein and Dalib (2014) conducted a study to investigate the nature of intercultural interactions experienced by international students and lecturers at a university in Malaysia. The researchers conducted interviews with 25 students. Selected for this study were students from Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Palestine. Ten Malaysian instructors who had frequent and active interactions with the students were also interviewed. The findings revealed that verbal communication in the form of language was a major barrier

in intercultural interactions as some of the foreign students had different interpretations of words spoken by the Malaysians. Findings also showed that cultural perceptions and expectations differed and resulted in discordant communication with regard to what was expected from either the students or lecturers, but was not always received (Krishnasamy et al., 2014).

Another study conducted by Morita (2012) was inspired by the lack of communication and interactions between international students who spoke minimal Japanese and Japanese students who were fluent speakers of the language. Through open-ended questions, the researcher conducted a survey on international students from different parts of the world who were attending a university in Japan. The findings revealed that the students faced language barriers in the different systems of the institution and even outside the university community. Students' integration into the academic and social systems of the institution were not smooth. The inability to communicate verbally in a different environment results in disadvantages, such as not being able to achieve a competent status of intercultural interactions, which would be beneficial in future, work places that are culturally diverse and internationalised. Also, for few of the host students who interacted with the international students, their interactions were only limited within the spheres of academic systems.

A difference in language has been identified as a major barrier in intercultural interactions and establishing friendships. In a study conducted by Marginson, Nyland, Sawir and Forbes-Mewett (2010), the majority of the participants mentioned that the difference in language was a barrier to establishing friendships with the host students as they were only able to communicate with those students who spoke English.

Anxiety is one of the factors that also hinder intercultural interactions. According to Duronto, Nishida, and Nakayama (2005), anxiety affects communication and is associated with avoidance. In a study conducted by Olson, Bidewell, Dune and Lessey, (2016), many host students experienced anxiety when they had to interact with their international counterparts; hence, they resolved to avoid intercultural interactions. It is suggested by Munawar (2015) that researchers in academia, as well as host institutions, should conduct studies that would reveal the differences of cultural competencies among international students in order to develop educational programmes that can improve social interactions amongst international students and the host students. Furthermore, it is proposed that learning practices should

include cultural learnings for international students to assist them in adjusting to the cultural climate of their host institution. Moreover, Bennet & Hammer (2011) state that with the increase in global mobility, it becomes imperative for institutions to recognize the level of an individual's intercultural competence.

International Students Integration

Theoretical perspectives in the literature emphasise the need for establishing membership within the systems of the institution. A study conducted by Bynum and Thomson (1983), explored student departure from four institutions. Their study indicated that any race group, which fell within the minority groups in an institution, recorded more departures than their counterparts in the majority groups. Hence, it is important to explore the persistence of foreign students who are minorities in an institution in a bid to understand their institutional experiences and its impact on their persistence.

Attinasi (1989) explains that the Mexican students in his study talked about the need to be members of social groups to be able to integrate into the institution. Some scholars are of the opinion that integrating into the communities of an institution could mean an individual discarding his culture and identity in a bid to integrate (Tierney, 1992), thereby reinforcing the concept of a dominant culture rather than an equal playground of diverse students/players. A study conducted by Przymus (2012), explored Latino students' perceptions of their sense of belonging (integration) through focus group interviews, individual interviews and photo elicitation at a community college in the Midwest in the United States of America. The results revealed that some of the students had integrated through peer group interactions and faculty validation and they had a sense of belonging to the communities in the college while others had personal and institutional barriers to integrate.

Carter (2006) examined factors that affect African-American, Hispanic and white student's persistence at public and private institutions in Indiana, in the United States of America, and found that background attributes, such as family educational background, were influential in all the groups' persistence. Hernandez (2005) conducted a study that examined 20 Latino students' sub-cultures and the impact of cultural integration or the lack of it on their persistence. He used several theories and models, which included Tinto's (1993) model of student integration and interviewed participants from different four-year residential institutions. He found that Latino students were not committed to the institution; rather, they

were more influenced and motivated to persist by external factors such as family commitments.

Furthermore, Gonzalez and Ting (2008) carried out a study (through the use of a descriptive survey) of Latino students at a South-eastern university in the US, to outline the cultural aspects of academic and social integration of Latino students. The results revealed that even though the students were able to integrate smoothly into the academic system of the institutions, they struggled to integrate socially due to cultural differences. In this instance, Tinto (1993) explains, that even though their persistence has been undermined, it is still possible that these students persist depending on their personal characteristics to commitment and their intentions, if the students hold strong norms to commitment. The worst that could happen in this instance would be for them to transfer to another institution. However, due to their non-integration because of cultural differences, there is a likelihood that their experiences would be the same in another institution.

As stated by Bennet & Hammer (2011), with the increase in global mobility, it becomes imperative for institutions to recognize the level of the individual's intercultural competence. However, there is a dearth of research by higher institutions that measure the outcomes that relate to a student's cultural learning; hence, reinforcing intercultural issues encountered by the host students and the international student's interactions.

In a study conducted by Russel, Rosenthal and Thomson (2010) on 900 international students studying in Australia, the result revealed that the majority of the students reported experiencing stress due to cultural differences or perceived discrimination.

More recently, Alva (2016) explored the social connections and sense of belonging of seven Latino students at a Midwestern university in the USA; it showed that even though the students had initially felt marginalised, they eventually integrated through developing their own identities with peer support. Although these studies did not conclude with the student's persistence, it is presumed that having developed a sense of belonging to the institution, there would be persistence.

Therefore, Tinto (1975) suggests that the students would benefit from establishing friendships or memberships in groups that are of similar cultures.

Summary

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure has been applied in researches on a global level. The methodology applied, participants and results have been diverse. Even though some of the literature reviewed pointed to other variables as being responsible for student persistence, the majority of the literature reviewed identified student integration as pivotal to student persistence. I aim to employ the use of a qualitative approach and the advantage of being an insider to explore the impact of intercultural peer group interactions in student integration and persistence.



SECTION 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

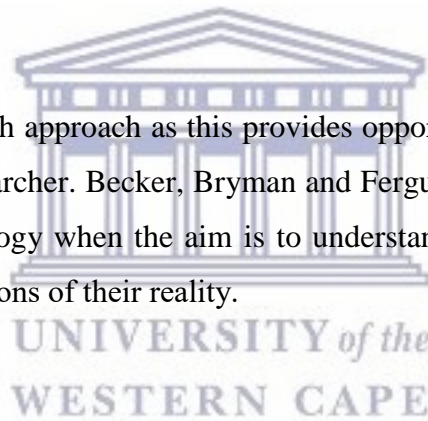
In this section, I discuss the research design used and provide a description of the methodology employed in my research study.

Research site

The research site for this study was a university situated in the Western Cape, South Africa. For the purpose of this study, the university is referred to as ‘The University’ (TU). It is popular as a culturally diverse institution, with students and members of staff from various ethnic groups as well as other countries. The university encourages and propagates diversity. It has a functional international student office that caters for the needs of international students and is serviced by members of staff that are mainly South Africans. International students manage an organisation, which is active and recognized by the institution.

Research approach

I adopted a qualitative research approach as this provides opportunities for interpretations by both participants and the researcher. Becker, Bryman and Ferguson (2012) suggest the use of qualitative research methodology when the aim is to understand phenomena or to construct and to know peoples’ perceptions of their reality.



Research instrument (s)

I used an interview guide as my research instrument to collect data. Becker et al. (2012), describe an interview guide as a list of questions of a fairly specific nature to be covered. In addition, it can be seen as a brief “list of memory prompts” (Becker et al., 2012, p. 438) of areas to be covered that are employed in a somewhat semi-structured list of questions to be asked. Blanchett (2006) suggests a pilot test of the interview guide in order to review and adjust the questions included in the grid. This advice was relevant when I was collecting data as I realized some of the questions were different in structure but revealed the same answer. This made responses to the questions of the first interview quite repetitive, I then reviewed and adjusted the questions on the guide for more relevance.

The interview guide includes some structured and open-ended questions, which were informed by my conceptual framework, and my research questions. I grouped the questions into different sections under clear themes, which are: experiences as a foreign student - which

asks questions on the separation and transitioning stages of my participants as inspired by Tinto's (1993) model, intercultural peer group interactions, social integration, academic integration and student persistence. The instrument and questions were in English as all my participants speak English.

Sampling strategies

To select my participants, I used a purposive sampling technique to strategically select people who were relevant in answering my research questions as prescribed by Becker et al. (2012). My criteria included all Nigerian students, who are studying towards a master's degree; undergraduate Nigerian students were excluded, as the study is focused on non-traditional students in a two-year degree programme. Purposive sampling entails a selection of participants based on the research questions. The reason that purposive sampling is best suited for my research is that the research questions give an indication of the units to be sampled. Becker et al. (2012) explains further that the research questions act as guidelines to the categories of participants and hence the sampling is conducted with the aim of selecting participants who can respond to the research questions.

Sample description

I interviewed 12 participants; 5 females, namely, Chineye, Dolly, Lizzy, Owoyemi and Omalicha and 7 males, namely, Mike, Dan, Uzor, Celle, Stephen, Emma and Melaye. There was no equal gender representation as my participants included a higher percentage of males due to the fact that they were the only people available. Although all participants are Nigerians, the sample was still culturally diverse because I had 7 participants from the south eastern region of Nigeria who are Ibo speakers, 1 from the Edo-Delta area, who speaks Edo and 4 from the south western region who speak Yoruba. The regions have different cultures and languages, however, they are all fluent English speakers as English is the lingua franca of Nigeria. All participants resided in Cape Town; 5 of them lived in university residences and others lived in different communities that are in close proximity to the university. The age group range was between 29 - 47 years old. Seven of the participants are at the early/middle stages of their master's degree programme while the remaining five are at the concluding stage.

Data collection methods

I conducted semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule. All interviews were conducted in English. The qualitative interview is flexible in nature. Due to the interpretivist nature of my research, it allowed for the emergence of my participants' perspectives and interpretations of their interactions and integration. The method created a space for my participants to include the points they felt were important or relevant (Becker et al., 2012).

Semi-structured interview

The flexibility of the semi-structured interview gave me the opportunity to ask follow up questions. Some of these questions were originally not in the interview guide but were a follow up to the relevant response of the participant. Becker et al (2012) notes that this enables rich and detailed data. Although Becker et al. (2012) explain that the semi-structured interview allows the interviewee to ramble, and sometimes the ramblings might not be relevant and could be extensive, I guarded against this by politely redirecting the participants through relevant questions. However, the ramblings sometimes led to the emergence of important information that I had not anticipated.

This method of data gathering was relevant to my research as it allowed my participants to express their experiences with "others" in the university environment. The interview guide included questions that are suggested by Draper (2008) as the appropriate questions for measuring the variables of Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure.

Data reduction strategies

I used thematic analysis to review my data by transcribing and reading the manuscripts repeatedly, as it is advised that effective researcher immersion in data is relevant to successful coding. I highlighted the key points and made notes on the answers given. The themes were generated and my research questions were then used to create an index for coding my transcript. I was able to generate reliable and rich data as thematic analysis allows for clearly defined, easy to use and reliable data, because of the rigorous process entailed in extracting meaning. In addition, I was able to avoid losing the context of my data as I made use of my research questions and theoretical framework as a guide for coding. This allowed for concise and accurate themes. I also avoided interpreting other people's thoughts through my point of view as advised by Javadi and Zarea (2016), especially as language could be a barrier since contexts are different. Javadi and Zarea (2016) caution that in using thematic

analysis, a researcher must be careful not to lose context as it encourages the breaking down of data, which could at the end leave the researcher with limited content and lead the researcher in a different direction. I guarded against this by keeping my research questions at hand. Moreover, Javadi and Zarea (2016) point out that themes are not located within a broader social context, but rather considered as separate from it. In addition, the flexibility of the method could also be a pitfall as the researcher could commit an error in his assessment of themes (Becker et al., 2012). However, to guard against conclusions that would emanate from my personal convictions and opinions rather than on the content of data, I adopted the use of the four criteria proposed in identifying a theme, namely, emergence from data, essence nature, themes relevant to data and recurrence of iteration. I also looked out for re-occurrence of themes and levels of recognizing the themes (Becker et al., 2012).

The first step I took was to transcribe the interview into text. Thereafter, I immersed myself in the data by reading the transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with the data. Being familiar with the data enabled me identify similar comments made by the respondents that were relevant to my theoretical concept which led to coding the data. Becker et al. (2012) states that coding early helps in understanding the data and theoretical sampling. I started coding immediately after I completed each interview by making marginal notes using keywords of respondents that were related to my themes. After this I coded, by generating an index of terms interpreting and relating my data to theory (Becker et al., 2012). As stated by Becker et al. (2012), qualitative interviews have a tendency of generating large data, which could make analysis a daunting task. Thus, I applied the steps suggested in breaking down the data by creating indexes that could be used to code.

Furthermore, I reviewed my codes by using my transcripts to check for repetition of words or where I had used different terms for the same phenomena. Also, I looked for codes that were related to concepts of my theory and replaced such names with the concept in theory as suggested by Becker et al. (2012). After this, I generated as many codes as possible, and pruned it down to only relevant ones. I made use of thematic data analysis, which I used in extracting meaning and concepts from data by noting, reviewing and recording themes and patterns. According to Javadi and Zarea (2016), “Thematic analysis is the minimum organization and description of a set of data” (p. 4). They note that thematic analysis is clear-cut and allows for researcher flexibility as the decision on what to include as a theme is made by the researcher. In addition, thematic analysis is claimed to be the most reliable method of

analysis used in interpretative researches as it is useful in reflecting and clarifying reality. It helps strictly in identifying patterns for the emergence of themes (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997).

Research ethics statement

According to the Economic and Social Research committee framework for research ethics, there are six key principles to be considered throughout a research process. The first is to ensure the quality and integrity of the research. Secondly, to seek informed consent, thirdly, to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants and the research site. In addition, I am also expected to ensure the voluntary participation of the participants and to do no harm to the participants, and finally, show that the research is independent and impartial.

In carrying out the first principle, I applied to the institution's research committee as well as the registrar of the institution for permission to conduct research (see Appendix B). I submitted a detailed proposal which outlined my research title and the aim of the research. I included questions that my study sought to answer as well as a list of the participants that were best suited to answer the questions. The proposal also contained the proposed method of data collection and data reduction strategies as well as questions included in the interview guide.

In seeking informed consent, I wrote and sent a letter of information on my research to the participants; the letter described the research title and the purpose of the research as well as its prospective benefits to the participants. Then, I issued a consent form to each participant to sign. The consent form contained acknowledgement that they voluntarily accepted to participate in the research after they had read the information letter and were at liberty to opt out at any point during the research. To maintain anonymity of the participants, I have used pseudonyms as a substitute for their real names. As I have gathered data which include personal information about the participants and the university, I will maintain confidentiality by not divulging any information to other people. I have also kept all completed participant consent forms, interview guides and audio tapes in a secured place during the course of the research. All my audio files and other electronic files will be securely stored in a secured format by using password protected storage for 5 years. After 5 years I will delete these. I

have also changed the name of the university to a fictitious one, to protect its identity and prevent harm.



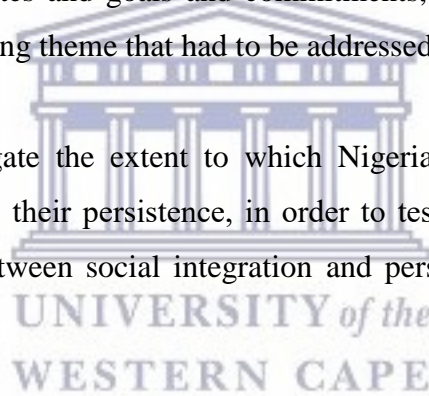
SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, I analyse the data, which I gathered through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. I use Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure as a framework for analysing my data.

I analysed my data using the steps prescribed by Becker et al (2012) for analysing thematic data by first using recurring keywords to group responses, and then using the themes that were inspired by the model and those that emerged from the data.

I divided the data into groups and themes, such as separation, transitioning, pre-integration intentions, intercultural peer group interactions, informal academic integration, formal academic integration, informal social integration, formal social integration, persistence and intent to persist. Other themes emerged while analysing the data. I did not intend to explore the variable, pre-entry attributes and goals and commitments, but during the course of the interviews, it became a recurring theme that had to be addressed in the analysis.

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which Nigerian students experience social integration and how it affects their persistence, in order to test and validate Tinto's (1993) theory on the relationship between social integration and persistence from an intercultural interaction perspective.



The main research question was: What is the nature of the relationships between peer group interaction, social integration and student persistence? The two sub questions were: What is the nature of intercultural peer group interaction between Nigerian students and students from other countries? What is the nature of intercultural peer group interaction and social integration?

Biographical information of participants

Although all participants are Nigerians, the sample was still culturally diverse because I had 7 participants from the south eastern region of Nigeria, who are Ibo speakers, 1 from the Edo-Delta area speaks Edo and 4 from the south western region who speak Yoruba. The regions have different cultures and languages, however, they are all fluent English speakers as English is the lingua franca of Nigeria. All participants resided in Cape Town; 5 of them lived in university residences and the others lived in different communities that are in close

proximity to the university. The age group range was between 30-62 years old. Seven of the participants were at the early/middle stages of their master's programme while the remaining five were at the conclusive stage.

Profile of the Participants

Mike

Mike is a 35-year-old male student from the south-eastern region of Nigeria. He is not married and has no children. He stays at the university residence and has a funding from his supervisor. Prior to obtaining the funding, he was a self-funded student. He is about to complete his master's programme at the Science faculty. He is a low-income earner. He speaks English and does not speak any of the other South African languages.

Dolly

Dolly is a 32-year-old female student from the south-western region of Nigeria. She is married with a young child. She lives off campus with her family and is midway through her master's programme. She is a low-income learner as she is self-funded and is only able to pay her fees through the tutoring she does at her faculty.

Omalicha

Omalicha is a 30-year-old female student from the south-eastern part of Nigeria. She is single and has no children. She tutors in one of the departments in the university. Omalicha lives at one of the university's residences. She is self-funded and also a low-income learner. She is midway through her master's in pharmacy.

Stephen

Stephen is a male student; he is 56 years old. He lives off campus with his wife and two children. He is also from the south-eastern region of Nigeria. He is self-funded and a low-income earner. He tutors in his department at the university and the stipend from his tutoring is what he uses to pay his fees as well as sustain his family. He has just started his master's degree although he did his honours at the same university.

Dan

Dan is 30-year-old man who speaks Edo and English. He lives off campus and tutors at his department. He has veered into entrepreneurship and is a medium income earner. He is just completing his master's degree.

Celle

Celle is a 34-year-old male student at the medical sciences faculty; he is from the south-western area of Nigeria. He stays at the university residence which is not within the university campus. He is married with children, but the family did not travel to South Africa with him. He was working in his country before coming for his master's degree; hence, he is being sponsored by his employer back in Nigeria. He receives his monthly salary and allowance for his upkeep. However, he is under pressure to complete his programme within the time stipulated by his employer back in Nigeria. He is midway through his master's programme.

Uzor

Uzor is a 36-year-old male student in the Language Department. He stays with members of his family off campus. He is from the south east area of Nigeria. He tutors undergraduate students at his faculty to enable him to make money for the payment of his fees. He is a low-income earner, single and without children. Uzor is at the tail end of his master's degree but this is his 4th enrolment.

Chineye

Chineye is a female student from Edo in Nigeria. She is at the faculty of Education and is presently completing her master's programme. She is 62 years old and is married with 3 children. She stays off the university campus with her family. She is a low-income earner, as she also tutors for the University.

Emma

Emma is a 37-year-old male student from the south-western region of Nigeria. He is single and has no children. He stays at the university residence for postgraduate students off campus. He is also a low-income earner and he is dependent on the salary paid for his tutoring services at the university. However, he has received funding from the university all

through his honours and master's programme. He is also in the final year of his master's programme.

Melaye

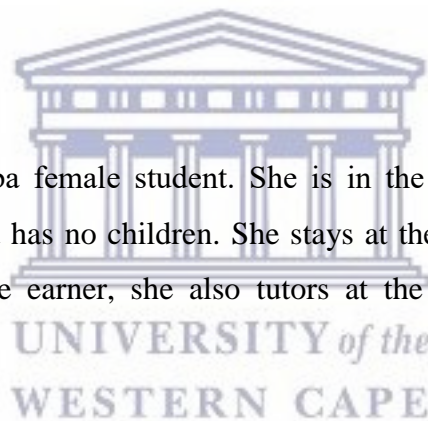
Melaye is a 34-year-old male student from the eastern part of Nigeria. He is married and has 2 children. Alongside his tutoring at the university, he operates a Laundromat near his home which is off campus. He uses the proceeds from this small business and tutoring to pay his fees as well as sustain his family. He is in the first year of his master's programme.

Owoyemi

Owoyemi is a 35-years-old Yoruba female student. She is married with two children, she stays off campus with her husband and children. She is also self-funded and tutors at the university to enable her to pay her school fees. She is in the second year of her master's programme.

Lizzy

Lizzy is a 40-year-old Yoruba female student. She is in the second year of her master's programme. She is single and has no children. She stays at the off campus residence of the university. As a low-income earner, she also tutors at the university, at the Education Faculty.



Experience as a foreign student

Separation, transitioning and pre- integration intentions

It was important to know what the experiences of my participants were as foreign students in a new institution and a different country. This was to understand how they were able to successfully separate from their previous settings and transition into the new community. It also sought to know how they transitioned, if the process had been smooth and what the hindrances were to their transition. This is inspired by Tinto's (1993) claim that transitioning from a familiar setting to an unfamiliar one can be difficult. As an individual has to detach himself from his prior setting to be able to integrate into the new setting, Tinto (1993) claims that they might encounter challenges adjusting in the new community. However, Tinto (1993) notes that these problems are not necessarily a reflection of individual attributes or as a result

of the character of the institution, but they are problems “rooted in the character of college persistence” (Tinto, 1993, p. 94).

This set of questions seeks to investigate the students’ pre-entry attributes such as family background as well as their intentions and external commitments. The questions act as background information to the pre-integration intentions of the participants.

When asked why they chose TU as a place of study, the emergent codes were family, friends and an availability of research area as well as relevant supervisors. The responses showed strong family background influences and external commitments as motivation for their move to continue learning.

External influences

According to Tinto (1993), the goals and commitment of an individual are a great influence on how the individual reacts to transitioning which could result in an early decision to either depart or persist. Tinto (1993) points out that this process is interactional as the individual’s goals and intentions are also influenced by their family background. From the responses, the majority of my respondents’ families have high educational expectations.

Dan, Lizzy, Uzor, Melaye and Owoyemi all said that TU was recommended to them by friends and family.

I read and also heard from friends about the Land mark that TU has made in terms of research and the general performance of both the undergraduate and Post graduate students (Lizzy, Interview, September 12, 2017).

I had family and friends in South Africa who suggested TU to me. I came for holiday and they advised me to further my study here and since they lived in Cape Town, TU was the best option (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

TU was recommended by members of my family as a good school in my area of profession (Owoyemi, Interview, September 14, 2017)

A friend of mine was studying here and he told me it was a very good school, he actually helped me to apply (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I think it was my brother who told me to check TU online, and when I googled, I saw it was a good university (Melaye, Interview, September 9, 2017)

It is obvious that the majority of the participants had strong family background ties that influenced their intentions.

University attributes

Mike, Omalicha, Stephen, Celle, Emma and Dolly all chose the institution based on attributes which ranged from the low cost of the fees to good reputation and availability of supervisors in their research areas.

Mike and Omalicha were motivated by their choice of supervisor and research area.

TU was my last option to be truthful, the first university that gave me admission was, the second was but they did not have my research areas of study that was why I opted for TU (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

I contacted a supervisor who was ready to supervise me, that was why I decided to come to TU (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Stephen was the only participant who made reference to the cheap rate of the fees as a motivation for choosing TU.

Comparatively, I applied to both University of and TU, but I chose TU because it was cheaper (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

When I was searching for a good university on the internet, TU was the cheapest I found (Emma, Interview, September 15, 2017)

Celle, Chineye and Dolly mentioned that the TU enjoyed a good reputation as the 6th best university in Africa and the faculty of dentistry enjoyed an international reputation of being one of the best in Africa

I chose TU, I study dentistry and planned to have my post graduate education outside of my country and TU dentistry is one of the best dentistry faculties in Africa (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I searched for the top ten universities in Africa, back in 2015 and discovered TU was in the top six. I chose TU because I found a supervisor whose line of research was the same as my passion; Tuberculosis/Hiv Aids (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

I have heard about TU from some of my friends, so it was a no brainer for me when I wanted to choose a university for my master's programme (Chineye, Interview, October 5, 2017).

The attributes and positive reputation of an institution is important in the development of an individual's institutional commitment. Tinto's (1993) model posits that academic and social integration and goal and institutional commitment impact on each other.

Transitioning

Tinto (1993) describes transitioning as rejecting values from past affiliations and adopting the practices of the new community. He indicates that transitioning is more difficult for foreign students and students from distinct social ethnic or religious communities. This could be due to issues ranging from cultural differences or having to adjust to new ways of doing things, which is an inherent part of adjusting into a new environment.

When asked the question if they felt welcome as foreign students when they arrived, four of the participants, namely Celle, Dan, Omalicha and Owoyemi said that they had felt welcome. Omalicha and Celle felt welcomed by faculty, which was an early form of faculty validation that made a lasting impression on them.

Yes, I did, although I think it was because my friends and family are also here (Owoyemi, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Although I missed the orientation, I had a couple of friends here already so it wasn't that bad. My friends made me feel welcomed (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Having family and friends from prior settings makes a new environment less strange, as one would easily have guidance both academically and socially, which makes for easier and quicker integration into all spheres of the university community: -Although I did not notice that, I just mixed with other (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Early faculty validation

In some cases, the department and supervisors welcomed the participants; this also eased their transitioning from a familiar space into an unfamiliar one.

Yes, the department introduced me to the others and the programme. I felt welcomed (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Tinto (1993) emphasises the need for a student to establish social relations that would be a support system for sustained persistence in the early stages in the institution.

Yes, yes in the sense that when I got to my faculty I was welcomed, they showed me the place, told me how to go about things, they helped me out with my registration asked me if I needed help with one or two things, which they did (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I felt welcomed especially by the Nigerian postgraduates in my department (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Yes, I was welcomed by my department (Melaye, Interview, September 9, 2017)

I felt welcomed (Emma, Interview, September 15, 2017)

Lizzy and Uzor both said that they felt partially welcomed by their departments and lecturers but not generally. This could affect their integration into the institution. It also reveals the important role of staff members which Barnett (2011) describes as faculty validation in the integration and persistence of students.

Partially, because the way some students and even lecturers looked at me any time our paths crossed each other at the campus made me feel that I am not welcome in their country. Nevertheless, I was warmly welcomed into my department by my amicable supervisor and my colleagues in the department (Lizzy, Interview, September 12, 2017).

Yes, but not like maximum welcome, at some point I was lost, but I had people like my lecturer who tried to welcome me (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Mike referred to a xenophobic statement that was made when he just came which made him feel unwelcome.

When I arrived TU my first day in class it was hectic because I experienced some xenophobic statements in the hands of my fellow students my first day of class, because we were just 3 foreign students in the class, a girl from Turkey and a guy from Congo, they had been together since their undergraduate years so it was not easy to integrate with them because we were coming in at a later stage (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

As noted by Tinto (1993), this occurrence is not necessarily as a result of the institution's character, especially as a few of the students had attested earlier to the good reputation enjoyed by the university, but as a result of the processes involved in transitioning into a new environment and in this instance, a different cultural setting.

Pre-integration

In transitioning, Tinto (1993) explains the need to organize a formal or an informal "rites of passage" (p. 97) for the newcomers to help ease them into the systems of the institutions and make their transitioning less difficult. This could be in the form of orientations and other

institutional activities that are carried out for this particular purpose. In this instance, the university usually carries out an orientation programme to introduce the institution to the students and it usually allows for new and old students to meet and chat, thereby laying a foundation for integration.

When asked if the university made any special effort to welcome them as foreign students, the majority of the participants stated that they had missed the orientation and possibly the welcome. Some felt that the university should have done more than the general orientation to welcome foreign students. Dan, Chineye, Uzor, Lizzy, Chineye and Dolly missed the rites of passage into a new stage of their lives (Tinto, 1993), which could make transitioning into the community more difficult than usual.

I was not here for the orientation (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

The acting Head of Department introduced me to the department because I came in the second semester, there was no formal welcome (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No, I missed the orientation programme, but not getting formal orientation really affected me because I had no one to help me until I found fellow students who were from my country (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

I wouldn't know because I did not come for the orientation. I was busy sorting things, like my permit and other travelling documents out (Lizzy, Interview, September 12, 2017).

I came in late.... (March) and orientation was far past, so I am sure it's a fault on my part, and not TU's (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

No, I missed it (Melaye, Interview, September 9, 2017).

Tinto (1993) notes that orientations and other activities organized by institutions are not as effective as daily formal and informal interactions in achieving successful integration

Celle and Owoyemi believed the university should do more to welcome international students, as they initially felt alone and without guidance.

The university itself did nothing to welcome me as an international student; I was just on my own (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I was not around for the orientation (Chineye, Interview, October 5, 2017)

There was nothing special about the orientation, international students should have had something more specific, knowing that they are coming from a different space (Owoyemi, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Omalicha was the only student who felt welcomed by the university due to the orientation programme held by the university.

Yes, during orientation (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

These responses showed that the participants recognised orientation as a form of welcome and introduction for them to the university. Even though no specific questions were asked about orientations, they were able to make a link between being welcomed by the university and having missed the orientation.

Pre-integration difficulties

Incorporating into an institution's community entails adopting the norms and practices of the new setting and having separated from the previous one. However, Tinto (1993) notes that the degree of difficulty encountered during this process depends on the extent of differences that exist between the previous setting and the new one. Usually when moving from one community to another, some difficulties are expected. In the instance of being an international student in a country, the degree of variances that exist between the university environment and cultural differences from the previous communities are wide. Tinto (1993) notes that "the degree of differences between the norms and patterns of behavior associated with membership in past communities and those required for integration into the life of the university" (p. 97).

To the question of the kind of challenges they were experiencing as foreign students, it was surprising to hear that many of the participants made reference to inaccessible funding as a challenge. A few participants also talked about the issue of language barriers and cultural differences. Worthy of note were a few responses regarding inability to access university accommodation and an unsafe environment. Only one of the participants referred to the issue of differences in the understanding of social norms and language barriers as a challenge.

Funding as a challenge

Dan, Lizzy, Uzor and Owoyemi all mentioned that funding has been a major challenge for them as international students.

The only issues are of funding, the only funding you see are for South Africans or Southern African district nationals, no funding for West Africans and all that so I think funding is the main problem (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No access to funding has posed a very great challenge, it is not easy being a self-sponsored student (Lizzy, Interview, September 12, 2017).

The challenges I have had is that we are not really attended to as foreign students, in terms of applying for bursaries and accommodation even for applying to study. (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Funding is not accessible for foreign students, I know some people enjoy it, but I have not received any funding since I got here. It is hectic delivering on your academics when you have to worry about money all the time (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Dan, Stephen and Lizzy all suggested that the university should make funding more accessible to international students.

As a postgraduate student, the support given post graduate students in respect of international students funding, in respect of the percentage that gets funding, 10

% of international students get funding, which makes it difficult for them to go through their degrees and finish on time (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

First thing is the restrictions applicable to funding, sometimes you see advertisements online restricted to South African students only, it is fine, this is their country, but funding should be given indiscriminately not minding where you come from if students are qualified and fit for contributions (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

They should try to support us financially. Medical aids should not be made compulsory before registration. Tutorial rate should be revisited. It was drastically reduced this year across all the departments in the Universities (Lizzy, Interview, September 12, 2017).

Even though Tinto (1993) explains that his interactionist model of institutional departure is focused on internal experiences, responses from the majority of the respondents presents the issue of finance as an important one, which should have been considered. This is because it is within the capacity of the institution to address this issue.

It was surprising that many of the participants cited funding as a challenge. It could have led to an early departure if they had not found a way around the issue of funding to persist in their academics. This is also worthy of note as one of the criticisms against Tinto's (1993) model, was that it did not recognize the importance of finance in the persistence of an individual. Tinto (1993) explains that even though funding is an important factor in an individual's persistence, he maintains that the model focuses on the internal institutional experiences of an individual and how these experience interact to influence their intentions.

Language barrier

Mike and Dolly referred to the difference in language as a challenge to interacting with local students and other local members of staff.

One of the challenges is the language barrier, because they think because you are black so they speak to you in their language, they feel like you understand their

language but you don't want to answer them and when you cannot answer them because what you don't know you can't say and that is embarrassing, for instance, there is a lecturer who wants to lecture in her own language in Xhosa, not knowing that not everybody speaks Xhosa, because there are foreign students in class, that for me was very appalling and annoying (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Language barrier primarily (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Language was also cited as a barrier. It could also act as a hindrance to interaction and subsequently to integration and persistence. In fact, Barnett (2011) highlights the role of faculty members' sensitivity to students' cultural backgrounds as a variable of faculty validation as being of utmost importance to academic integration. Mike's inability to communicate with peers, especially in his field of study could undermine his integration academically.

Cultural differences

Stephen mentioned an incidence where he thought the party involved was too emotional and talked about disparities in cultural behaviors and most likely a misunderstanding of social norms in a different environment.

There are disparities regarding identities, I remember I did a course with some South African students and one of the girls was too emotional saying I touched her indecently (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Not knowing what is considered as acceptable and unacceptable in a new or different society could jeopardize one's persistence and integration into such society. This could be seen as him not having totally separated himself from his past norms and patterns which is important to him being able to incorporate into the new community by adopting the practices and behaviors of the institution.

Tierney (1992) suggests that competency in being able to understand one's culture and the dominant culture in an institution without losing one's identity, results in competent communication. Moreover, Tinto (1993) suggests that students have to adjust or adopt the

dominant cultures of the institution. Stephen had not attained the phase of being a competent communicator as he still had to grapple with cultural issues.

Inaccessible accommodation and safety

Celle and Uzor had challenges in accessing student accommodation from the university.

As a foreign student I have a lot of challenges but the first one is the issue of accommodation, TU is not doing well as regards accommodation for foreign students, they consider their national students and their undergraduate students first, also the security issue is of major concern, because in my country, you could still walk around at 8 or 9 pm but by the time I got here I discovered that here you have to be back home by 6, and “TU” since they do not have the capacity to accommodate all their foreign students, there is no orientation about the security situation of the community you live in, if they had given an orientation about... this is South Africa, or we have this issue, we don't expect them to solve these issue, but at least they should let people know that this is what is at stake, this is what is on ground, let people know that this is where you can go, this is the number you can call if you are in this type of situation, so those things which they should do they didn't do (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

The challenges I have had is that we are not really attended to as foreign students, in terms of applying for bursaries and accommodation even for applying to study. (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Celle and Omalicha stated that the environment was unsafe, especially for foreign nationals/students.

It's not a problem for local students because it is their environment and as humans we always adapt to our environments, it's a problem for international students because people have different cultural backgrounds, different ways, different ways of thinking, different expectations, so every country has its problem but our problems differ, it's not a problem for South African students but foreign students, that is why it is important for TU as a university to put in

consideration what to do to help foreign students which they did not do (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

There is a difference in the environment from what it is like in my country, the environment here is unsafe. You practically live in fear (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017)

Inaccessible accommodation for foreign students could have an impact on their integration. Tinto (1993) acknowledges that students who are not resident at the institution's residences might transition easier than students who have to abruptly cut off from past communities and adopt to new environments. However, he states that in the long run, this could have an adverse effect on the integration and persistence of the student as they are unable to totally separate, incorporate and integrate into the communities and systems of the institution (Tinto, 1993). This is because they might have to live in environments where there are no students and this could affect the degree of their interaction with peers and integration into the university's social community, which could undermine their persistence.

The fear of being unsafe as expressed by Celle and Omalicha, where they made references to the differences in their home countries and the new environment, also showed that the students were still making comparisons with their past communities. They were yet to totally embrace their new community as the next stage of their lives. Even though some of the fears were legitimate, they acknowledged it was the environment they lived in and there was not much the institution could do to change it.

The participants exhibited insight by recommending that the institution could make these issues of incorporation less worrisome by being more sensitive to the needs of the foreign students who are not familiar with the behaviour, patterns and happenings in their new environment. This suggestion is in line with the position of Rodriguez et al. (2003) that institutions that are successful in retaining students are those that are sensitive to the students' academic, social and cultural needs. While a few of the students recommended making bursaries available to foreign students, the majority of the students wanted the institution to proffer a lasting solution to bridge the cultural divide and to provide support for them as foreign students.

An inclusive classroom

Mike suggested that an inclusive classroom, where language would not act as a barrier to learning and interacting, could make academic integration easier to achieve and help the students to persist till graduation.

First of all, (on postgraduate basis now) the department should let lecturers know that there are foreigners and there might be language barriers and they must learn to lecture in ways that they can understand because they are coming from a different country from South Africa and they might have ways of doing things differently there, otherwise the lecturers are great, I have not experienced any that is bad in my own point of view (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

An inclusive classroom is important, as it can be referred to as the cradle of institutional integration (Tinto 1997). Tinto (1993) explains that even though experiences in the different systems may have separate effects on an individual, social communities emerge from academic activities that take place within the academic space of the classroom, during activities. However, membership in one of the systems does not automatically translate to integration into the other system of the institution (Tinto 1997). Hence, if Mike felt excluded within the classroom space, it could result in a negative cascade effect that would be detrimental to his social integration.



Access to funding

Information centre for international students

Celle, Omalicha and Uzor expressed the need for awareness of the cultural and environmental differences encountered by foreign students in a new environment and the need for the university to prepare the new arrivals on aspects of cultural differences and expectations.

..... Also foreign students, people have different cultural backgrounds, so if they can find a way to have a means of orientation to introduce them to the culture, the expectations of people, I am not from a country where people categorize themselves in terms of colors. I just got here and I found myself in the midst of that if you are colored, black, white... kind of mentality, that if you are black, colored or white, we don't know how to bridge that gap , you just find

yourselves in the midst of some...., but if there is a kind of orientation, to let people know what to expect, like this is South Africa, this is our diversity, people are different, this and that , though we try to make sure there is no racism, we still find these kind of things if there is some, then we will be able to manage the situation (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I don't think there is anything the university can do about it because it is a South African issue, although the university can alert foreign students to this phenomenon (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017)

They should make provisions for an Office for foreign students which should be active and effective, the one they have right now is not an effective one, a foreigner does not necessarily get assistance (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Improve provision of accommodation

Like actually, majority of those problems are not caused by TU but every institution has a way of going about challenges, doing things to create a better environment for their students. So I think they can do more in the aspect of accommodating foreign students, even in their post graduate residence, you find out that most of the students there are still their local students and the foreign students are just asked to go sort themselves out. So they can find a way of improving the issue of accommodation their foreign students (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

The issue of accommodation was addressed by Tinto (1993) as important in students' persistence. He suggests that institutions that are non-residential are socially weak in character, due to fewer interactions amongst students. Such institutions are usually not successful in retaining students.

The interview questions asked about separation and transitioning. As predicted by Tinto (1993), all the participants revealed that they had not transitioned smoothly into the institution, but had persisted, despite the difficulties faced while transitioning. Of major importance to being able to carry on with their studies, regardless of the challenges faced during this period, were their pre-entry attributes. This was mainly as a result of family

background as many of the participants lived with family and friends who were known to encourage and support persistence (Bean & Vesper, 1992).

Informal peer group interactions

Durkheim (1951) explains intellectual integration to be a form of integration that is brought about as a result of “personal affiliations and day to day interactions” (p. 276) among members of a community. Moreover, Durkheim (1951) notes that day to day interactions could be a scale for measuring one’s social values.

In addition, Tinto (1993) refers to peer group interactions as a basis for social integration which is necessary for student persistence and academic success. Hence, this section seeks to know the nature of and the extent to which these international students interact with their peers in informal social contexts. If minimal interaction occurs, this could undermine student persistence and academic success. However, if maximum interaction occurs, it could aid a student’s persistence or their intent to persist.

Establishing friendships / Intercultural friendships

This set of questions sought to know if the students had made friends to measure the extent to which they interacted with others in the social systems of the institution. All my participants acknowledged that they had made friends with others in the university environment, although they felt a need to explain the types of friends they had made. Mike noted that he had made more acquaintances rather than friendships with local students.

Yes I have made friends with other students but the thing is that there are people you call friends but you just greet and walk past that outside of school work, or school box you don’t communicate with, the people I communicate with outside the school box are foreign nationals like me and not really South Africans I cannot really say I have a South African guy that I go places with, I am not racist or xenophobic, but it’s just that I happen to meet a lot of my nationals here and we just stay together (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Friends, yes I have friends’ foreign students, South African students (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I have made a lot of friends (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I eventually did with the ones that I am comfortable with and of the same manners (Lizzy, Interview, September 12, 2017).

Yes, I have few friends (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Yes, I have made friends, although they are few, but they are my very good friends (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, I have made a few friends, we socialize a little on campus because we all don't stay on campus, so we meet in church and other places (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Dolly's friendship site suggested that she had integrated into the academic space of her institution

Not really. Only with my departmental colleagues (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Tinto (1993) states that being able to establish membership in the institutions sub culture does not refer to being incorporated into the whole social system. Hence, Dolly's membership with departmental colleagues is an acceptable form of social integration.

Stephen, talked about making friends with other students from various countries. This implied that he had been able to incorporate into his new community and this was also an indication of successful intercultural interactions.

I am multicultural, I make friends with Zimbabweans, Somalis, Cameroonians, South Africans, Ethiopians, Congolese, Malawians (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Establishing friendships in a new community gives a sense of belonging, which would bring about integration into the social and academic community as well as academic success. From

the responses of the participants, some had made large numbers of friends while others had made just a few. This validates Tinto's (1993) claim that the number of friendships established does not have a direct impact on integration and/ academic success, as much as establishing these friendships.

I asked questions on the site of their socialization and the types of activities they engaged in to be able to understand the extent of the friendships established and to know if the friendships belonged to the informal or formal systems of the institution.

Informal peer group interaction impacts social integration

I socialize with my friends off campus but most of the friends I socialize with are foreign nationals, they are not local students (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Socialize with my friends both on campus and off but mostly on campus, because like I said you are always careful, I am not the going out type so I am always careful where I go and what I do, so most times I spend more of my time on campus (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I socialize both on and outside campus (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Both on and off campus (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I do socialize on campus (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

A little, we all don't stay on campus, so we meet in church and other places (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I socialize with them on campus (Lizzy, Interviewer, September 14, 2017)

Yes, we socialize a little on campus when we are at the department.
(Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, I do (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Many of the participants attested to taking part in social activities organized by the institution and most of which took place on campus. Only Omalicha expressed fears as to why she did not socialize with her friends.

Wine tasting, I party a lot, I go to clubs and family braais or maybe I go for youth conferences and other social activities organized by my residence (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Playing together, as post grad students we are mostly busy but when we are not busy, if there are activities on campus we want to go, so generally we find ourselves in the midst of the social activities going on campus or we visit and talk (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Types of social activities engaged in are: soccer, we go out for drinks and dinner (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Praying singing, praising studying the bible and going to birthday parties together (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I am into religiosity, and the church is my centre of interaction. I am a Christian and a pastor, we pray together, preach, go out and take lunch together. When I just came, I was at a guest house with people from Croatia, Columbia, United Kingdom and India. We used to braai together, go out together, bring out money together for weekend fun (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

We don't have particular social activities but we do engage in chatting off campus (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

We attend birthdays, get-togethers and braais (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

We gist and just share life experiences, sometimes we go out to visit common friends and invite ourselves out to church or fellowship (Owoyemi, Interview August 3, 2017).

From the responses of the participants, it was clear that they socialized off and on campus with friends. Thus, there was enough evidence to suggest that they were integrated into the informal social community of the institution. Tinto (1993) explains that informal peer group interactions results into social integration. Even though, Mike tried to emphasise that he socialized with foreign nationals like himself rather than local students on campus, there was no indication that this had any impact on the contribution of the friends he had made to his academic success. This validates Tinto's (1993) argument that the most important issue is to establish friendship with peers. Tinto (1993) notes that establishing friendship is an important step in measuring how socially integrated students are.

Barriers to social integration

Omalicha, mentioned that fear for her safety and lack of funds were a barrier to her socializing with peers on and off campus. This could hinder her interactions and keep her integration to a minimal, which could also have an adverse effect on her academic progress/success.

I enjoy outings but can't do a lot because of transport and safety, I have heard a lot about people's ugly experiences and how rampant crime is here, moreover, I am self-funded, so I have to manage the tiny money I get from tutoring on campus, there is little room left for outings and social activities when you consider these two issues (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Omalicha's inability to socialize due to reasons such as funds and fear for her safety could limit her interactions with others in the institution as Tinto (1993) proposes that insufficient integration occurs as a result of insufficient personal affiliations with other persons in the community.

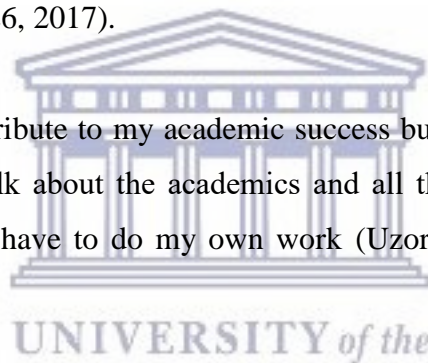
Social integration and academic success

When asked if they thought that the friendships they had established contributed to their academic success, the participants gave varied responses. In Mike's instance, he found friendship only relevant to academic integration and persistence when such a friend could contribute relevantly to his area of study. The majority of the participants agreed that there was a relationship between friendships and their academic success.

Two participants, Mike and Uzor, argued that friendship contributed partially to success and that the burden to succeed was highly dependent on the hard work they themselves invested in their academics. However, they also proposed choosing friends strategically for the purpose of academic success. Only one participant did not see any relationship between friendship and academic success.

In a way you can say friendship contributes to academic success if the person is able to advise me on what I am doing if I am a science student, I don't expect someone who is doing social sciences to contribute to my affairs because he or she does not know what I am doing, for instance I go to the lab and run experiments contrite the results, it's only a South African or a foreign student who is doing exactly what I am doing that is able to advise me in that regard (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

In one way it does contribute to my academic success but not totally like 100, It helps to integrate, to talk about the academics and all that but it's not like my academics is on that, I have to do my own work (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).



Owoyemi, Omalicha, Dan, Celle and Stephen, all agreed that friendships were necessary for academic success, especially as it pertained to obtaining relevant academic information from peers.

Yes, it does, I know the types of intelligent discussions I hold with other students and even though I make it seem like I already know what we are talking about, most of the time, these discussions are new and relevant knowledge for me, moreover, if you need someone's help academically but you have not chatted with that person before, it will be very difficult for you to ask for the help (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, in so much in the sense that information is power in case you need to get information about your thesis, how to go about things like that, I can say yes...yes (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

These responses corroborate Tinto's (1993) claim that students' academic achievements result from having a supportive peer group.

Mike and Owoyemi showed insight into making friends strategically that would be relevant to their areas of study. Owoyemi went further to explain how interaction was necessary for academic integration. She recognised the role of friendships in attaining academic success. Omalicha and Stephen saw friendship as being important from a financial perspective, while Omalicha made reference to information she got from such interactions that have helped her improve her income and to persist where unavailability of funds could have acted as a barrier to her persistence

I have been privy to a lot of relevant and necessary information that I would usually be unaware of, I get information on where hands are needed for stipends, the best faculty to tutor in, outside campus opportunities and most importantly, I am able to get information and advice on my academics (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Stephen explained that friends helped him overcome his financial problem which could have caused him to either drop out or stop out and not persist in his programme.

It does, I remember vividly in my second semester, I was short of cash and it was these friends that contributed money to pay my fees. The Cameroonian guy and the Croatian guy, because we had a good relationship, I told them my challenge and they rose up to the task and I paid them back at a later stage (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Dan, saw this from the angle of friendship being therapeutic in keeping a stable mind for academic excellence.

Yes, because the truth is if you are here lonely and alone, there are a lot of things you think about that can stress you out, so if there are people around, friends that you can talk to and chill with, it can give you a stable mind when doing your studies (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I believe it does (Lizzy, Interview, September 9, 2017).

Dolly did not consider friendship to be a contributory factor to being academically successful.

No, my academic success is due to me alone. I don't think being friends with anybody will make me succeed (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

These responses are a direct validation of Tinto's (1993) position on interactions and social integration being the bedrock of student participation in learning and persistence which also helps in developing a supportive peer group

Informal interactions with peers from other countries and integration

This section asked a set of questions that sought to understand the nature of intercultural peer group interactions that occurred between the participants and students from other countries and its relationship to the informal integration into the social and academic systems of the university. It is important to understand this phenomenon as evidence exists to suggest that intercultural peer group interactions encourage students to form communities of learning, where they negotiate meanings, learn together and generate knowledge, which is seen to result in a shared practice (Wenger, 2000).

I asked participants if they had looked forward to getting to know students from South Africa and other countries when they registered. All participants responded that they had looked forward to meeting new people and learning the culture of their host community, but they also went further to explain what their experiences were in this regard.

Mike mentioned that he had made more of acquaintances than friends with the local students, while Uzor and Dolly mentioned attitudinal differences and language barriers as hindrances to their anticipation, specifically with local South African students and had made more of acquaintances rather than friends.

When you come to a new environment you want to integrate and try to learn the culture, which I did and I am still trying but I don't know but I don't see them as having the type of temperament that I want, those that I come in contact with, might not be all of them that is why most of my friends are not South Africans ,

and the South African friends that I have are on greetings basis, they are not people I can run to if I have a problem, most of the people I Confide in a foreign nationals and specifically from my own country (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Yes, I did but only my problem is that when I first came the communication especially my accent was a barrier because we did not really understand one another (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Very much, I was really looking forward to mingling and all. But found out that other Nigerians made it easier to be friends with them than South Africans, maybe because of the language barrier (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Yes, I believed I would have friends which is very important in getting to know about the different cultural backgrounds...when I registered, from different countries, you want to know different ways of reasoning (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

For sure, most definitely, it's a foreign land, I expected I would learn more of their culture and make connections (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

That is why we came here to meet people, but when I just got here I realized the dichotomy in the general perceptions of the environment, the coloreds on one side, the white and the blacks on other sides, that was my first observation, I needed that not to influence my interactions (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I did, I was very excited as it was my first time of leaving my country and I excitedly looked forward to mixing with people of other culture and whom I could learn new things like languages and stuff from (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Yes, I looked forward to making new friends, I was particularly thinking I could pick up a new accent that is foreign; I really wanted to take pictures with people

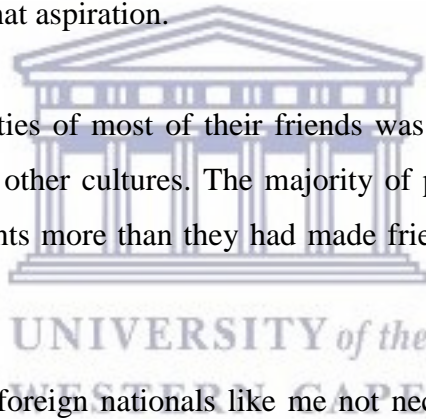
from different countries, learn how to make South Africa dishes and all that (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, I did look forward to meeting and exchanging ideas and learning new things (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Anticipating new friendships and hoping to learn new cultures showed that the participants were eager and open to meet and befriend new people as well as get easily integrated into their new communities. It also corroborates Ward's (2001) point, that international students desire and anticipate positive interactions with local students.

Although all the participants claimed to have looked forward to making friends with students from other countries as well as learning about their different cultures, some of them pointed out difficulties that hindered that aspiration.

The question on the nationalities of most of their friends was to know to what extent they interacted with students from other cultures. The majority of participants had made friends with other international students more than they had made friends with local South African students.



80% of my friends are foreign nationals like me not necessarily from the same country (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Majority of my friends are foreigners, I have fair friendships with local students. No friendship with a local student has made impact on my academic success but for other international students (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

My friends are mostly foreign students from Nigeria, Cameroun and Zimbabwe, 30% of my friends are local (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Most of my friends are not Nigerians, I feel like I had a lot of Nigerians around before I came here, so I had to learn from others. It is not intentional, it just happened that way by circumstance, you just meet Indians and Cameroonians.

My best friends, the Croatian and Cameroonian have gone back but we maintain interactions up till now (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

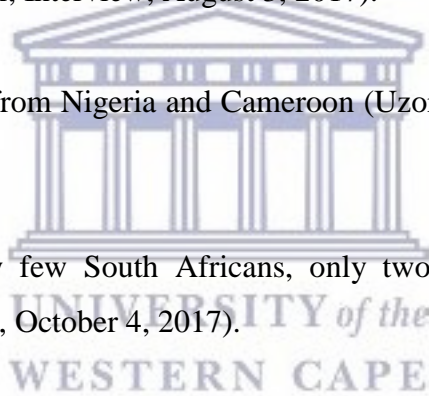
Most of my friends are from Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa, Namibia, Ghana and Lesotho (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Almost all my friends are Nigerians, I think it is just convenient for me, considering the fact that you have to put in so much efforts into forming new friendship with people who are not even eager to be friends with you (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I have a lot of Nigerian friends, I also have friends from Ghana and the Ethiopia, I will not say I have any South African friends, maybe fellow students and acquaintances (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Most of my friends are from Nigeria and Cameroon (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Mostly Nigerians. Very few South Africans, only two South Africans to be candid (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).



The friendships they had established, irrespective of the nationalities of these friends, indicated that they had achieved intercultural peer group interactions, which is pertinent to their academic success and their persistence as indicated by Tinto (1993).

The participants spoke about the challenges they had encountered in getting to make friends with South African students and students from other countries.

Language was cited as a barrier to making friends by Mike, Celle, Uzor and Dolly. They explained that the difference in language had been the greatest challenge they encountered in making friends with local students. The participants explained that it was easier for them to interact with other foreign students as they all spoke English, than with local students that preferred to speak their local dialects. They also mentioned the issue of cultural differences as being a barrier.

Language barrier and cultural differences

Some of the challenges is the language barrier, because they think because you are black so they speak to you in their language, they feel like you understand their language but you don't want to answer them and when you cannot answer them because what you don't know you can't say and that is embarrassing, for instance, there is a lecturer who wants to lecture in her own language in Xhosa, not knowing that not everybody speaks Xhosa, because there are foreign students in class, that for me was very appalling and annoying (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Yes, first, local students, even on campus speak their cultural dialect, which will not help because communication is actually very important in friendship, when you have five students speaking their cultural dialect like Afrikaans and Xhosa, by default so most times you might not easily get along, it's not an environment where people speak English informally and if you are a foreigner you don't understand those languages, even though I tried to learn the basics of those languages like greetings andStudents from South Africa are a bit reserved when it comes to international students. They have certain opinions about international students, sometimes it is so difficult to make friendship with them or to be close to them because they have these perceptions and reservations about them. They are the ones who block. I think they have a limit to how they can get close to you (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

The only challenge I face is in terms of language and sometimes I feel my culture and perception are not in line with theirs and in that way it's sometimes difficult to integrate. In terms of language I communicate in English language, but sometimes the accent but I feel sometimes we seem not to understand each other. I feel they don't agree with my own culture so there is an imbalance (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

I am open to making friends with other nationalities but the problem is that making friends of friends, Picture this "a Nigerian and a South African being

friends, the south African introduces the Nigerian to other South Africans and the small group of South Africans begin to gist and talk in the native tongue. The situation becomes uncomfortable and boring for the Nigerian who feels left out. One can't blame the South Africans because it's easier to converse amongst themselves in the native tongue. People of other African nationality are easier to make friends with than South Africans because most African nationalities converse with me in English. It's like we are bound by a common cause; language barrier issues (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

I have friends from other countries, but I think language is a major challenge for me, once they speak Xhosa to me and I respond in English, they move on (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

There is usually an attitude with the way people profile you here, it is almost as if you are being evaluated, the way you talk and act, especially what country you come from. I have made friends with people from other countries, but not so much with South African colleagues, probably because of the difference in culture (Owoyemi, Interview, August 8, 2017).

I have tried establishing friendships in my undergraduate, but I realized that it is difficult and there is a limit to what you can push (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I can't say but my point of discussion with South Africans is on religion. South Africans are not friends but church brethren, they look up to me as their... kind of with regard, lots of them are South Africans. The basis of making friends with them is on religion and academics. If not a church leader, as a person, personally, I socialize (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

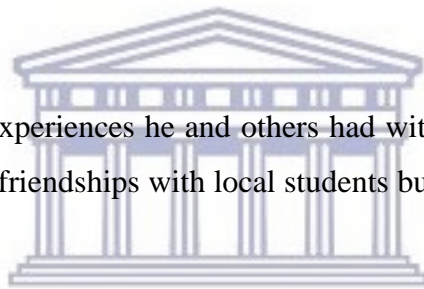
People tend to keep to themselves, even when you go the extra mile and try to be friendly with them, they make you feel bad for doing that, because you will still get snubbed (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Not being able to interact through verbal communication could make interaction and doing academic work together difficult and these could result in not being able to achieve academic success. Successful interactions are suggested to encourage foreign students to develop a sense of belonging, which researchers such as Rovai (2002) and Tinto (1975, 1993) state is pertinent to efficient and effective collaborative learning outcomes and academic success.

However, if my respondents had been cognisant of the linguistic context of South African society, they would have been more tolerant of the use of local languages.

I asked the participants if they had been invited home by any local student to know the extent of the interactions between local students and Nigerian students and for the purpose of knowing how these contributed to or undermined their persistence. The majority had been invited to the local students' residences on campus while just two had been invited to the homes of locals.

Mike was biased because of experiences he and others had with some local students. He did not want to establish personal friendships with local students but would rather stick to foreign students like himself.



A South African student has invited me to her home but I declined to go simply because I need to travel 3 to 4 kilometers away from Cape Town. I can't take that risk especially as she is female, if she were a male student I would have gone, but not here in Cape Town, though the family knows me, I talk to her mum. A South African student invited me to her personal home and not her family home. I don't want stories.

You know what is going on now with the men are trash, men are these and that, I don't want a situation whereby they will say a foreign national did this to a South African girl, I try to avoid anything that can lead to such incidences, people may say I am negative minded but I am just being cautious.

I am being cautious because when I came to South Africa, there was an incident that happened to a foreign national, a relationship incidence, he was a Nigerian guy who was doing his PhD, he was dating a girl, his girlfriend, she came, she slept to his house, they had sex and she asked for money when she was about

leaving but the guy had no money, he came to campus, 30 minutes down the line, policemen came to campus to arrest him because the girl went to the station to say that she was raped but she was not raped, but the guy was rusticated, he did not complete his PhD, that was a waste of time and waste of years and money spent in the university, that is one of the incidents why I am very cautious where I go (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

When I asked further if he would consider himself as biased and deliberately limiting friendship with these students, he acknowledged that he was partially biased and gave more reasons for his bias.

I will not really say, I have experience of things stolen from me, I bought a towel 3 days ago, I put it on the line and it was stolen, I don't know if it was a foreign national or a local student, he was caught on camera but the camera could not zoom in to see his face. I have been mugged, twice this year by the locals and not foreigners, they stole my phones, one in the train one along the road in Muizenberg close to the police station, that is why I am biased in a way, I cannot help a South African in terms of giving them money because I used to do that but then I decided I cannot be giving them money and they will be robbing me, so you can say I am 5% biased (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Celle, Omalicha, Lizzy and Owoyemi all said that they had not been invited home by local students, but some of them had been invited home by foreign students like themselves.

To the residence (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

(Laughs), not really, except on campus, to their room on campus (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, one of them, not really an invitation, I helped him to drive his luggage/belongings back to his home in Kraaifontein when the school asked them to vacate the premises during the fees must fall protest (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No, it's funny actually, but you know it is true, I have never been invited home by a South African student (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Not at all, I have never been invited by a South African student (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Erm, other international students have invited me to their homes and I have reciprocated but not once has a South African student invited me (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Uzor and Dolly have both been invited home by local students

Just a couple of them, I feel normal and welcome (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Yes (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

When I asked the question if they had ever missed classes because of a personal crisis and if they had been helped by a student friend to 'catch up' with their academic work, the majority of the participants explained that they had received help with their academics from peers when they needed it. Two participants said that they had never been in such a situation before while one said that he had needed that help once but did not have anyone to help him.

This question was expected to reveal the extent to which intercultural interaction aided or undermined academic success and student persistence through academic peer support and collaborative learning. In addition, it sought to reveal the relationship between intercultural interactions and integration, especially how friendships had helped students to integrate academically as claimed by Tinto (1993).

Mike, Celle, Dan, Owoyemi, Dolly and Omalicha explained that they had support from both peers and academic staff in their academic work.

I have missed my class once or twice if I can remember in 2014, one of them was due to home affairs when I came back, one of the lecturers called me into the office to explain everything that she taught them in class, the other person that

assisted me in the explanation was a foreign national like me not a South African student (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Yes, like for example when I first came, I did both clinical and academic work, and they helped to explain, colleagues that put me through on how things are done, for example in my country things were done differently than how it's done here and they put me through (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, during undergraduate, there were times I fell sick that my friends had to help me catch up with my work. I have missed classes before and foreign students helped me out (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I have had instances where my friends have helped me out when I needed help, especially with my thesis, submissions and other things (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

I don't attend classes due to the nature of my research, but I have had friends help me out of situations, especially when it has to do with my academics, like explaining stuff to me (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Now I remember, there was a time I was unavailable for a submission that was due and I just could not get to campus and one of my friends helped me out, although this friend is not South African (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Uzor, explained that he had never received such help even though he had needed help in catching up with his academics. He acknowledged that not having a peer's support made it very difficult for him to 'catch up'. This could act as hindrance to his academic progress. It validates Tinto's (1993) claim that students' achievement of academic goals are as a result of having a supportive peer group.

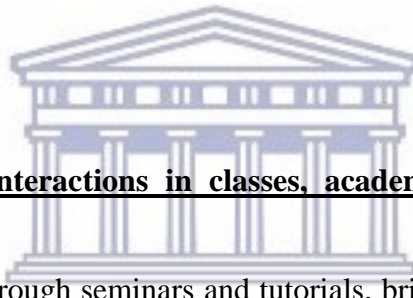
A student friend... I haven't had such experience, I missed my class before and it was really hard to catch up because there was nobody to help (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Only 2 of the participants, Stephen and Lizzy, claimed not to have been in such a situation;

No (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No, it has never happened to me before (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Evidence from the responses of the participants revealed the importance of interactions and friendships to academic support and good learning outcomes. However, the response from Uzor revealed the need to be strategic in balancing friends to include interactions within social and academic settings. References to the help and support rendered by the lecturers also showed the importance of informal interactions with members of faculty, which Barnett (2011) refers to as faculty validation, in being able to achieve academic integration and academic success.



Intercultural formal peer interactions in classes, academic integration and student persistence

Working together in groups through seminars and tutorials, brings about a demystification of perceptions and biases which makes way for tolerance and informed knowledge that aids integration and brings about peer support for academic success and persistence. In fact, research suggests that there should be a “purposeful approach to planning interactions” (Arkoudis et al., 2010, p. 10) as there is a tendency for students to gravitate into culturally similar groups which undermines the benefits of interacting with students from other cultural backgrounds (Arkoudis et al., 2010).

The questions included in this section sought to know what the experiences of the Nigerian students were in the academic systems of the institutions and how these experiences could encourage or undermine their persistence.

I asked the participants if they felt comfortable when interacting with students from other countries and South African students in class. The majority of the participants said that they felt comfortable while only two explained their discomfort.

Mike explained that there were power dynamics at play in his department and that he believed that the department, which included the faculty and students, was hostile towards foreigners. Dolly also described her discomfort as a result of her inability to communicate clearly with her colleagues.

There are a lot of politics in my department, for instance, my supervisor has more of foreign nationals than others who take only locals, because of this, it has affected us even when she asks for funding she does not get it, they say she has only 20% local students, even the other research groups you can see, it is obvious they don't like us, they don't see us as fellow students but as enemies, although I don't see the reason why we can't co habit properly because we are not in competition for the same thing (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Not really, most complained they could not understand my English or is it accent now, as they felt I spoke too fast (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Even though several of the participants said they were comfortable amongst their peers, they had various responses for feeling this way. Dan had found a way around his limitation and challenges in making friends. He recognized the importance of his peers to his academic success and had made it a point of duty to interact with them based on that singular reason, for academic success.

I feel comfortable, this is because most of them are opened and experienced in what they do, academically, and I interact with them but not on a personal level, because there is a limit to which they want to interact with you (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I feel comfortable, it's personal, I am not moved by where you come from, I am moved that you are human. I talk with them freely, chat in class, share academic views (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Initially I felt uncomfortable, but now I feel very much comfortable when interacting with them (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

My colleagues actually, Yes, I do feel comfortable, I am a very friendly person and they are also friendly, they make you feel comfortable (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I do feel comfortable, because I am able to contribute to the discussion in an informed manner (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, I am comfortable, because I feel like even though I am far away from home, I still feel, that to some extent we are good enough friends (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Comfortable (Celle, Interview, August 8, 2017).

These responses are an indication that Tinto's (1993) modification of his academic and social systems as indivisible is right, because the respondents attested to the fact that their formal academic gatherings and their informal social gatherings were spaces where friendships were established.

Most of the participants also explained that they found it easier to work in tutorial groups for various reasons. Some of them said that this was as a result of communicating in English.

Yes, I do find it easy (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Understanding and being aware of the differences that existed in the diverse groups made it easier for Celle and Lizzy to work better with their peers in tutorial groups. Lizzy referred to the preconceived biases she had before interacting with her peers in the university. When she got to know them better, she was able to distinguish stereotypes from the reality.

Yes, respect for each other, when I just came, I had issues with the pronunciation of words, for instance pronunciation of bags, so I had to keep quiet for a few months because I did not want to stress myself to pronounce how they will understand. Now, we communicate at the level that everybody understands as people from different ethnic groups have been present. Instances of work that

involves local languages especially with patients (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Fairly easy, because of language and tongue issues. Common purpose, English language made it easier (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Initially I felt uncomfortable, may be because of what I have heard about them, especially South Africans which I eventually found out that they are peculiar to some of them, but now I feel very much comfortable when interacting with them (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

When we are within a research group, I do find it easy actually, they are always willing to hear me share my opinion, they don't make me feel like I have nothing to offer, you know, you feel good when someone makes you feel that your opinion makes sense and your contribution is relevant (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I find it easy (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

In groups, you have no choice because everybody wants to perform well (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Uzor and Stephen declared that they felt uneasy when working with peers and in tutorial groups. Uzor admitted that it could be due to the difference in culture that exists in such settings, while Stephen said that he had been snubbed by some students.

As a tutor I have had challenges, I have had one South African student snub me, but there are good ones too (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Not totally, I think, the difference in culture and ways of doing things and carrying out tasks. (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

These responses indicate that the anxiety associated with intercultural communications and differences in culture, as suggested by Harrison and Peacock (2010) as well as Dixon et al. (2006), are valid.

I asked whether the participants had felt that their discussions were heard and valued when they participated in tutorial groups. Feelings of being heard and valued connote a sense of acceptance and being relevant which encourages persistence and this affords a feeling of a sense of belonging to a community (Arkoudis et al., 2010).

All the participants stated that they believed that their ideas were heard and valued either in tutorial groups or in departmental seminars.

Yes, since it's a group thing, people look at my perspective and try to do it the way I suggested (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I have never been in a tutorial group but I have always been a tutor, I am one of the very serious tutors, I am serious because I want them to be serious, even in the lab, outside the lab we play and all that but if I don't take it serious, they won't take their studies seriously (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

In my own personal course, we don't have tutorials but seminars, my views are valued, in my course, History, I bring up discussions about the Nigerian perspective of African History, these perspectives are different and it makes them think about what I say, my views are valued by both students and lecturers (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

They feel happy and accept the idea, I try to give my 100 percent, so I believe I contribute in a relevant manner (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

I do think so because it's always an interactive session and I don't feel neglected (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017)

Yes, like I just explained to you, usually they adopt my suggestions (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Yes, my ideas are heard and valued (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, very much (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Yes (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

The majority of the responses attesting to their ideas being accepted, depicts that they had a sense of belonging which is important in their persistence (Tinto, 1993).

To understand the extent to which my participants had integrated academically by leading and engaging in academic discourses, I asked if they had ever played a leadership role in tutorial group discussions.

Only one of the participants had not played a leadership role.

No, I have not (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

All the other participants had played leadership roles either in tutorials or seminars.

Yes, I have played leadership roles (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I have played a leadership role, seminars are in small groups and not large classes, we are divided into small groups and tasked with championing a cause, when I was doing a course in leadership, I was delegated to lead a group (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I have (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Yes, with my students in tutorial groups, with my colleagues at the department, not so much working together goes on there (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Not tutorial groups, but during seminars and tasks, I have assumed leadership roles (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, I have (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Most tutorials I have are with undergraduates....so I have the upper hand and the advantage of experience so, it's like I am a tutor to them (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

The majority of the participants expressed confidence in their academic abilities, especially in playing leadership roles, which showed that they were fully integrated into the academic system of the institution, Tinto (1993) suggests this measurement as appropriate to understanding the extent to which the individual is academically integrated.

Only Omalicha expressed not having played a leadership role in academic discourses or gatherings. This could be as a result of her not having confidence in her academic abilities which could be a reflection of her academic progress and integration.

In answering the question if participants had ever felt like dropping out of their tutorial groups due to discrimination, marginalization or any other reason, the majority of the participants said that they had never felt like dropping out. A few gave various reasons which did not include marginalization or discrimination for wanting to drop out. Uzor and Celle also explained their motivations for persisting.

Yes, I have, due to fellow members not showing up and being in active (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I persevere because I understand that all human beings are different. You will have issues where you want to drop out of groups but understanding that people are diverse helps you to go on (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No, I have never felt like dropping out of a group (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

No, I always feel fulfilled anytime I am in my tutorial class interacting with my students. I always see it as an opportunity to impact their lives positively since teaching is commitment to making changes (positive) in the lives of the learners. Also, I ensure that I am always on the top of the game. I took charge of my classes right from the very first day that I met with my students. I always go to the class fully prepared physically and spiritually. Having known fully well that teaching is a calling and spiritual (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

No, I have never had cause to feel that way (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

No, I have not (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

No, I have not felt like dropping out (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

External support as a motivation for persistence

No, some of my friends and family from Nigeria living in South Africa have tried to encourage and motivate me and I came here with the mind of excelling at my academics and I don't want to step out of line, it is not easy but I have made up my mind to excel. It is my mind set that has helped me continue because since the day I got here, I have had so much challenges but I insist to succeed. (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

This corroborates Brandes's (2013) argument that students persist due to being motivated to be successful and their ability to develop coping strategies. It also validates Tinto's (1993) claim that pre-entry attributes such as family background is important to students' persistence. Moreover, the response from Uzor on family being his motivation for persisting suggests that even though it is important to student persistence, it is not directly related to persistence

When you work in tutorial groups with students from South Africa and other countries, do you feel marginalized?

No no no no, maybe because I am outspoken, something I know, you cannot outshine me, unless if there is clause that if you are a South African student (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

No marginalization, when I just came in, I had a very good relationship with my HOD then and my lecturers, they also wrote letters of recommendations for me (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

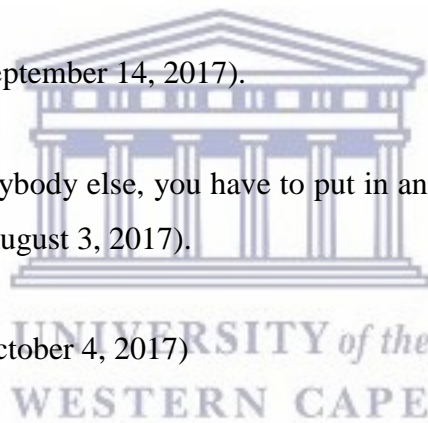
Personally, I have not had such experiences (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Research groups, not at all, I think everybody is treated with equal respect (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

No (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

No, but I think like everybody else, you have to put in an effort to prove yourself (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

No (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017)



The absence of feelings of marginalization indicated that a student was a part of the community which is important to attaining academic success.

However, the language barrier, made Celle feel sidelined and marginalized.

Yes, I can't remember, maybe, from other students from campus who look at you that you are a foreigner, if they speak a language to you and they see you don't understand they keep doing what they want to do in their language and ignore you (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Uzor explained that he did not feel integrated into his tutorial group with his local counterparts and believed that it had impacted negatively on their outcome as a group.

I don't think its marginalization, but integration is not much, coming together is not that much, probably because I am not south African, not that we don't work well together, but it's not smooth, to some extent, I think it does affect our work as a group (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Uzor showed intellectual insight into how his non-integration into his tutorial group affected their academic outcome as a group. He had unconsciously mentioned that his non-integration was probably due to the fact that he was a foreigner even though he had mentioned earlier that he had made friends and socialized with South African and other international students. His response showed that he had only made friends within the informal social sphere and had not been able to integrate into the formal social space of the institution; hence, his academic success was being undermined.

Discrimination

Participants were asked if they had experienced discrimination when in tutorial groups with students from South Africa and other countries. Three of the participants, Celle, Uzor and Dolly, all claimed to have experienced discrimination due to being foreign students and the differences in accent.

Yes, even amongst the locals, against the fact that I am a foreigner, the fact that a good percentage have not travelled out of their country and ask why is he here, because he is foreigner, he is considered to be low they belittle the person, they don't know that people travel out for their country to get educated (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Not really discriminated but sometimes the mixing up doesn't help, I think that is in a way discriminating, maybe it's my background or the way I speak (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Yes, a white lady was once rude to me, I was invigilating a test and she challenged my orders intentionally, asking me the basis of the orders given (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Feeling discriminated against could undermine a student's sense of worth both socially and academically, it could also act as a barrier to their persistence.

Stephen had found a way to handle it from the perspective of the foreign student.

I am not too sensitive to these things, so I can't really perceive them, they might be there but I just close my eyes to these, I don't really remember when I am marginalized (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

The majority of the participants said they had not experienced discrimination

No (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I have not experienced discrimination from students or the university, the staff treated me well as compared to the students (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

No I don't think so (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

No (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017)

The participants had diverse responses to questions on whether they felt their academic success had been compromised as a result of marginalization or discrimination in tutorial groups. Only one of the participants said that marginalization had compromised his grades. The majority of the participants said they had not felt any compromise.

Uzor pointed out that his unsuccessful integration had a direct impact on his academic success and grades.

Yes, because when such things happen you don't get the kind of grades or mark you want (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Circumventing all barriers, Owoyemi and Stephen said that their success was in their own hands.

No, I don't think so, I have taken ownership of my studies, it will be difficult for anybody to compromise it, not even lack of funds, I am going to do all it takes to make sure I excel (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Not at all from the academic point of view, I see the lecturers as very supportive during my honors, my supervisor was really very on my neck and willing to assist and that really helped me to move forward (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

No (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017)

No (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I asked the participants if and why they felt that easy interaction with students from South Africa and other countries was important to their academic success. In response to this, all the participants acknowledged the need for establishing friendship with peers for persistence and academic success. The main reason for the majority was to be able to share knowledge for academic purposes. The insight that the participants had to these interactions and friendships as a coping mechanism for academic success, finding a way around it and succeeding by all means, was surprising.

It has never been but I would go out of my way to establish this friendship with the local students for the purpose of my academic success (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I asked the participants if they felt that peer group interaction was necessary for their academic success. The participants, Stephen, Dolly and Lizzy all used the phrase, "Nobody is an island". They all confessed to the need to establish friendship for academic integration and success.

Nobody is an island of knowledge; we are all human beings we will always need each other for one thing or the other. Sometimes you find it easier and feel more comfortable sharing your experiences or challenges with your fellow students than your supervisor, Also, in order to get exposed to the rich cultures of some other countries (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

No man is an island. Nobody knows all. So I need to move with people so as to get more information, more knowledge (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

No man is an island and no one has sufficient knowledge, we need people's perspectives and as students, we need to learn and learning is not only from the top but both vertical and horizontal. It is a part of life to relate well with people and to interact, but while you interact, it could help empower your academic success and continuity on campus, but there is no objective to interacting, its human to relate with people, I just can't be silent in an environment, you need to talk to people around you (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

All the other participants agreed that friendship had helped them to persist, especially academically. Mike gave a scenario to drive home his point that establishing friendships socially was pertinent to achieving success academically.

That I will say it's important, not for me but others, for instance as a science student, you might need a chemical you need to work with and someone else has it, if you don't talk to the student there is no way you can ask for the chemical. For instance, a case study, a personal story now, there is a girl in law I used to know at the residence, I used to greet her but one day she saw me walking with my girlfriend and stopped greeting me maybe because she has feelings for me or something, so later when I saw her at a party, a friend introduced her to meet her and I said I know this girl but she was very angry and said how can I say know her when I don't greet her in the residence, so you have to interact with people, relate with them (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

The interaction and friendships I have had, have helped me with my academics, it's important to have friendships, academics are better done in groups, when we

share knowledge together, we improve ourselves, we get better together. I would go out of my way to establish these friendships with the local students for the purpose of my academic success (Celle, Interview, August 8, 2017).

It is very important because this is South Africa and this is their history and they know it more than you, for instance, most of the students in my department are part-time students, so they have the practical experience. I am in public administration and I have to delve into the history of South Africa. I cannot say I was forced into the friendship, because of my degree, I saw it was important and my classmates had no grievances against me (Dan, Interview, August 8, 2017)

It is actually very important, nobody can say they know it all, I need my friends that are in the same boat as I am in that would understand and give me relevant help when needed, otherwise, doing my research alone could be suicidal (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

When you interact together, it makes things easier for you to work together and achieve the same goal (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

It is very important because other students have been able to give me good ideas and there is always a fresh way of looking at things with the help of others, moreover they have helped me out also in other work related areas (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Evidence from the responses of the participants suggested that most of the participants acknowledged a direct link between peer group interactions, social integration / academic integration and academic success / persistence. This validates Tinto's (1993) Interactional Model of Institutional Departure, which posits that the variables are interactional in nature and they all result in intentions of either persisting or departing.

Student persistence and intent to persist

I asked questions about students' academic grades to find out how academically integrated the participants were. Tinto (1993) suggests that academic integration can be measured by

students' self- efficacy and how confident they are in their ability to carry out academic tasks that are required of them as students. It also sought to find out about their persistence and how, the interactions and integrations they had described earlier, had influenced their grades and their persistence.

The majority of the participants said that they were satisfied with their academic progress and grades, except for Omalicha who was not satisfied with her grades, and Mike, who was not satisfied with his progress in retrospect.

Are you satisfied with your academic grades? The responses were:

Academic grades yes, progress..... not satisfied with my progress because I should have completed my masters, but because of the fees must fall movement, and I am a science student and I need to use the lab but the labs are always locked because of its sensitive nature, I am still here, the lab had to be closed down because of the chemicals in there. In terms of the grading, the grading is okay, they don't care if you are a foreign student or a local student I will even give the government an applause because where I am from you don't get funding but they gave me bursary, for instance, I was given a bursary in the 2nd year of my honours, they said if I topped my class and I did and they gave me funding (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

I am satisfied (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I think I am (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Very much (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I am (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017)

Yes (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

I am (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

No I am not satisfied with my progress, I don't have grades, my success is measured by the progress I have made and right now, I am far from being satisfied with that (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Self-efficacy

Do you feel you have the capability to complete your programme within the required time?

The responses were:

Yes, I am at the edge of completing my masters, now I am using an extra year. I am almost done (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Yes, I am capable, I will complete my studies, I am working with time and everything is going fine (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, sure because I study full time, except it changes, but I think so (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I believe by God's grace (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

Yes, my supervisor has been most helpful and a great teacher (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Hopefully, by His grace, not by human ability, I did well in my honors and I am doing well in my master's programme too (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

My progress is on schedule and I have everything I need to complete it in time, as long as the fees must fall movement do not disrupt academic this year (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Yes, because I have acquired more knowledge in research through the series of programme organized by the school of post graduate student, Faculty of Education and my department. I have also attended workshops and conferences

that have better equipped me to be a rare gem in my field of study (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Academic staff not supportive /Accountability of academic staff and review of processes

Academic Staff support, which (Barnett 2011) refers to as faculty validation, came up a couple of times. The majority of the students mentioned the roles members of staff, especially lecturers, played in seeing that they persist in their studies.

Yes, personally, I believe I am capable, if I get my supervisor's full cooperation, this is the only reason why I am not satisfied with my academic progress at the moment. He is highly uncooperative (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

From Omalicha's response, it was obvious that she had not been able to integrate academically as she was not moving at an expected rate of progress in her academics. Even though she expressed confidence in her ability to persist till graduation, her persistence had been undermined by a number of factors, ranging from issues she had in transitioning, limited interactions and socializing with friends due to fears for her safety and limited funds, not being socially integrated into the institution's social systems to the slow progress she believed she was making in her academics due to the lack of academic support from her supervisor.

Omalicha and Lizzy both expressed displeasure at the supervisory pace and processes of supervision.

TU should not stand aloof, the university has to hold its academic and non-academic staff accountable, they should look into how lecturers and supervisors treat their students, the lecturers and supervisors should be made to also write progress reports, they should be accountable (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Institutional support system

The participants were asked about what other kinds of support the institution could provide that would make them feel that their success was important to lecturers and administrative staff. This question is important to students' academic integration and is confirmed by Tinto (1993), when he states that “rewarding interactions between faculty, staff and students outside the classrooms and offices of the institution may lead directly to enhanced intellectual development and therefore to greater intellectual integration into the academic system of the college” (p. 118).

Four of the participants reiterated the issue of funding for international students while a few talked about the importance of training academic and administrative members of staff and make them accountable for their contribution to the slow progress of the students.

Academic staff training

Mike and Celle expressed the need for the training of academic staff on issues of cultural differences.

They should be.... even if it's once in a semester, there should be a meeting between lecturers and students, although there are assessments but in the meeting people can say what is on their minds (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

I think TU can do a constant training of their staff on how to relate with international students, they have diff ways of thinking some international students are being funded by their countries some are self -funded, the supervisors and staff need to know this, some friends can stay here and spend more time than expected, I have a friend that personally delayed her thesis to keep enjoying her government funding (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Provision of funding

Dan, Lizzy, Stephen, Owoyemi and Uzor talked about the need to make funding accessible to international students.

I think they should look more into helping postgraduate students, because the truth is funding is the issue, if they are being funded well there will be good

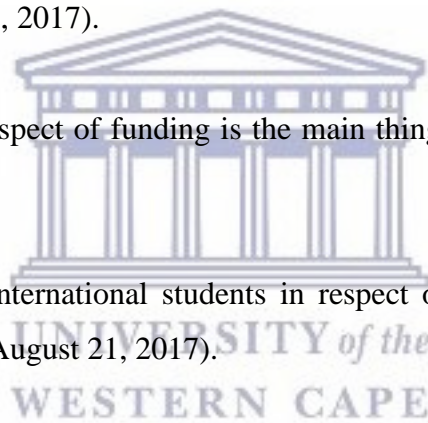
results at the end. The funding should include all post graduate students (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

I need money, let them give me plenty money (laughs), the financial aid department should open up more room to be able to take up more than one tutorial, they should consider one's academic ability to be allowed to take up more than one tutorial (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

The school needs to improve on the area of assisting the international students financially and supervisory methods of the supervisors so that we will not be stressing financially and our supervisors will not be delaying us unnecessary. The process of issuing ethical clearance to the students must be revised too especially for international full time students considering that they have limited time (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I think the support in respect of funding is the main thing (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

If TU can support its international students in respect of funding, that will be great (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).



Continued learning and retention

When asked if they would like to continue learning after completing their current programme at the current institution, some participants stated that they intended to persist in learning after graduating from their current programme. Two had not made up their minds as the university, for various reasons, might only be able to retain a few students after graduation from their present programmes of study.

Yes, I will like to do my PhD before leaving the country (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

Continue to study in TU or continue studying? Yes, I will like to continue studying, a PhD in dentistry, yes but no not in TU, TU focuses more on its

undergraduate it's being managed like an undergraduate university, they are not there yet in the postgraduate studies (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I will, I have a lot of ambition like to continue in history or anthropology (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

Yes, I want to in TU, I love the system already (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Yes, I will like to continue with my doctoral studies in my field of study for continuity in order to enable me to have an in-depth study in the field of Science Education so as to contribute to knowledge in this regard and also help to bridge that gap that currently exist in my field of study, (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017).

Omalicha and Dan did not wish to continue studying at TU after graduating from their present degrees due to the need for funding.

Not for now, how can I continue when I have no money and funding is only available to local students (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

No I don't think so, I have been studying here for long and the support for postgraduate students is not too good and it's the most important support (Dan, Interview, August 2, 2017).

When asked if they would like to continue studying at TU, 5 of the participants indicated that they would love to continue studying at TU, while others had decided they would not continue at TU for various reasons.

I will choose TU, but I need a bursary for that because I don't have money, if TU gives me bursary then I will love to continue with my supervisor, she is a unique person (Mike, Interview, June 26, 2017).

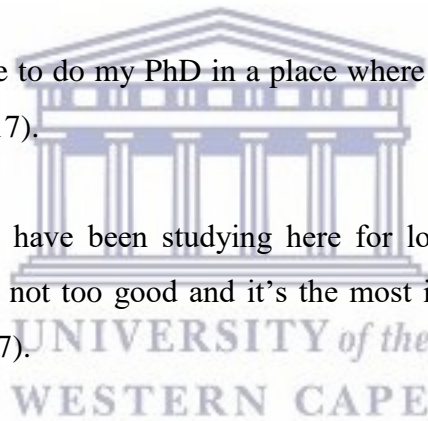
USA or Canada, but I will also like to continue my PhD in the division of History here in TU (Stephen, Interview, August 2, 2017).

TU, I give Kudos to TU for the various seminars, workshops and trainings that have been put in place for post graduate students in their various departments, faculties and the school of postgraduate at large. This has really been of great help to us as postgraduate students. The school ensures that we are fully equipped for the tasks ahead of us as researchers. It is only in the area of assisting the international students financially and supervisory methods of the supervisors that the school needs to improve on (Lizzy, Interview, September 14, 2017)

Yes, a PhD in pharmacy but this time around, in pharmacology, TU, I love the system already (Dolly, Interview, October 4, 2017).

Personally I will not like to do my PhD in a place where I did my master (Celle, Interview, August 2, 2017).

No I don't think TU, I have been studying here for long and the support for postgraduate students is not too good and it's the most important support (Dan, Interview August 2, 2017).



I am not sure about that for now, I am still thinking about it (Uzor, Interview, August 21, 2017).

No, I am not continuing, here or anywhere else (Omalicha, Interview, September 14, 2017).

I will love to continue to a PhD but not in TU, I will rather look for a place where I can get funding (Owoyemi, Interview, August 3, 2017).

Even though the majority of the students indicated their intentions to persist, their responses revealed that they had no institutional commitment. They had been able to persist and intend to persist due to personal commitments, external influences and interactions during the early stages that had carried them to their present stages. This speaks directly to Tinto's (1993)

claim that commitment rather than the lack of social integration would help sustain a student's persistence towards the end of the programme.



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SECTION 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this section, I present a summary of my research as well as my findings and recommendations.

The research problem addressed by my study are factors that undermine student persistence in higher institutions, especially as it relates to intercultural interactions and the integration of Nigerian students into the social and academic systems of an institution.

The aim of my study was to investigate intercultural peer group interactions between Nigerian students and students from other countries at a university in the Western Cape, in order to find out the extent to which international students experience social integration and how it affects their persistence. Also, it seeks to use the results of this study to influence informed practices and policy development in addressing issues of student integration and persistence.

I investigated a main research question and sub-questions which are:

Main research question: What is the nature of intercultural peer group interaction between Nigerian students and students from other countries?

Sub-questions: What is the nature of the relationship between intercultural peer group interaction and social integration? What is the nature of intercultural peer group interaction and social integration?

I employed purposive sampling in strategically inviting 20 Nigerian students that were at different stages of their master's programme to participate in the research; however, only 12 students were available to take part in the research. The participants were limited to only Nigerian students who were at different stages of their research programmes.

As a conceptual framework, I used Tinto's 1993 Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure as my guide.

My research approach was qualitative to enable me understand how the participants interpreted the constructs of their own experiences on how they interacted and integrated into the university's academic and social systems.

I made use of an interview guide (see Appendix A) that had pre-set questions to guide my semi-structured interview. The interview guide included open-ended questions that gave me leeway to ask follow up questions on answers that were not clear or detailed. The research questions, literature on persistence as well as the theoretical framework of the research guided the development of questions included in my interview guide. The questions were divided into themes that had sub-questions relevant to each theme. The themes were: experiences as a foreign student, informal peer interactions and integration, informal interactions with peers from other countries and integration, intercultural formal peer interactions in classes, academic integration and student persistence, student persistence and intent to persist.

Data were collected through the use of an audio recorder on a smart phone. The audio files were transcribed into written text for analysis. I transcribed and grouped the keywords under the themes that had been set out, which were inspired by aspects of the model of institutional departure and literature on integration and persistence. To guard against being overwhelmed by the data, I started coding early. I was able to analyse all the data with these themes, while occasionally going back to the literature to understand themes that emerged from the data better, and finally, I achieved the aim of my research successfully.

Findings

All participants agreed that peer group interaction was pertinent to academic and social integration. This was evident in the description of how friends had helped most of my participants to carry out academic tasks that they were not able to. Moreover, many of the participants declared that they would find ways by every means possible to establish friendships with other students to aid their academic integration and persistence. There is evidence to support that a strong relationship exists between informal social integration and academic integration and persistence.

Many participants agreed that it was important to establish intercultural friendships to help achieve academic success. Even though a few of the participants argued that their academic success was reliant on their abilities and hard work, evidence that emerged from their responses suggested that they would go out of their way to establish strategic friendships, circumventing all hurdles to be able to achieve academic integration and persistence.

A few of the participants were motivated to persist by external factors such as family background and their intentions and commitments to goals that had been set prior to embarking on the degree.

Evidence suggests that even though intercultural peer group interaction is pertinent to student integration, interactions do not necessarily have to be informal as there is no direct relationship between informal social integration and persistence. An example of this can be gleaned from Uzor's response about not receiving academic assistance despite having established friendships.

Evidence that a direct relationship exists between peer group interactions, integration and persistence emerged from data as all the participants described the importance of peer interactions had been effective to their academic success. The participants explained the need to make friends that had content knowledge of the courses they were studying and who could contribute effectively to their own knowledge and academic success.

The evidence from data validates Tinto's (1993) claim that the number of friends established or the nature of friendship does not have a direct impact on persistence as long as friendship and interactions are established. Although evidence suggested that interactions and the establishment of friendship in itself did not necessarily lead to academic success, it was a precursor for persistence. Moreover, some of the participants did not have to lose their cultural values or adopt the dominant culture in the institution. Rather, they established friendship with other students that had similar values and culture to theirs.

Evidence showed that interactions existed to a large extent between Nigerian students and students from other countries, which indicated that intercultural interactions had been positively established.

Even though, interactions between Nigerian students and South African students were minimal, due to biases and stereotypes from both sides, Nigerian students found a way to circumvent the negative effect of missing out on benefits that such intercultural interactions could have. They established friendships with students from other countries and engaged in formal social activities for academic benefit with South African peer groups.

It was also revealed that even though all the participants had persisted and had intentions to persist in their studies, most of them had weakened commitment to the institution. Their responses showed that although they intended to continue with their studies after completing the present studies, they did not intend to continue studying at TU.

Unexpected Findings

An unexpected finding was that an individual could be socially integrated but not academically integrated if friendships established were limited to informal social systems of the institution. An example of this was Uzor, who even though he had established friendships, even with local students and had been invited to their homes on a couple of instances, he still complained of not getting academic assistance and or support of friends/peers when he needed it.

New theoretical perspectives and insights

Evidence suggests that Tinto's (1993) model for institutional departure is also applicable to postgraduate university programmes as shown by its successful application to participants in the Master's degree programmes that this study investigated.

Data validates Tinto's (1993) claim that weakened institutional commitment does not necessarily affect persistence. This is because, despite the complaints about the institution and the non-sentimental attitude to it, the majority of the participants persisted and intended to persist till graduation. This had to be due to the strongly held norms and commitments to their intentions.

Interaction is also shown to be central to integration into the academic systems and the social systems of the university. As noted by Tinto (1975; 1993), academic integration is indeed nested within the social system of the institution. Several of the students attested to this as they believed that they had to first initiate interactions informally, before being able to interact formally or to integrate socially.

Some of the research that had applied or tested Tinto's theory on non-traditional students, such as the study done by Torres and Solberg (2001) on Latino students in the USA and Duquette's (2000) application of the institutional departure model on disabled participants, suggest the possibility of the weakness of the relevance of the social integration variable in

certain sample groups. Even though I had also considered this view at the early stages of analysing my data, evidence revealed that the sub-construct, informal social integration, was the weak link. It did not have a direct relationship to student persistence, while formal social integration was of central importance to the participants' persistence. This can be noted in the majority of my participants' responses when asked about the importance of establishing friendships. Formal social integration through peer assisted learning and coordinated learning projects such as seminars, tutorials and group tasks with or without tutors was effective in creating intercultural interactions for the purpose of academic success (Tinto 1997). The majority of the participants agreed that this type of interaction/integration was of utmost importance to their academic success and some said that they would look for ways to overcome issues that could pose as barriers to them been able to formally socialize with students from other countries and South Africa.

There was also evidence to support Tinto's (1997) claim that social integration was not as important towards the end of the student's programme as it was in the beginning, rather, the individual's commitment to his/her goals was of most importance at the end of a programme. I also agree with the school of thought that prescribes that the model should be investigated through qualitative semi-structured interviews as some of its variables are best measured through the individual's views of their own integration and experiences (Tinto, 1993). A questionnaire would not suffice in this regard as the opportunity to understand the questions as well as to ask follow up questions that could bring clarity to both the participant and the researcher, would not exist.

The research validates Tinto's (1993) view that formal social integration, more than informal social integration, would determine students' academic integration and persistence. This was revealed by the responses of some of the participants that friends might not have any impact on academic integration if the friend was in another academic field of study.

The interpretation as well as measurements of the variables should be literature inspired, as trying to give personal meaning while conceptualizing could disrupt the originally intended meaning and result in inadequate data that cannot be analysed using the model.

Implications for further study

This research could have been extended to include students from other cultural backgrounds since the issue of intercultural interaction is not peculiar to Nigerians alone but known to be rife in culturally diverse communities like the one being studied. However, this study focuses on the Nigerian experience, due to the researcher's personal experiences to allow an insider's perspective and also because it is a research paper which is limited in nature. Nevertheless, this research paper could be used as a foundation for further research to include other cultures represented within the institution's community.

Similarly, there is need for a study into the current institution's actions, for knowledge into its activities in the area of student support as regards involvement and engagement.

Recommendations

The aim of this study was to investigate intercultural peer group interactions between Nigerian students and students from other countries at a university in the Western Cape, in order to find out the extent to which international students experience social integration and how it affects their persistence. In addition, the results of this study could be used to influence informed practices and policy development in addressing issues of student integration and persistence. Based on the findings of this research, I recommend the following to enhance student persistence and retention:

- There should be a conscious effort in addressing the issues that undermine the smooth transition of Nigerian students and international students at large into the institution.

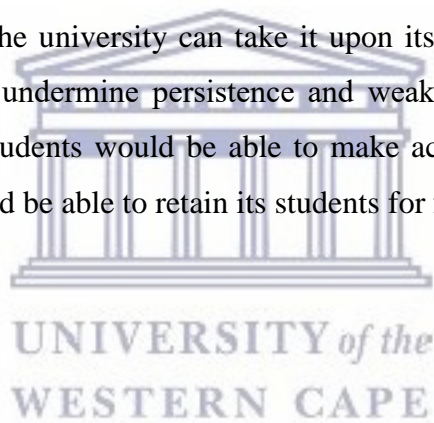
This could be done by reviewing some of the processes of the international student office to include international student support services so that the students would feel catered for. Attention should also be given to the safety and accommodation of foreign students as well as sensitization on the cultures and practices of the host country.

- More peer tasks and activities should be organized in the departments to encourage formal interactions which could bridge the gaps of barriers in language and demystify the stereotypes and biases that exist amongst international students and students from the host country.

- Faculty members and lecturing staff should be sensitized to the cultural backgrounds and differences of international students.

Conclusion

The study shows that Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure is relevant to the study of student integration and persistence in adult education. The model is seen to be interactional in nature as evidence reveals that interaction and integration are dependent on each other for persistence. Furthermore, the sub-constructs of family background and goals and commitment are also pertinent to persistence. The study also revealed that formal social intercultural interactions are directly related to persistence. Even though many factors could have hindered the persistence of some of the participants in my study, their institutional experiences did not weaken their goal and intentions; however, it has weakened their institutional commitment. If the university can take it upon itself to address the recognised institutional experiences that undermine persistence and weaken the student's institutional commitments, international students would be able to make academic progress and persist. Moreover, the university would be able to retain its students for future registrations.



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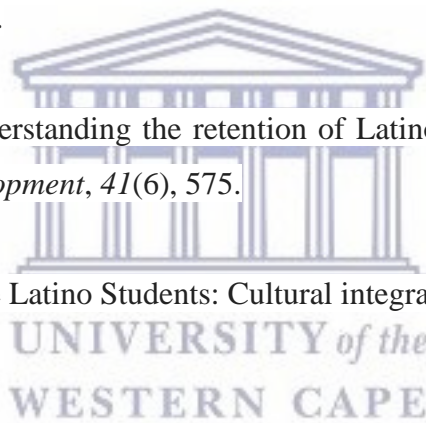
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Appendices

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Appendix A

Profile

1. Surname
2. First names
3. Addresses
4. Telephone number
5. Gender
6. Age
7. Marital status
8. Country of origin

Experiences as foreign student

9. When did you arrive in South Africa?
10. When did you register at TU for this first time?
11. When did you start the programme for which you are currently registered at TU?
12. Why did you choose to study at TU?
13. When you arrived, did you feel welcomed as a foreign student?
14. Did TU make a special effort to welcome you as a foreign student?
15. What kind of challenges are you experiencing as a foreign student?
16. What improvements can be made by the University management and staff to address your challenges?

Informal peer interactions and integration

17. Have you made friends with other students?
18. Do you socialize with your friends on campus?

19. What kinds of social activities do you and your friends enjoy?
20. Do you socialize with your friends off campus?
21. Do you think these friendships contribute to your academic success?
22. If yes, in which ways do these friendships contribute to your academic success?
23. Have you ever missed classes because of a personal crisis, and were helped by a student friend to 'catch up' with your academic work?
24. What are the nationalities of most of your friends?

Informal interactions with peers from other countries and integration

25. When you registered at TU did you look forward to getting to know students from South Africa and other countries?
26. What challenges have you faced in getting to know students from South Africa, and other countries?
27. Have you made friends with students from South Africa and other countries?
28. Do you socialize with these friends on campus?
29. What kinds of social activities do you and your friends enjoy on campus?
30. Have South African students invited you to their homes?
31. Have you ever missed classes because of a personal crisis, and were helped by a student friend from another country to 'catch up' with your academic work?

Intercultural formal peer interactions in classes, academic integration and student persistence

32. Do you feel comfortable when you interact with students in your class who are from South Africa and other countries?
33. If yes, what makes you feel comfortable?
34. If no, what makes you feel uncomfortable?

35. Do you find it easy to work in tutorial groups with students from South Africa and other countries?
36. If yes, what makes this ease possible?
37. If not, why is it not easy?
38. When you participate in tutorial group discussions, are your ideas heard and valued?
39. Have you ever played a leadership role in tutorial group discussions?
40. Have you ever felt like 'dropping out' of a tutorial group?
41. If yes, what were the reasons?
42. What stopped you from 'dropping out'?
43. When you work in tutorial groups with students from South Africa and other countries, do you feel marginalized?
44. If so, how does this marginalization impact on your academic success?
45. When you work in tutorial groups with students from South Africa and other countries, do you experience discrimination?
46. If yes, against what do they discriminate?
47. Has your academic success ever been compromised because you felt marginalised and /or discriminated in tutorial groups?
48. For the success of your studies, why is it important that you should be able to interact easily with students from South Africa and other countries?

Student persistence and intent to persist

49. Are you satisfied with your academic grades?
50. Do you feel you have the capability to complete your programme within the required time?
51. What gives you the most confidence that you will complete your studies successfully?

52. What other kinds of support can TU provide that would make you feel that lecturers and administrative staff make you feel that your success is important to them?
53. Would you like to continue studying after completing your current programme?
54. If yes, what would you like to study?
55. Where would you like to study and why?

The interviews were completed within the proposed time frame.



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Letter of Permission to Conduct Research

Appendix B

The Registrar
University of the Western Cape
91 Robert Sobukwe
Bellville

Dear Ms Nita Lawton-Misra

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE

I am Marian Olubukola Babalola, registered for the Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change at the University of the Western Cape. I am required to write a research paper in fulfilment of my degree. To this end, I must conduct a small research study.

My research study focuses on 'Student persistence among international students at a university in the Western Cape'. I hereby request your permission to conduct this research study at the University of the Western Cape.

I am interested in investigating Nigerian students' experiences of other international students in relation to their intercultural peer group interactions, how they perceive their integration into the university's academic system, and how these perceptions and experiences could affect their persistence. I would like to use the findings of my research to influence the university policies and practices to increase success rates and persistence among international students at the University of the Western Cape.

Using an Interview Guide, I would like to conduct semi-structured interviews with 20 Nigerian students who are presently registered in Masters Programmes across the university. The interview will last for about 1 hour. I will provide participants with an Information Letter, and a Participant Consent Form which they should sign before the interview. I will treat all information provided by the participants as confidential.

I hope that my request meets with your favourable approval. My contact details are as follows:

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Email: ynomlomo@uwc.ac.za

Information Letter to Participants

Appendix C

Dear Participant

KIND REQUEST FOR AN INTERVIEW

I am Marian Olubukola Babalola, registered for the Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change at the University of the Western Cape. I am required to write a research paper in fulfilment of my degree. To this end, I must conduct a small research study.

My research study focuses on 'Intercultural peer group interactions, social integration and student persistence among international students at the University of the Western Cape'. As you are an international student, I would like to interview you about your experiences as an international student, of intercultural interactions with other students, your perceptions of your integration into the university, and how your experiences and perceptions could affect your success.

If you agree to the interview, I will ask you questions that I have included in my Interview Guide to conduct the interview. The interview will last for about 1 hour. I request your permission to record the interview with an electronic recording device.

If you experience any discomfort during the interview, and you are required to seek counselling, I shall assist you in this regard. As your participation is voluntary, you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point.

All your information will be treated with strict confidentiality. If I use any part of my interview with you in any publication, I will not divulge your personal information.

If you wish to contact me, I include the following contact details:

Student: Marian Babalola
Email: bukato100@gmail.com
Phone: 0715033688

If you wish to contact my academic supervisor, her details are as following:

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Participant Consent Form

Appendix D

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Kindly sign this form as your consent to participate in my research. By signing this form, I agree that:

- I have read and understood the Information Letter and Participant Consent Form
- I consent to be interviewed
- I am aware that the interview will last for about 1 hour
- I agree that the interview can be recorded with an electronic recording device
- I understand that my words may be quoted and used in publications and reports but my name and other personal information will not be disclosed
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research project at any time and no questions will be asked about my reasons

Please sign this form and return it to the researcher

Name of Participant: _____

Participant signature: _____

Place of interview: _____

Date of interview: _____

Researcher Signature: _____



UNIVERSITY of the
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A place of quality, a place to grow, from hope to action through knowledge

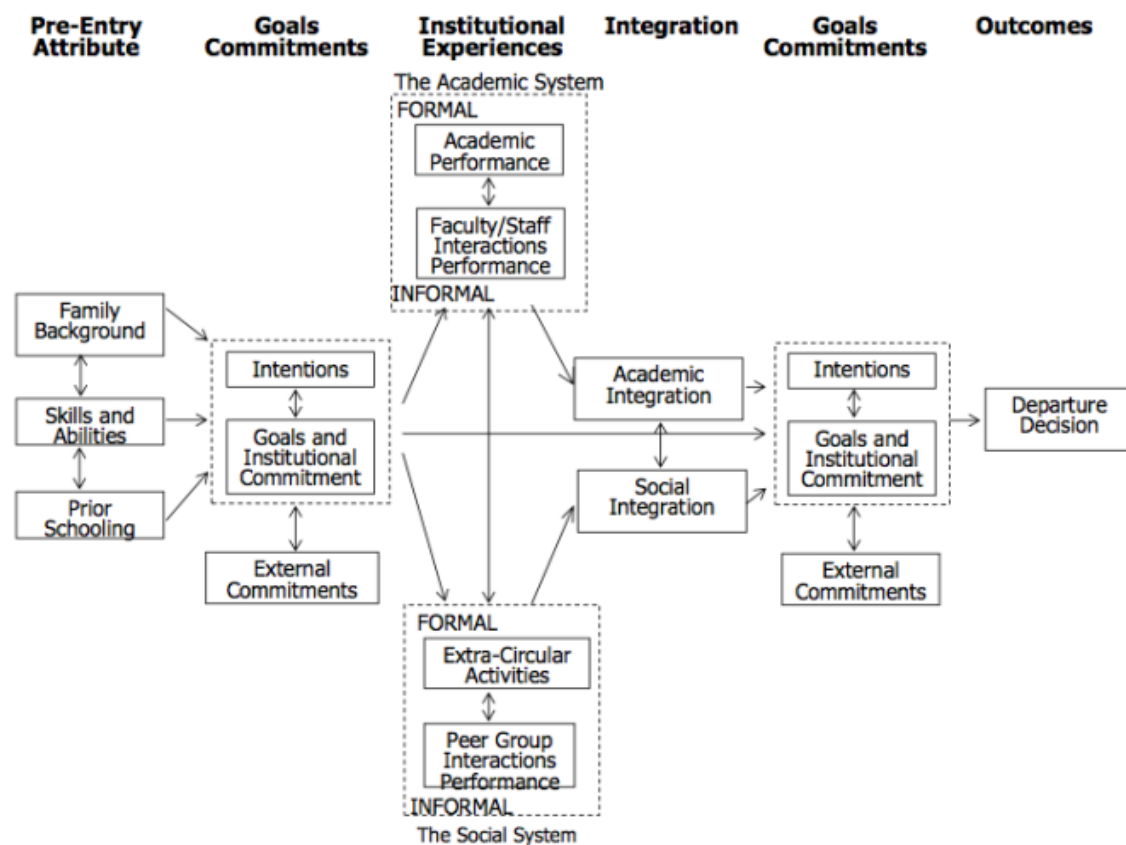


Fig 1.1. A Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Tinto, 1993)

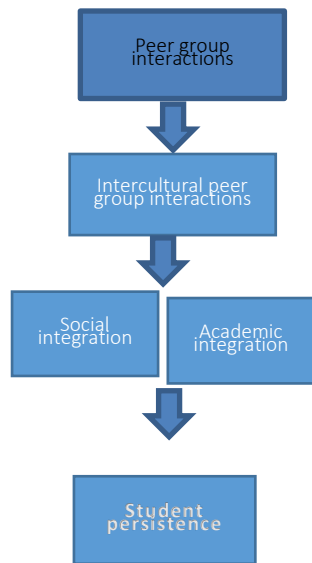


Fig 1.2. Introduction of intercultural peer group interaction variable (This variable has been introduced by the researcher.)