

**The Educational and Psychosocial
Experiences of First Generation Students
in Higher Education**

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*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Education in Educational Support in the Faculty
of Education at Stellenbosch University*

The crest of Stellenbosch University is centered behind the text. It features a shield with various symbols, topped by a crown and a banner. The colors are primarily red, blue, and gold.

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December 2015

Declaration

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Abstract

The experiences of first generation students or non-traditional university students are well researched internationally. However, little specific research on this group of students is conducted in South Africa, especially those who have attended bridging programmes and have successfully completed university degrees. This qualitative case study explores the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students who have been successful in higher education. The study drew on a number of theoretical strands. These positions included, Bourdieu's social and cultural theory, Yosso's cultural wealth theory, Tinto's widening participation theory, Ungar's resilience theory and Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory. Eight participants were selected as research participants based on their status of being first generation students at the specific university where the study was conducted. Data were collected using a focus group, followed by semi structured interviews as well as research journal entries. The themes that emerged were structured around positive and negative experiences of higher education. The findings suggested that negative experiences included how difficult it is for FGS to access higher education institutions as well as the financial challenges they encounter because they come from families that survive on low incomes. The participants highlighted the financial relief that the National Student Financial Scheme brought to them when they determined to pursue higher education. They also commended the universities' administration system and this stood out as a significantly positive experience. Lecture hall experience of diversity, student residence experience, institutional culture as well as the language of teaching and learning arose as significant themes when describing negative experiences in higher education.

Keywords : First generation students, higher education institution,

Opsomming

Die ondervindinge van eerste generasie studente of nie-tradisionele studente is deeglik nagevors op internasionale vlak. Min spesifieke navorsing oor hierdie groep bestaan in Suid-Afrika, veral onder studente wat oorbruggingsprogramme bygewoon het en hul universiteitsgrade voltooi het. Die kwalitatiewe studie verken die opvoedkundige en psigososiale ervaringe van eerste generasie studente wat suksesvol was op universiteit. Die studie is gefondeer binne 'n paar teoretiese orientasies. Die posisies sluit in Bourdieu se sosiale en kulturele teorie, Yosso se kulturele rykdom teorie, Tinto se verbreedte deelname teorie, Ungar se veerkragtigheidsteorie en Bronfenbrenner se bio-ekologiese sisteemsteorie. Ag deelnemers was gekies omdat hul eerste generasie studente was wat aan die universiteit studeer het waar die studie gedoen is. Data was ingesamel deur 'n fokus groep, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en ook navorsingsjoernaal inskrywings. Temas uit die navorsing is gestruktureer in terme van negatiewe en positiewe ervaringe van die hoër onderwys. Die bevindinge dui aan dat negatiewe ervaringe toegang tot hoër onderwys en finansiële struikelblokke insluit. Die deelnemers het aangedui hoe die Nasionale Studente Finansiële Skema groot finansiële verligting bring en dit moontlik maak dat hul verder kan studeer. Hul het ook die universiteit se administratiewe sisteem geprys want dit het as 'n baie positiewe ervaring uitgestaan. Negatiewe ervaringe is beskryf onder die temas van klaskamer ervaringe van diversiteit, studente se koshuis ervaringe, institusionele kultuur en die taal van leer en onderrig.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the participants who were willing to go through this journey with me. Even though they had to focus on their own studies they made time to speak to me and share their journey of higher education. I have grown just by listening to you. Thank you very much for sharing your stories.

“I know the *plans* I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to *prosper* you and not harm you, plans to give you *hope* and a *future*”

Jeremiah 29:11

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List of Abbreviations

CHE – Council for higher education

DOE – Department of Education

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

FGS – First generation student

HE –Higher Education

HEA – Higher Education Act

HESA – Higher Education South Africa

HDI – Historically disadvantaged institution

HAD- Historically advantaged institution

HDI – Historically disadvantaged institutions

IEASA – International Education Association of South Africa

NSFAS – National Student Financial Aid Scheme

NCHE – National Committee of Higher Education

LLL- Listen Learn and Live

Res – Student residence

RSA – Republic of South Africa

UCT – University of Cape Town

UWC – University of Western Cape

SU– Stellenbosch University

CPUT – Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Chapter 1

Context and rationale for the study

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

The issue of how higher education (HE) can be made more accessible to students who have not traditionally had access to higher education remains 21 years into a post-Apartheid South Africa which still has many disparities in access (Essack & Quayle, 2007). Numerous policy interventions that highlight the need for transformation were put in place shortly after 1994. These policies will be described briefly.

The Education White Paper 3, 'A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education' (Department of Education, 1997) highlighted 'an inequitable distribution of access and opportunity for students and staff along lines of race, gender, class and geography'. Even though many positive structural changes, such as improving the race and gender demography, institutional transformation forums and the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) have been implemented, there is still a need to recognize that apartheid legacies still remain entrenched in contemporary higher education (HE). Later policies such as the Ministerial Committee on Social Cohesion (Department of Education, 2008) and the report on the Summit on Higher Education (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2010) documented how many of the challenges identified in the White Paper 3 of 1997 are pertinent to higher education today, especially in relation to race, gender and class differences. In addition to policy and structural recommendations, some authors have made suggestions as to how debates on transformation can be deepened in relation to first generation students (FGS). Key ideas in this regard relate to emotional connection to HE institutions and access for success (Soudien, 2011). I will elaborate on these ideas.

Jansen (2009) argues that universities consist of knowledge and traditions often captured in curriculum and other practices. The concept of "knowledge in the blood" (p.171) then becomes central to emotional connection to institutions and practices that encourage success and contribute to failure. Emotional connections to HE institutions may depend on family knowledge of higher education and support needed (Vincent & Idahosa, 2014) and the extensive opportunity to forge such connections that students from privileged backgrounds may have (Jansen, 2009; Van Schalkwyk, 2007). The lack of exposure to HE contexts, even just in conversations, increases FGS vulnerability to successfully navigating the terrain of HE (Van Schalkwyk, 2007; Jehangir, 2010).

Access and success in higher education is therefore not simply a matter of students demonstrating academic ability only. Students have to master the ‘student’ role in order to understand the lecturer’s expectations and apply their academic skills effectively to those expectations. This appears to be a common phenomenon amongst students who have little intergenerational knowledge of higher education institutions (Collier & Morgan, 2007). These students tend to perform poorly, not only because they may be poor academic achievers but because they often do not know the institutional culture and how to navigate the systems, a process that will allow them to be part of such institutions and to succeed (Jehangir, 2010; Letseka & Breier, 2008; Letseka et al., 2010).

My study locates itself within debates about widening participation in HE with specific emphasis on access and success debates. The study explores the journey taken by students who decided to take the ‘road less travelled’ by their families by joining higher education to further their studies. I wish to explore the educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in higher education in an effort to begin to understand some of the experiences they have gone through within HE. By understanding these experiences, universities may be able to put effective support systems that will assist the FGS to navigate higher education in the same manner that non-FGS do.

1.2 Motivation for the study

The motivation for the study is both research-driven and experiential reasons which I will explain below.

In terms of access, both privilege and marginality are important factors to consider (Bozalek, 2011; Heymann & Carolissen, 2009) as people may not always consider how their positionalities and taken for granted assumptions about who they are and what opportunities they have had or not had, impact on their access and success. One such aspect of disadvantage that may need to be considered is first generation or non-first generation status of students, given the argument about emotional connectedness to institutional cultures (Jansen, 2009; Heymann & Carolissen, 2009).

If the idea of emotional connectedness and access for success is taken seriously, it is important to consider what the experiences of first generation students (FGS) are in HE. It is equally important to note that a body of research exists on experiences of Black students in higher education (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Tinto, 2014). Some of the literature on Black

students may overlap with literature on FGS (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005) but an assumption cannot be made that *all* Black students in contemporary South Africa are first generation students (FGS). There is little research in South Africa that deals explicitly with the topic of FGS. There is however recent research that explored the experiences of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are current higher education students (Lourens, 2013). Other research explores the life worlds of students and the bridges that need to be created to link life worlds, curriculum and institutions (Fataar, 2012). Little current research explores exclusively FGS experiences. In the absence of a strong body of research, many stereotypes about this group of students may be perpetuated.

The literature suggests that stereotypes about FGS exist. They are typically thought of as less competent than non-first generation students with deficit models applied to all FGS students (Green, 2006). Bangeni and Kapp (2005) tracked two FGS over a three year period and reported that students continuously respond to multiple and often conflicting expectations of who they are and who they should be. These sentiments are echoed by Kiguwa (2014) who focused on a group of Black students' progression through university. In her analysis of Black students' experiences in a historically White institution, she argues for a much more complex understanding of the complexities and contradictions in understanding Blackness in HE. Some of the motivation for this study is therefore based on the literature on FGS in South Africa, but another part of the motivation for the study is personal.

I joined the university where the current study was conducted, as a programme manager of the university's bridging programme, in 2008. The programme's objective is to give a second opportunity to students who did not achieve their desired marks in Mathematics, Physical Sciences or Accounting. We offer the programme in a hybrid model of problem based learning and allow the students to rewrite these subjects with the National Education Department after one academic year of support at the institution where the research was conducted. The students then have a better chance of acceptance into higher education institutions especially into highly selective careers of their choice that involve Mathematics, Physical Science or Accounting. Because we draw students from previously disadvantaged communities our students' schooling experience is situated in disadvantaged schools, often located in low-income communities. These students are completely disadvantaged by their schooling systems even though they may have the potential to achieve good marks.

In 2009 all the students in the current study passed well and were accepted at a South African higher education institution where they had completed the bridging programme. During my involvement with the programme, I consistently noticed that students, even when they were supposedly settled into the university, continued to come to our offices to enquire about university systems. It became apparent that even though they had spent a year within the university environment, they did not always know how to navigate the university systems. I would have to deal with numerous questions about student health, student fees, and student support, in general.

1.3 Description of the problem

First generation students (FGS) are defined as students that come from a family or background where neither a parent nor a guardian has attended college or university (Mehta, Newbolt, & O'Rourke, 2011). They come from families in which the understanding of academic norms, expectations, and demands are different from families in which at least one parent attended higher education (Heymann & Carolissen, 2009).

The literature suggests that FGS may experience a number of challenges. In the United States FGS have a more problematic transition from secondary school to higher education than non-FGS. This is because FGS confront all the anxieties, dislocation, and difficulties of any higher education student; but their experiences often involve additional cultural as well as social and academic transition (Rendon, 1992; Rendon, Hope et al., 1996; Terenzini et al., 1994)

Zipin (2005) similarly argues that in the Australian context students who come from poor communities are at a disadvantage in schooling because they have not inherited cultural ways of knowing and learning. While Zipin's (2005) research focuses on school contexts, his theoretical model may be equally applicable to all teaching and learning contexts, including that of higher education.

Given disadvantaged backgrounds, students have to make huge adjustments to make their educational goals a reality. FGS are faced with the challenge of navigating higher education institutions on their own as few of their support systems at home may understand the magnitude of the work they have to complete as well as how to access support within the institution. The role that is played by families is significant in the success of students who join higher education. Croll (2004) highlights the importance of families as supportive

structures that provide not only the identity and security to young people, but are also influential to the FGS educational outcomes. He contends that in addition to the higher socio-economic status of the family, parental activities such as communication, mentoring and monitoring of homework are likely to lead to favourable educational outcomes for young people.

Parents and family members of FGS may not understand the time, energy, and emotions that must be invested at higher education institutions to be successful (Clark/Keefe, 2006). There may also be conflicting and multiple family and community pressures on FGS. Some FGS may be self-motivated individuals who are determined to achieve success beyond their family history. Other FGS may be driven by challenging family situations. They may be determined to break the cycle of either poverty or helplessness by entering the academic world with the hope that it might improve their socio-economic status and allow them an opportunity of good employment and a middle class lifestyle. Their parents may also see their children's access and successful completion of a higher education degree as an opportunity for them to be relieved from the families' financial burdens (Thomas & Quinn, 2007).

FGS are faced with other challenges that contribute to success within higher education namely lifestyle, social and shared living, financial needs, access to support available at the university, bursaries and a general understanding of finding systems that can make the transition from high school to higher education bearable. The message that FGS receive is that their cultural capital, language, and resilience are not useful in the higher education context. Only when they are able to reshape themselves in the likeness of the status quo, can they be successful (Yuval-Davis, 2010).

Much of the research that talks about FGS focuses on deficit amongst FGS and very little on the nuanced ways in which students may navigate the system (Kiguwa, 2014; Mehta, Newbolt & O'Rourke, 2011) and use their agency in the context of disadvantaged positions to navigate HE systems strategically. It is in this context that this study aims to explore the educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in HE.

1.3.1 Aim of the study

The study aims to explore the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education.

1.3.2 Research Question

What can we learn about the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education?

Sub questions:

1. What are the negative educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
2. What are the positive educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
3. What do first generation students do to overcome the negative experiences that they have at the university?
4. What can university bridging programmes do to further support first generation students?
5. What can all lecturers do to support first generation students?

1.4 The Research Process

1.4.1. Paradigm

Paradigms act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation, and interpretation, (Merriam, 1998; Terre Blanche & Durrheim 2006).

This research was conducted using an interpretative, constructivist paradigm. Jansen (2012) explains interpretivism as a paradigm that foregrounds the meaning that individuals or communities assign to their experiences. In this study the experiences and interpretations of the experiences by FGS are explored with the purpose of understanding the everyday experiences of Black first generation students at a historically White Afrikaans campus.

1.5 Research design and methodology

This study is a qualitative case study. The qualitative research approach is an inquiry process of understanding where a researcher develops a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts studies in natural settings (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research, a researcher often approaches reality from a constructivist position, which allows for multiple meanings of individual experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This understanding is an end in itself, so it does not predict what may necessarily happen in the future, but aims to understand the nature of the setting. It also allows exploration of what it means for the participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what their meanings are, and what the world looks like in that participant setting from their perspectives. Qualitative research is significant in this study because the participants come from different backgrounds and share a common objective; that of completing their studies. Their diverse backgrounds will provide me with insight into their families, their aspirations for the future and how their university experiences support or are a hindrance to those aspirations.

1.5.1 Research Design

The research will be conducted as a case study. The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings. Case studies can involve either single or multiple cases and numerous levels of analysis (Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) defines a case study as a study of a single case, a bounded system of some sort. Understanding of a single case is usually framed from an interest in what is common and particular about the case, as well as the dissimilarities in the case. The purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the specific case. The methods of qualitative case study are largely methods of exploring personal and particularized experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; Stake, 1995). In the current study, each first generation student will be viewed as a unique case. However, similarities will be shared but there will also be differences in their experiences.

1.5.2 Research Method

I chose a participatory action research (PAR) approach because the methodology is interactive, allowing for the development of new insights and action plans. PAR methods are often used when democratic dialogue, cooperation, inclusion and a concern with issues of equity and social justice in research is desirable (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

This approach commonly uses visual learning methods which are adaptable and used flexibly to learn from and to evaluate people's concerns (Chambers, 2004; Krieg & Roberts, 2007). Participatory action research generally relies on concrete, visual and colourful methods, activities and material. The use of these resources is based on the belief that visualisation promotes participation and that it can act as a catalyst for in-depth discussions (Sanderson & Newport, 2007). PAR techniques include mapping, modelling, diagramming and ranking

exercises which encourage participation that does not depend on the literacy levels of participants, but on the presentation of ideas by means of symbols, drawing or concrete objects (Ebersohn, Eloff & Ferreira, 2012).

In PAR common forms of maps include social, resource and mobility maps representing people, resources and outlets where people obtain services. PAR has three major elements; people, power and praxis. It is people-centred as it is informed by, and responds to, the needs of the people, usually marginalised people (James, Milenkiewicz & Buckman, 2008). In this study, PAR will be used in an initial focus group to explore student's backgrounds, challenges and opportunities that they experience in HE.

1.5.2.1 Methods of data collection and analysis

1.5.2.1.1 Data Collection

Eight students participated in the study. Initially the research was going to be conducted with twelve students who had completed the bridging programme and qualified to study at university in a field of study of their interest. Eight of these students were still studying at the university where they had completed the bridging programme whereas four of them had left the university. The four students who had left were studying at other higher education institutions. The students, who were no longer at the institution where the study took place, were not contactable and could not participate in the study.

Data were collected from multiple sources (Merriam, 2009) that included focus groups and drawings as well as individual interviews. Although I had planned that students also do journal entries between the focus group and individual interviews, only three students were able to do journal entries. The other five students reported discomfort with writing down their reflections. They preferred oral participation. I therefore decided to abandon this part of the data collection. My supervisor and I started the focus group with group based PAR activities which included drawing a community map and a river of life of students' educational journeys. Bozalek (2011) used the PAR approach in her research with a view to understand university students' own perception of their situations. Participants were allowed an opportunity to share their drawings with the rest of the group and were given an opportunity to ask each other questions about their drawings. These discussions were audio recorded with a digital voice recorder.

In addition, the eight participants were interviewed individually within a week after the focus group had taken place. These individual interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The data were collated and stored in a lockable safe cupboard. The group discussion and interviews were transcribed for subsequent analysis.

1.5.2.1.2 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data. There are different ways in which thematic analysis can be used. It can be an essentialist method, which reports experiences, meaning and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 2006). In this study it will be used in both ways.

There is also a synergy between thematic analysis and the strengths of participatory action research methods. The synergy lies in the possibility of obtaining rich contextual data by reporting on the participants' own perspectives with regard to experiences, challenges and opportunities (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

1.5.3 Ethics

The proposal was submitted to the institutional review board of the University concerned and was approved (see Appendix E – Ethics proposal HS923/2013). Participants were informed in good time about the study so that they could decide to participate or not. The students were informed that they have a right to refuse to participate if they do not want to be part of the study. They were given a choice to withdraw from the study at any time when they felt uncomfortable with being part of the study. The participants were also told that all the information that was gathered would be treated with confidentiality and their identities will not be divulged.

The researcher became aware of the emotional aspect of the engagement and was sensitive to aspects that participants were not willing to share in a group or to the researcher. However, the research process ensured that feedback was given to students about the themes of the research and how these themes would be reported in the research.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Different theoretical frameworks are used to research the career aspirations and experiences of marginalised students in higher education (Basit, 2012). The frameworks that are usually drawn on in education are Bronfenbrenner's systems theory, Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital of the dominant classes and Yosso's cultural wealth theory which includes aspirational and familial capital that marginalised students draw from to succeed in higher education. Additional theoretical concepts are Tinto's concept of integration and Ungar's resilience theory. These concepts and theories will be briefly described below:

According to Bourdieu (1997), social and cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital (i.e., education, language), social capital (i.e., social networks, connections) and economic capital (i.e., money and other material possessions) can be acquired two ways, from one's family and/or through formal schooling. The dominant groups within society are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital for social mobility.

Yosso (2005) on the other hand believes that cultural capital is not the only form of capital that determines success or failure in higher education, there are other capitals that play an equally important role in the success of marginalised students in higher education. It is the higher education setup that promotes the culture of the dominant group in the systems that determine success or failure of students even though students come from diverse groups. In Yosso's (2005) opinion cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, it is rather an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* (p.76) by privileged groups in society. She further explains aspirational capital which forms part of the cultural wealth theory.

Aspirational capital is a combination of positive thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs and actions that parents pass onto their children (Basit, 2012). Aspirational capital is when parents from working-class backgrounds demonstrate high educational and career aspirations for their children in the same way that educated and middle-class families in possession of cultural and social capital do. Because of the aspirational capital that students acquire through their parents or family relationships they perceive education and career as a route to upward social mobility. FGS may find themselves downhearted when they are faced with the challenges of higher education and aspirational capital enables them to continue to hope and dream of a life

that includes education and a career. FGS who embrace the aspirational capital of their parents are more likely to succeed in education.

Tinto (2014) defines his integration theory as the alignment of student's attitudes and values with the social aspect of student life (especially peers), the academic life (faculty/staff) and the institutional goals of the institution. Tinto (2014) believes that as students try to be integrated into higher education their personal goals link them to the institution. On the other hand negative experiences distance the student from the academic and social community of the institution and reduce commitment to shared goals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto 1993). He further views persistence as a function of integration into the academic and social aspects of higher education. He argues that persistence is mediated by students' goals and commitment (Tinto, 2014).

Resilience theory (Ungar, 2006) is used to research implications of cultural and contextual understanding especially with minority groups who find themselves in a different context to that of their majority. Resilience is a multidimensional construct, the definition of which is *negotiated* between individuals and their communities, with tendencies to display both homogeneity and heterogeneity across culturally diverse research settings (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Ungar, 2004, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's systems theory suggests that the major challenge of the education system is to understand the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual learner and multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from the ecological system theory or systems change perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). The framework uses the concepts of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem to emphasize the importance of understanding bidirectional influences between individuals' development and their surrounding environmental contexts (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory takes into consideration the background and history of a person as well as his/her personal characteristics. The model acknowledges the environment as well as societal systems a person functions within and accounts for the reciprocal interaction between the person and his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The proposed study will draw strands from each of the above mentioned theoretical frames and concepts to explore the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education.

1.7. Explanation of terms

For the aim of this study the following term will be used

FGS – First generation students

HE – Higher Education

CHE- Council for higher education

LLL – Listen Live and Learn

PAR- Participatory Action Research

PAL – Participatory Action Learning techniques

NSFAS – National Students Finance Assistance Scheme

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

HESA – Higher Education South Africa

IEASA – International Education Association of South Africa

1.8 Outline of the study

Chapter 1 discusses the overview of the research. The overview includes an introduction and background and the motivation to the study. The description of the problem will include the aim of the study and provide the reader with the research question. I will also discuss the process of the research I will further discuss the research design and methodology by sharing the methods of data collection, data analysis and ethical issues. Finally I will discuss the theoretical framework that will be applied in the research.

Chapter 2 provides the literature review of the experiences of FGS in higher education. I will first look at definitions of FGS. I will then briefly describe the context of FGS in the context of widening participation debates in HE, especially in the post-Apartheid period. I will further discuss the background to the context where the research was conducted. This will be followed by an overview of the negative and positive educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS by reviewing the literature that refers to these experiences. A brief discussion of the theoretical frame and concepts that I will employ in the study will follow.

Chapter 3 will describe the research design and methodology. The research design includes the paradigm, design, methodology and context of the study. Approaches such as PAR and methods such as focus groups will be discussed in more detail.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and interpretation of research data and **Chapter 5** provides a discussion of the research findings, reflection on the research findings, recommendations and conclusion.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research constitutes an exploration of the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students (FGS) in higher education (HE). Much has been written about FGS in the international literature (Jehangir, 2010; Jehangir, Williams & Jeske, 2012; Sellar & Gale, 2011) but little work has focused on the concept of FGS in South Africa to explore experiences of access and success, as well as widening participation in higher education. Most of the literature in South Africa has focused on groups of historically disadvantaged students who were denied systematic access to higher education (Bangenji & Kapp, 2007; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012; Vincent & Idahosa, 2014). This literature review (and study) shifts the focus somewhat to use the lens of FGS, as this may be a useful lens from which to explore student experiences in a higher education context. Therefore the focus of this literature review is to review conceptual and empirical work that has been done on FGS' psychosocial and educational experiences in higher education contexts, globally and locally, in order to locate the current study. Specific focus will be placed on definitions of FGS, positive and negative experiences of FGS in higher education contexts, as well as conceptual and theoretical approaches to working with FGS.

2.2. Who are the first generation students?

In order to understand the experiences of FGS I will explore the concept in South Africa and other countries. The term 'first generation' in and of itself, does not have one set definition in academic discourse. It is a much debated and contested term locally and in other parts of the world. Locally, the notion of FGS intersects with debates on whether race alone can be a marker of disadvantage or whether other factors such as class or FGS status should also be considered as markers of disadvantage too (Heymann & Carolissen, 2009). Elsewhere, the notion of FGS often intersects with notions of "non-traditional" students. The question as to why some students should be regarded as traditional and others as non-traditional is a contentious one. This implies that some have the right, legitimacy and ability to engage with higher education while others reach that destination by default (Bruch, Jehangir, Lundell, Higbee, & Miksch, 2005).

Much research has been done on FGS in Australia (Australian Government, 2009; Burge, 2012; Gale & Tranter, 2011) the United Kingdom (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010; Thomas & Quinn, 2007) and the USA (Aries & Seider 2005, 2007; Karabel, 2005; Leathwood & Read, 2008).

In Australia and the United Kingdom FGS are referred to as non- traditional students. The term ‘non-traditional’ in the Australian context has come to refer to those students who are first in their family to attend higher education , are from a low socio-economic background, of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, or from a rural or remote area (Burge, 2012. p81). In the USA context, as in South Africa (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005), the term FGS is used to refer to students who are thought of as the first in their families to attend higher education. The latter implies that the parents or guardians could still have some higher education experience, even though they did not graduate (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Jehangir, 2010). Some scholars use the term FGS when referring to students who are in the minority in their higher education context, to women, to immigrants, or students whose parents have low incomes and students who are above the age of 24 who might attend classes part time because they are bread winners in their families (Clerehan, 2003; Johnson &Watson, 2004; Tinto, 2008).

2.2.1. Prevalence and proportion of students in HE that are FGS or non-traditional students?

Approximately 24% of students that were enrolled in the USA higher education institutions in 2007 were FGS (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Mehta, Newbold and O’Rourke (2011) reported that FGS account for 50% of student population. These students were disproportionately students of colour, likely to come from low-income households, and raised by single parents who are non-native English speakers (Choy, 2001; Yorke & Thomas, 2003).

2.2.2 Why do students whose parents have not attended HE, decide to attend HE?

Higher education, globally, is widely regarded as an enabler of social mobility to students, irrespective of their life circumstances (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). In this context, the main motivation for students to attend HE when their parents have not, concerns their aspiration towards social mobility and the perception that HE will provide them with a possibility of a steady middle class income and lifestyle. Jehangir (2010) and Thomas (2012) suggest that higher education is viewed by FGS as a chance to start afresh, and to assist their

aspiration to social mobility and financial sustainability that the FGS' parents may not have been afforded and this in turn will have a positive influence in their communities.

2.2.3 The nature of FGS experiences

The literature suggests overwhelmingly negative experiences of HE when discussing the experiences of FGS (Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010; Owens, Lacey, Rawls & Holbert-Quince, 2010; Univerferth, Johnson & Borgard, 2012).

In Wales, a Welsh Assembly Government report (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009) on student withdrawal from higher education identified FGS as part of the students who are at risk of withdrawal. The risk had a range of demographic factors as key indicators. Among these indicators were background factors, such as gender (Cook, 2004; Sanders, Sander & Mercer, 2009; Woodfield, Jessop & McMillan, 2006), entry qualifications (Cook, 2004), identity of the learner (Hockings, Cook & Bowl, 2007), family background prior higher education engagement (Cook, 2004) and social support (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie- Gauld, 2005; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; Thomas, 2002). Additional influential factors had to do with the choice of course and how that choice was made, including how the students had accessed higher education (Cook, 2004; Davies & Elias, 2003) (i.e. via a bridging or access programme, or extended degree programme or directly to main stream), confidence in choosing a career of choice (Cook, 2004) and knowledge of course/ institution prior to arrival (Cook, 2004; Davies & Elias, 2003). The level of preparedness of FGS for higher education was found to be influential (Cook, 2004; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Adapting to a different style of learning and teaching was perceived as presenting difficulties for FGS who may also be experiencing simultaneous changes in their social and domestic circumstances (Akhtar, 2014; Stanley & Manthorpe, 2002).

In South Africa, Bangeni and Kapp (2005) conducted a research on students who had identity dilemmas of experiencing a constantly changing environment that changed the construction of who they were as students, and they realised that the experiences of these students were the same as the students that are called FGS in other countries. These similarities are guided by the fact that FGS had to adapt to changes in their relationship to home and higher education during the course of their study. FGS constantly found themselves crossing new borders, and consequently experienced mediating multiple discourses and identities marked by ambivalence. Akhtar (2014) suggests that ambivalence is one of the key issues central to marginalised people's experience in contexts of dominance, such as higher education

institutions. He suggests that it is very difficult for marginalised people to “fit in” as fitting in often means having to give up aspects of their home culture and identities. However, if they do not do this, they may also be isolated in their new contexts.

Pym, Goodman and Patsika (2010) continue the argument highlighting the dilemmas that FGS face. They suggest that many FGS may lack a sense of belonging or ‘feeling at home’ at the institution that they attend because they are in the minority and not familiar with the culture and practices of those institutions. FGS are sometimes different in terms of race and class to the majority of the students and that in itself poses a fear of the unknown and may make them feel uncomfortable and they might shy away from active participation in activities that they are not familiar with in the institution (Akhtar, 2014).

Many of the non- first generation students come to higher education already having friends that they had met during their high school years. For many non-FGS the decision to attend certain higher education institution is made among friends (i.e collective decision) so there is some sense of community when they join the higher education institution (Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Smith et al., 2012; Voelkl, 2012). This community is a support system and a motivation to perform at a higher academic level (Thomas, 2012).

The paradoxes and dilemmas that FGS face are not restricted to South Africa but extend to the USA. Ancis et al. (2000) found that African American FGS students consistently reported more negative experiences compared with Asian Americans, Latino/a and White students. These FGS experienced greater racial-ethnic hostility, greater pressure to conform to stereotypes, and less equitable treatment by staff and teaching assistants. They were constantly exposed to multiple “micro-aggressions” (Akhtar, 2014; Pierce, 1978; Sue, 2007) which can be defined as ‘brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults towards people of colour’ (Sue, 2007, p. 177).

The students in this study are South African Black African students who attended high school in either rural areas or township schools.

2.3 Structural context and background to a discussion on FGS

In order to discuss the experiences of FGS in South African higher education, it is important to consider historical forces as well as current and future impacts on education in South Africa when considering FGS.

The South African education system has always been under scrutiny because of its separate education system during the Apartheid era that privileged whites and produced hierarchies of privilege for Coloureds, Indians and Blacks where Blacks received the bare minimum of resources in all spheres of life, including education (Rohleder, Swartz, Carolissen, Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2007). Today, Section 29 of the South African constitution guarantees citizens the right to basic education, including adult basic education and further education, while Section 29.2 (c) refers to the need to redress the results of past discriminatory laws and practices that institutionalised racial difference (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). These clauses provide a basis for the removal of discriminatory legislation and to replace it with progressive policies that have the potential to include all citizens (Cele & Menon, 2006; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012).

In 1994 the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was appointed to make proposals as to how the sector could be transformed. In 1996, the NCHE made several important proposals. These related to massification responsiveness of higher education to its social context and increased institutional co-operation (CHE, 2000). This report was followed by a White Paper (1997) and a Higher Education Act (1997) in which the principles of equity, redress, democratization, effectiveness and efficiency, were stressed. Out of these came key innovations such as the Institutional Forum, a structure established in each university, for the purpose of monitoring and advising university councils on the question of transformation (DOE, 1996). In 1999, a Council for Higher Education (CHE) was established to advise the Minister of Education on a broad range of issues relating to higher education. In April 2010 the Department of Higher Education and Training convened a national summit for higher education, at which the key issues of transformation were discussed (Pampallis, 2011). The most recent policy documentation that highlights the state of post-school education and provides policy guidelines in this field of transformation is the White Paper on post-school education (DHET, 2014). The post-school education report reviews the participation rates in universities and projects an increase from 17, 3% to 25% that implies from 937 000 students in 2011 to about 1, 6 million enrolments in 2013 (DHET, 2014). This is the reason Soudien (2011) argues that South Africa is an important site for understanding how universities are engaging with the issues of social inclusion and access. Similarly to most higher education systems elsewhere in the world, there is a vibrant discussion underway around transformation and what universities should be doing when functioning in an increasingly complex world (Letseka et al., 2010).

It is important to note however that a number of authors have pointed out that discrepancies exist between the availability of policy and the poor implementation of these progressive policies in everyday practices in HE institutions (Carrim, 2002; Cele & Menon, 2006; Sellar & Gale, 2011). In 2015, twenty one years after the birth of democracy in South Africa, the country is still facing the challenge of redressing past inequalities because higher education institutions still perform a gate-keeping function in aspects of social, cultural and economic development (Essack & Quayle, 2007). Some of the major challenges that impact specifically on FGS will be outlined below.

South Africa has a huge need for human development within the global economy and higher education institutions can be instrumental in producing highly skilled graduates that can play a significant role in the economy of our country and the world. South African HE is however plagued by questions as to how this could be done without continuing to reproduce unearned advantages to historically advantaged groups and perpetuating discrimination of disadvantaged groups. In this context equity, access and inclusion were significant questions to consider during the reform of SA higher education (CHE, 2000).

An extensive system of universities for differently classified population groups (Indians, Coloureds and Blacks) was created historically and even though mergers between some historically Black and historically White higher education institutions were incorporated post 1994, Bozalek and Boughey (2011) have commented on structural ways in which some institutions are still advantaged (HAIs) and others are disadvantaged (HDI). This has an impact on FGS because even though all FGS are not Black, the FGS population is disproportionately racially skewed in South Africa, as in the USA (Tate et al., 2015).

One of the impacts of the history of separate HE institutions with differential resources is that even though student demographics have increased significantly for Black students, there are larger proportions of Black students at HDIs than at HAIs (Department of Higher Education and Training Green Paper, 2013). The University of Cape Town's student enrolments showed that between 2009 and 2013 there was a 22, 3% growth in Black students that were accepted to study at the institution (www.uct.ac.za). The strategic focus of Stellenbosch University is to increase the Black student population to 34% in 2016. In 2013 28, 3% of the registered students were Black students (www.sun.ac.za).

There is furthermore little significant change in staff demographics especially at professorial levels, particularly at research focused HAIs. In one of the HAI in the Western Cape only 3, 5% of all professors are Black whereas 86 % are White. This trend has left some HDI to remain predominantly White institutions, especially in terms of staff complement, in spite of the fact that most of the transformation practices during the post-Apartheid period were meant to diversify student and staff demographics at all institutions (International Education Association of South Africa [IEASA], 2009).

2.4. Background to research context

The Western Cape has four major higher education institutions. Two of these are research intensive HAIs and these institutions are also the top two universities in the country. One historically advantaged institution (HAI) is a university that is situated in the southern suburbs of Cape Town and attracts a racially diverse student group, even though most of their permanent staff, especially at senior level, is White and male. The second university, a historically disadvantaged institution (HDI), is located in the northern suburbs of Bellville and attracts predominantly Black (African, Coloured and Indian) students with a small number of white students registering each year. It is also the university that attracts the largest population of poor students in the country (Letseka & Breier, 2010; Rohleder, et al., 2007). The third is a university of technology that has campuses in both the city and the northern suburbs of Cape Town. This institution attracts mostly African (Black, Coloured and Indian) students and some White students (Letseka & Breier, 2010). The fourth university is located in the Cape Winelands. This institution is a dual medium (English and Afrikaans) HAI, and attracts predominantly White Afrikaans speaking students (Rohleder, et al., 2007). Over the last 5 years more White and Black English speaking students have enrolled at the institution. The university is making an effort to change the demographics of its student body. In 1990 this university had 762 Black students (as generic for Blacks, Coloured and Indians) enrolled, constituting 5.4% of the entire student body. In 2012 there were 9 221(25, 9%) Black students that were enrolled and this number has increased to 28,3% in 2013 (www.sun.ac.za).

The focus of my research is to explore the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education. The setting is one of the higher education institutions described above. It is an HAI which, like all HAI's during the South African apartheid era, accepted only White Afrikaans speaking students. The legacy still remains in this university today with the student population being predominantly White and Afrikaans speaking and

currently 28, 3% of the students are considered to be African, Indian or Coloured. This implies that the language demographics within the university are changing.

Even though this university had attracted some Black (African, Indian and Coloured) students in the past, it has now embarked on a more aggressive recruitment drive since 2010 to increase the number of Black students and staff. Many of the newly recruited students, often but not exclusively, come from disadvantaged, rural and semi-rural areas and arrive with a list of unique challenges with which the institution may not always be equipped to deal (Dunn, 2011). They also arrive with experiential strengths that are at times not recognized (Kiguwa, 2014). This particular group of students is thus sometimes not appropriately prepared for the challenges of living far from their homes and cultures which they are familiar with. On the other hand the university and its staff may not be ideally equipped to support the students in the manner they require (Dunn, 2011).

It is within this current higher education context of increasing diversification and access that many HAI, similar to international universities, are dealing with the challenges and strengths of FGS. It is therefore important to consider the literature that discusses the experiences of FGS.

2.5. Experiences of first generation students in higher education

In this part of the research I will look at how literature has explored the educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in higher education. I will separate the negative experiences from the positive experiences. In the first section on FGS' negative experiences, I will focus specifically on language, teaching and learning, lecture halls as spaces of teaching and learning and residences.

2.5.1 Negative educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education

I will now discuss what the literature mentions about negative experiences that FGS encounter in higher education institutions. This part will focus on the language, teaching and learning and lecture hall experience.

2.5.1.1 Language, teaching and learning

Language is an important component to consider in the context of FGS experiences in HE and has been central to the debate on access abroad and in South African higher education.

2.5.1.1.1 Language and FGS in HE

Nine Indigenous African languages in South Africa gained official recognition after the democratic status of the country in 1994, alongside Afrikaans and English that had always had official status. The granting of this official status to all indigenous languages, and not Afrikaans or English only provided learners with an option to be taught in their mother tongue within formal education after the demise of apartheid (Mgqwashu, 2011). Even though these languages have been granted official status it seems that HEI in South Africa have difficulty in translating knowledge and skills in the curriculum through these languages. In most HEIs in South Africa, English is used exclusively as a language of teaching and learning. In other institutions, including historically Afrikaans institutions, dual medium English and Afrikaans is favoured in academic contexts. Few institutions are beginning to introduce regional indigenous languages, but minimally so.

This issue is however complex, as the drive for internationalisation and globalisation in higher education tends to foreground English as the lingua franca (i.e. a language that is systematically used to make communication possible between persons who are not sharing a native language). Students and staff at South African universities, irrespective of their home languages are strongly encouraged to use English as a language of teaching and learning because most cutting edge texts and journal publications, are available only in English and in some instances, European languages, such as German, Spanish or French.

The drive towards establishing a lingua franca has implications on not only a political level but also on deep personal levels. This includes but is not limited to issues of self-concept, cognitive symmetry between mother tongue and language of teaching and learning, as well as failure, for students. Norton (2000, p. 5) argues that language is not only about exchanging information but that ‘a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different points in time, through language. A person gains access to or is denied access to powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak’. FGS then find themselves with a challenge of continuously adapting to the languages of learning and teaching chosen by the specific institution where they choose to study.

There are also implications for some FGS students in terms of cognitive skills. Mqgwashu (2011) points out that the learning of cognitive skills is best acquired in the mother tongue. For that reason teaching and learning becomes symmetrical (balanced) when conducted in students' mother tongue. In the case of many Black FGS in South Africa, there is asymmetry (unevenness) between their own mother tongue and the language of teaching and learning. Students who speak English and Afrikaans as first languages typically experience epistemological access since primary education. Throughout their education they have the opportunity to use 'the language they know from their parents' (Prah, 2002), yet FGS have to negotiate constantly between their home language and languages which are not typically their first languages, but that are used as medium of instruction.

Even though language is not the only contributing factor to the high failure rate of Black African students in HE, Scott et al. (2007, 2) suggests that 'Black students do worse than White students in most disciplinary fields and African students performed worst of all'. It is rather simplistic to associate the high dropout and failure rate of African students only with the fact that the language of teaching and learning is not their mother tongue. It can be argued that there are other psychological, social and economic factors that could be responsible for this state of affairs, such as individual student's motivation to study, family and cultural backgrounds, both of which are intertwined with such issues as economic status and lack of opportunities for the enhancement of 'school literacies' in their home and community environments.

2.5.1.1.2. Teaching and learning and FGS in HE

Universities have always been international institutions and have attracted students from around the world to study at these institutions. However, the diverse knowledge brought by FGS to higher education is seldom utilised or scaffold to traditional HE learning methods and contents (Dunn, 2011; Leibowitz, 2009). Thomas (2002, p. 1) agrees that FGS' 'virtual schoolbag' is not unpacked, their lack of fit with the culturally arbitrary selections that are valued by the institution become individualised and internalised as 'failure'. Similarly, other authors argue that teaching and learning principles are often unexamined for the extent to which they are culturally mediated (Amstutz, 1999; Haigh, 2008; Turner & Robson, 2008; Teekens, 2000) and may lead to isolation and marginalisation that FGS may face on campuses. With regards to concerns about isolation among FGS on campus, Jehangir (2010) suggests that isolation is often reinforced by a curriculum and pedagogy that does little to

reflect their worldviews. Many FGS students find it difficult to approach academic members of staff, but they value being able to ask for clarification, guidance and feedback (Akhtar, 2014). Students who feel isolated tend to have a less good relationship with academic members of staff and are more likely to think about leaving (Thomas, 2012). Good relationships are based on informal relationships that recognise students as individuals and value their contributions. Isolation is also enhanced when effective and successfully negotiated use of a language that is understood by all who participate in the teaching and learning process, can take place. However, FGS often find themselves on the boundaries of the learning process because their own languages differ from the dominant institutional linguistic preferences (Tinto, 2006, 2007).

FGS do not only experience challenges regarding language but may also feel excluded as a result of the lecture hall experience

2.5.1.2 FGS in lecture halls as spaces of teaching and learning

Lecture halls as learning spaces can become places where all students' collective experiences are heard and integrated into teaching and learning but unequal power differentials in classrooms may silence FGS, allowing only dominant powerful voices to be heard (Akhtar, 2014; Bengesai, 2011). It is therefore important that power is minimised in the educational context, so that students may be given an opportunity to see themselves as equals (Tinto, 2006/2007). They may then be in a better position to learn without fear of intimidation or ridicule (Akhtar, 2014; Bengesai, 2011). There are many ways in which teaching and learning may be made more equal within contexts of diversity.

Paideya (2011) affirms Vygotsky's (1978) work on the cognition principle that knowledge is first socially constructed and then internalized. This understanding suggests that the creation of learning spaces involves more than controlling the external conditions to enhance learning. It also involves mediating the power asymmetries between students and lecturers that characterise educational practice (Akhtar, 2014). Wenger (2000) also suggests that individuals in learning situations provide scaffolding for each other to acquire the skills and knowledge for participation. If there are assumptions within the context of teaching and learning, that power asymmetries do not exist between lecturers and students as well as between different groups of students, marginalised students' self-esteem and confidence may be affected. This may lead them to participate minimally in lecture spaces (Akhtar, 2014;

Bengesai, 2011). It is therefore important that curriculum design and lecture hall experiences take issues of diversity into account when designing the curriculum (Leibowitz et al., 2012).

Many FGS are encouraged to live in residence on campuses but institutional cultures of dominance within these residences may impact negatively on FGS.

2.5.1.3 FGS and student residence experiences

Previous research suggests that living in student residence that higher education institutions offer to students to be closer to the campus, promotes a variety of desirable academic outcomes by enhancing student involvement and engagement with the institutions (Eccles & Wang, 2012; Peck et al., 2008). Student housing on campuses are important resources because higher education institutions in South Africa tend to be located far from where the majority of students live (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). Research also documented that students living on campus are more likely than those living off campus to interact with staff, participate in extracurricular activities, use institutional resources and that these activities are beneficial to students (Astin 1984; Nelson, Dickson & Hargie, 2003). Yet by focusing only on the general academic effects of student residence, past research ignores the possibility that different groups of students are differentially affected by their living environments in the student residences. Many students, including FGS, disengage from the very institution entrusted with fostering their academic development (Hu, 2002; Robertson, 2014).

Student residences are primarily social settings in which students encounter more opportunities for social rather than academic involvement. Social involvement is an important factor in the development of higher education students but very unlikely to improve academic performance especially when students may be exposed to a variety of potentially distracting social activities such as alcohol use (Clapp, 2011; Pascarella et al., 1991; Valliant & Scanlan, 1996). When FGS join historically advantaged institutions they encounter a socially constructed context within student residences where there are deeply entrenched social cultures that might not necessarily be advantageous to people who are not familiar with the culture (Akhtar, 2014). These institutions may also fail to pick up the racial tensions that become rife in student residences (Baber, 2012; Prime, 2001) such as whose music preferences are privileged in social encounters. Residences serve as a prime, concentrated area in which symbols, practices, and values can create both inclusive and discriminatory institutional cultures (Robertson, 2014).

This has resulted in higher education institutions experiencing a contemporary crisis, as predominantly White higher education institutions are less able to recruit and retain African students with many of them being FGS (Harmon, 2012; Jones & Jackson, 2003; Roach, 2001).

2.5.2 Positive educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education

FGS do not only have negative experiences of higher education. There are positive experiences that encourage them to continue with their studies until they graduate. These range from the support they receive when they try to access higher education institutions, the role of family and the financial assistance that helps them to pay for their tuition fees and lodging.

2.5.2.1 Access to higher education institutions

In many countries, national policies were adopted to extend access to higher education. These policies have changed the nature and needs of incoming students (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012).

On 7 January 2010 the South African higher education system committed to facilitate increased access to the 23 South African universities and to ensure that higher education remains affordable for most individuals and families (HESA, 2010). Some institutions immediately put processes in place to make provision for financial assistance to academically deserving but needy students from their own budgets (CHE, 2010). FGS became the beneficiaries of this agreement between higher education institutions and South African higher education system because in the past they didn't have the opportunity to join, especially the HAI because of the stringent selection criteria that was used in accepting students to those institutions (HESA, 2010; CHE, 2010). FGS now contribute to the changing demographics of the student body in higher education and are among the fast growing segments of the undergraduate student population (Burke, 2012; Jehangir, 2010) in the context of the widening participation agenda in HE.

In South Africa there has been a noticeable increase in the proportion of African students enrolling in higher education from 40% in 1993 to 65 % in 2002 at institutions that had previously been exclusively White. While the African students were expected to adapt to the dominant European culture of the White campuses, their presence on campus and their

specific needs had an impact in changing the campus culture (CHE, 2010). This resulted in many FGS and Black students to complete their degrees successfully.

2.5.2.2. Financial assistance

One of the biggest challenges for many FGS who consider higher education is the availability of financial assistance. FGS typically come from families who have low income or no income to support their families, and HE may not be considered to be a basic need (Breier, 2010; Mangan et al. 2010). Poor financial backing puts a lot of strain on a student who wishes to pursue higher education and often forces them to turn to student financial aid and loans. It is only through acquiring grants or student loans that FGS may overcome the financial barrier intertwined with higher education attendance (Li, 2007). The expensive cost of higher education include tuition fees, lodging, meals, books and learning materials, transportation fees and other necessities (Breier, 2010; Letseka & Breier, 2008; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012).

There are many initiatives for student financial assistance but I will focus briefly on NSFAS as all the students interviewed in this study would not have been able to pursue higher education without assistance from the NSFAS scheme. In 1991 the South African government established the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to assist students from poor backgrounds who would like to pursue higher education. According to the NSFAS website, loans are offered to cover students' tertiary-level expenses. Up to 40% of the loan may be converted into a bursary, depending on the year-end results, which are re-evaluated every year after the first year of higher education study. This opened paths for some formerly excluded students to enter the higher education arena.

All South African students have the freedom to choose which higher education institution they wish to attend, but higher education institutions in South Africa tend to be located far from where the majority of students live. Public transport is expensive and often unsafe, and many students who have to commute to university often live in accommodation that is not conducive to studying. These factors necessitate accommodating students in residences, but until 2009, student accommodation was not subsidised by the state. There have been students whose funds have been depleted by the end of their first semesters, and who have been forced out of the higher education system as a result (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012).

In 2009 NSFAS was spending R2.5 billion on 140,000 students. Thus loans and bursaries have become indispensable for funding tertiary-level education in South Africa. For FGS,

NSFAS became a means to an end and gave them opportunities that were otherwise not possible.

2.5.3 Coping strategies

In the light of the backgrounds that many FGS come from, it is important to explore how they cope with the challenges they face in higher education institutions and complete their studies. I am now going to discuss the coping strategies they use to survive and succeed in their studies. These will include the individual student, family support and peer support. Family, peer and community ecologies exert a powerful influence on the student's educational opportunities and interests as well as their aspirations for the future (Lee, 2012; Ream & Rumberg 2008; Skinner & Pitzer 2012; Tate, 2012; Wylie & Hodgen, 2012).

2.5.3.1 The individual (i.e. student)

For FGS, aspiring to be a higher education student is a dream and the actual process of being a higher education student becomes a reality that needs resilience and motivation. Resilience may be described as a constellation of characteristics displayed by children that are born and raised in disadvantaged circumstances (Ungar, 2006). These children's aspiration for success in higher education come from the reality they have experienced within their families, communities and schooling system. These experiences have awakened a hunger for something different and a drive to strive to be successful against all odds. Both Greene (2002) and Luthar (2003) agree that resilience occurs in the presence of adversity. Scholars have found that these students rely heavily upon self-motivation, self-efficacy, and an internalized locus of control to persist (Naumann, Bandalos & Gutkin, 2003).

2.5.3.2. Family support

Family support in children's higher education pursuits are important and ongoing but may be different for FGS and non-FGS. Research in different fields of study has found that parents empower their children through giving them advice about their career and study plans and help them to choose a particular course of study strategically or arrange for them to participate in a work placement or internship (Jehangir et al., 2012). Non- first generation students' parents easily influence their children through their own knowledge of the higher education context. But when these non-first generation middle class parents are not able to do this themselves, if they are not graduates, they arrange, through the school system for their children to have access to opportunities where they are schooled in navigating the higher education system (Delpit, 2012) or in social networks of friends and family that are familiar

with higher education processes. When this happens, it is more likely that there will be a good match between the students' desired educational and occupational aspirations and their ability to devise suitable strategies to achieve them, i.e. there is an aligned ambition between parents, higher education institution and students.

Literature indicates that students' choice to go to university is influenced more by their parents' level of education and socio-economic status than the students' academic performance (Lang, 2009). Students with parents who can navigate the uncharted territory that higher education holds have an advantage that is difficult for FGS whose parents are not familiar with the processes of higher education institutions. Non- first generation students' parents are mostly familiar with higher education because they themselves were once higher education students and have access to resources such as schools and other networks that may offer important information regarding university processes.

Some authors, as highlighted in the literature review above, focus on deficits that FGS hold in relation to parental power paving their children's way in HE. Yosso (2005) argues that some FGS parents play a significant role in their children's' lives by transferring their own aspirational capital to motivate FGS to perform well in higher education. Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structural inequality. Aspirational capital helps many FGS to transcend thinking that they are condemned to their current circumstances and motivates them to see alternatives beyond their circumstances. It helps them to stay positive as they now view education as the solution to breaking the cycle of poverty within their homes and communities. One of the challenges that FGS grapple with is to stay positive in an educational environment when they know that their parents could lose their job. Staying at university is also more difficult for FGS when their parents are unemployed and they may feel that they are being selfish in neglecting family responsibility by pursuing an education instead of working and contributing to family income (Wiggins, 2011).

It is vital for FGS to have the family support as this becomes the only real support that helps them to remember and hold on to who they are and what they stand for. They realise that their success is crucial for the family's survival and standing within the communities where they come from. This is at times a challenge as family expectations place enormous pressure on FGS (Jehangir, 2010).

2.5.3.3 Peer support

When students join higher education institutions, they either come with their friends or they come because of bursary obligations or because their families have experience of that particular higher education institution. Whatever the circumstances higher education is a huge space for any student to cope without the support of other students.

Peer support is important to FGS as it becomes the pillar to hold onto when the world of higher education becomes challenging especially when the family members have no experience of the context and no means of supporting them in the way that matters for higher education. It is then among peers that realities can be openly discussed and resolved.

Peer interaction provides learners with a greater sense of belonging and support which may have a positive impact on student retention and learning achievements (Eames & Steward, 2008; Huijser & Kimmins, 2008). However, because FGS are often the only ones from their high school classes who choose to go to university and especially an HAI, they have less involvement with student acquaintances, at least during their first year of study (Lundberg, et al., 2007). Less peer interaction may have a negative impact on their learning (Huijser & Kimmins, 2008) because peer interaction engages students more deeply in the higher education experience and consequently enhances the student's learning (Astin, 1993). Previous studies into peer support suggest that formally organized activities among peers have social, economic and practical benefits for students who come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds like FGS (Egerton, 2002; Vernon & Foster, 2002).

2.6 Theoretical approaches used to research the experiences of first generation students

There are many major theoretical approaches that have been used in research that involves FGS. These theories include Bourdieu's social and cultural capital, (Bourdieu, 1986), Yosso's social and aspirational learning theories (Yosso, 2005), resilience theory (Luthar, 2003; Ungar, 2008) and Bronfenbrenner's system's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). I will briefly describe each of these theories as I locate my study theoretically by drawing on various strands from these theories.

2.6.1 Bourdieu's social and cultural capital

Bourdieu (1997) used a social and cultural theoretical framework to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes. He suggested that young people from educated middle class families acquire cultural capital from their parents

in a reflexive manner through observing, and interacting with the older generation which ultimately enables them to succeed as adults.

Cultural capital refers to a general familiarity with the traditions and norms necessary to be successful at an institution of higher education (Lundberg, et al., 2007). This familiarity is developed and passed on from interactions with others. In most instances, cultural capital would be learned from parents and/or peers who are attending or have successfully completed higher education. FGS, by definition, do not have parents/guardians who have knowledge of higher education that they can pass on to their children, and are therefore likely have less cultural capital than non-first generation students. FGS, who do not have this 'cultural capital,' do not understand the importance of involvement in all the activities that are part of higher education life, and then they struggle to adjust to higher education. The end result is that FGS earn lower grades and are less socially satisfied. Other studies have shown that they have lower graduation rates (Mehta, Newbold & O'Rourke, 2011). However, Yosso (2005) challenges Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as something that only the middle and upper middle classes possess.

2.6.2 Yosso's cultural wealth theory

Yosso (2005) used the concept of aspirational capital to conceptualize community cultural wealth as central to critical race theory (CRT). CRT focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged, especially in institutions dominated by cultures of whiteness and patriarchy. Yosso believes that the success of non-first generation students cannot only be attributed to their social and cultural capital as Bourdieu indicates. The challenge is that the capital that the FGS bring to the higher education context is hardly ever integrated into the curriculum or social activities of some higher education institutions and this makes the FGS to believe that their culture does not count in higher education and forces them to integrate into a culture that is not necessarily their own.

Kiguwa (2014) agrees with Yosso and affirms that educational institutions in South Africa post 1994 reflect some cultural practices and expressions of experience that highlight cultural dynamics of power and these sometimes determine dominant experiences in higher education contexts. According to Jansen (2004), the final bridge to cross in order to achieve social integration at formerly-white higher education institutions in South Africa is to create an

inclusive institutional culture, which he describes as, “the way we do things around here”, in which students from diverse backgrounds “feel at home” (p. 122).

The question therefore has been asked how students cope given oppressive structural context and resilience theory has attempted to explain apparent coping.

2.6.3 Resilience Theory

Masten (2001) and Werner (1989) define resilience as positive adaptation despite adversity. They both agree that positive outlook can be used as a constructive view of adversity with the emphasis being perseverance, determination, ability to bounce back from adversity and to take a step back, reappraise a situation and plan a way forward (Walker, Holling, Carpenter & Kinzig, 2004). Resilience may be misconstrued as referring to individual characteristics only. However, resilience is also evident in interpersonal and community ecologies (Luthar, 2003; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005). This means that the principle of adaptation in challenging circumstances implies that individuals and systems must cope and adapt to changing conditions within an eco-system.

Resilience theory has been used to research the experiences of people who come from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds who have to deal with challenges in either their places of employment or in educational contexts (Garnezy, 1991; Goldstein & Brooks, 2006; Luthar et. al., 2000; Rutter, 2001). People like FGS often have to demonstrate competence and coping despite continuous or cumulative adversity in order to be successful. O’Doherty, Wright and Masten (2006) agree that resilience tends to manifest in the reciprocal interplay of individuals in relationships and environments especially families and neighbourhoods, and specific contexts like educational institutions allowing greater scope for recognising the influence of cultural and social dimensions. The idea of ecologies, referred to in resilience theory is centrally located within Bronfenbrenner’s theory.

2.6.4 Bronfenbrenner’s Systems theory

Bronfenbrenner’s systems theory uses the concepts of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem to emphasize the importance of understanding bidirectional influences between individuals’ development and their surrounding environmental contexts (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010).

Bronfenbrenner’s theory suggests that the major challenge of the education system is to understand the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the

individual learner and multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from the ecological system theory or systems change perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory takes into consideration the background and history of a person as well as his/her personal characteristics. The model acknowledges the environment as well as societal systems a person functions within and accounts for the reciprocal interaction between the person and his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological model after recognizing that the individual-contextual relationship was overlooked in other theories of human development, which were largely focused on either the individual or the context of development (e.g., the environment).

The **microsystem** is the innermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's model. This context is closest to an individual and encompasses interpersonal relationships and direct interactions with immediate surroundings. For example, family members and a child's school are considered part of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1998).

The **mesosystem** refers to the relationships that develop and exist between the microsystems i.e. a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. An example of a mesosystem is a learner who comes from an unsupportive home environment may not receive the emotional support she/he requires, thus placing that learner at risk of developing possible barriers to learning. The same learner might have an attentive caring teacher who is able to provide a positive support that can boost the self-esteem of the learner. The home and school environment complement each other for the benefit of the learner (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2010).

The **exosystem** does not directly affect individuals but encompasses aspects of structures within the microsystem. For example, financial difficulties within the family of origin and parental job loss, may affect a child, but do not involve the child directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The **macrosystem** is the outermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's model. This system includes social or cultural ideologies and beliefs that affect an individual's environment. For example, laws may be incorporated into the macrosystem. The systems theory will focus mainly on the experiences that might facilitate or hinder the FGS's progress in higher education (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Bronfenbrenner's systems model is an appropriate model to study the experiences of the first generation students as it allows the examination of the reciprocal and dynamic interactions between the student and the campus environment (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Alford (2000) conducted a study to understand the formation of relationships by African students at urban commuter colleges in the North Atlantic region of the US. He found Bronfenbrenner's system's theory useful to understand the experiences including the problems these students faced in adapting to new environments.

Lourens (2013) conducted a study to understand the experiences of educationally disadvantaged students at a Western Cape university and used Bronfenbrenner's system's theory to understand the perceptions of students who participate in higher education from a point of disadvantage.

2.7 Conclusion

This research will draw on the theoretical frameworks that have been mentioned above because they capture and explore the experiences of FGS in higher education. The literature review has touched on important issues that impact on the experiences of the FGS and the aspects that cause hindrances in the success of the FGS in higher education. It also touches on issues that motivate them to stay on adapt and succeed in the end.

Chapter 3

Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I am going to discuss the research design and methodology that was used to answer the following research question: What are the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education? The research design and methodology is discussed within the research paradigm which I considered most suitable for the question that I investigated.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which give rise to a particular world-view. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe a paradigm as “the net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises” (p.19). Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher and what will be studied. Epistemology therefore looks at how one knows reality, the method for knowing the nature of reality, or how one comes to know reality. It assumes a relationship between the knower and the known (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In this research I wish to know (a version of) reality by exploring how the participants experience the educational and psychosocial aspects of higher education. It is an attempt to see how they have constructed their reality by asking them to share their experiences by talking about it.

Ontology refers to the nature and form of reality that will be studied. It is assumed that reality is about the deeper meanings of social actions, and how these are interpreted, understood and appreciated by individuals and groups. I wish to explore how these meanings have been shaped over time and history by a series of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors and then crystallised into a series of structures that are now taken as real (Niewenhuis, in Maree, 2012) while methodology refers to the research process applied in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 2006). In this study the participants were FGS who joined a HAI in South Africa.

In the context of this research, the interpretative paradigm was used to investigate the problem because it places emphasis on meaning and experiential knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kidder & Fine, 1997; Patton, 2002). This paradigm places the central concern

on the participants and allows the researcher to obtain information from participants about their subjective worlds and their experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Silverman, 2004). The focus of this paradigm is more on language, communication, subjective human experiences and the meaning that people make of their experiences in their historical, social, cultural and political contexts.

The interpretative paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and there is no single observable reality. There are rather multiple realities, or interpretations of a single event. This paradigm resonates with the intentions of the researcher because to understand people's experiences one needs to use language and communication. This implies that when researchers choose this paradigm they do not present one reality as the truth but they co-construct it along with participants.

Creswell (2007) suggests that constructivism and interpretivism can sometimes be used interchangeably. I adopted an interpretative paradigm and interacted with the participants throughout the research process, to ensure that I was producing knowledge and perspectives that reasonably and accurately reflected the participant's reality (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

3.3. Research design

There are different designs attached to qualitative research such as ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study designs (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006). I chose to conduct my research as a case study.

I chose the case study method to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events (Stake, 2006). A case study is defined by the fact that it is a bounded system (Merriam, 1998) and that it does not necessarily mean that one site only is studied (Schumacher & McMillan, 1989). Yin (1994) further explains that a case study is not a representative sample and in doing a case study aim is to expand theories and count frequencies. Generally, case study designs are used to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation or context and its meaning to those who are involved. To establish meaning through case studies, multiple perspectives are typically taken into account to understand the influence of multilevel social systems on participants' perspectives and behaviours (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The researcher chose the case study design because it fitted well with the intended research of exploring the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education. This case was unique to the participants who were

first generation students (FGS) in a unique context of a historically advantaged higher education institution (HAI).

3.4 Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, focusing on interpretive research. Qualitative research involves the close study of everyday life in diverse social contexts. It describes and analyses both the processes through which social realities are constructed and the social relationships that connect people. It is in these processes that organizations, institutions, culture and society emerge and are sustained (Barbour, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

In this qualitative research study I was interested in understanding the meaning that people had constructed, that is, how they made sense of their world and the experiences they had of higher education (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). This research was conducted with an assumption that meaning would be embedded in the participant's experiences and that the meaning would then be mediated through the researcher's own perception (Merriam, 1998, 2009) in conjunction with member checking. Member-checking is a process whereby the researcher checks back with participants if her interpretations are accurate representations of their stories (Merriam, 2009).

3.5. Context of the study

The context of this research was a university in the Western Cape region of South Africa. This university is a historically advantaged, Afrikaans research intensive institution. This university has been involved in numerous debates about its language policy that dealt largely with the perception that it remains exclusionary because of its requirement that students entering the university should be able to be conversant in Afrikaans, as well as English. The language policy at this university has gone through many revisions over the last few years and it is beyond the scope of this study to describe these reforms in detail. What is important to note is that in 2013 the university accepted 16% African Black students to the university in a policy context where dual medium (Afrikaans and English) teaching and learning opportunities have been established in all faculties.

The participants that were requested to take part in this research were all Black African FGS. These students accessed the current university (where the research was being conducted) via a bridging programme that operates within the university. The bridging programme is a one

year programme that offers students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds an opportunity to improve their National Senior Certificate marks in Mathematics, Physical Sciences or Accounting. Once their marks have improved the students can apply to the same university for study towards a degree. The university accepted these students into the faculties for which they qualified to study (students have a choice of a career option they wish to follow).

3.6. Research Method

This research was conducted within a qualitative research framework. The researcher intended to use three methods of data collection, namely a focus group, research journals and individual semi-structured interviews. The use of multiple methods in qualitative research is considered important as it lends validity and reliability to qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell, (2013) refers to validity as “common sense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation or other sort of account” (p.122).

3.6.1. Population

I selected the participants because I thought that they would be able to give me access to an experience that I wished to understand (Henning et al., 2005). The initial study population was twelve students but because of difficulties in communication with the four participants that were no longer at the university, I settled for the eight participants that were still busy with their studies at the institution where the research took place. Table 1 below provides more information on the participants’ names, gender, background, field and year of study during the time that the research was conducted. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 3. 1

Summary of the Research Participants

Name	Gender	Background	Field of study	Year of study
Lwandile	M	Rural Eastern Cape	Economic and Management Science	2 nd year of undergraduate degree
Koli	M	Tshwane (township)	Natural Sciences	Final year of undergraduate degree
Yanga	F	Western Cape (informal settlement)	Economic management Sciences	Final year of an undergraduate degree
Vivi	F	Eastern Cape (township)	Health Sciences	Final year of postgraduate studies
Pam	F	Gauteng (township)	Health Sciences	Final year of an undergraduate degree
Sive	F	Western Cape (township)	Economic Management Sciences	Final year of an undergraduate degree
Bukelwa	F	Limpopo rural area (rural area)	AgriScience	Finished undergraduate degree awaiting graduation
Andiswa	F	Western Cape (Informal settlement area)	Health Sciences	1 st year of postgraduate degree

3.6.2 Sampling of participants

I chose purposive sampling because the underlying assumptions inherent in purposive sampling are that a few cases studied in depth yield many insights about a specific topic (Mc Millan & Schumacker, 2001; Patton, 2002). This type of sampling was appropriate because it relied on selecting information-rich interviewees or focus group participants who could highlight the area being researched (Barbour, 2001; De Vos, et al., 2011).

The twelve selected participants had joined the bridging programme at the university to improve their Mathematics, Physical Science or Accounting marks. At the end of their

bridging year they rewrote their National Senior Certificate and obtained better marks that gave them a better opportunity of acceptance in higher education. They re-applied to the same university with the new marks and were selected to highly selective programmes like Health Sciences, Engineering, AgriScience and Economic Management Sciences. The actual number of participants was reduced to eight because of communication challenges with the four students that had been part of the bridging programme but had left the institution.

The selected group (eight participants) was made up of participants who were in various years of study. The participants were Black African students who came from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They were selected because they had a common element of being FGS.

3.7 Methods of data collection

I intended to use three methods of collecting data. These were:

1. Focus groups
2. Individual interviews
3. Research journals

These methods will be described, in turn.

3.7.1 Focus group interview

Focus groups are popular in social research. They should not be mistaken for group interviews because focus groups discussions focus on the interaction between participants and the researcher taking a less active role in directing the discussion. The value of focus groups lies in their capacity to highlight group processes and the way in which meanings and even action plans are developed are refined through interaction (Bloor et al., 2001). Focus groups are interviews conducted with a small group of people, all at one time to explore ideas on a particular topic. The goal of a focus group is to uncover additional information through participants' exchange of ideas (James, Milenkiewicz, Bucknam, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

The first exercise of the focus group was conducted using participatory action learning (PAL) techniques such as drawing community maps and rivers of life to stimulate active discussion among participants in the group.

PAL techniques rely on concrete, visual and colourful methods, activities and material based on the belief that visualisation acts as a stimulus for participation. The techniques include mapping, modelling, diagramming and ranking exercises which encourage participation that does not depend on a specific level of literacy (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Chambers 2003; Shah, 1995). PAL facilitates a process of self-reflection and critical awareness of the participants' social reality and their capacity to transform it by their conscious action (Daniels & Damons, 2011). I chose this design because it was a useful method to bring marginalised groups (i.e. FGS) together and allow them a forum to share and discuss their experiences without the fear of being labelled or judged for airing their views. I also chose this technique to give the participants a space where they could identify with the experiences that other FGS were going through.

PAL and PAR techniques have typically been used with marginalised populations that have low literacy levels (Brown & Strega, 2005; Pots & Brown, 2005; Krige & Roberts, 2007) as well as populations marginalised by age such as children (Alexander et al., in Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007) and the elderly (Sanderson et. al., in Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). It has also been used in research in higher education, albeit minimally (Bozalek et al., 2010; Bozalek, 2011; Daniels & Damons, 2011).

3.7.2. Procedure of the focus group session

Participants were first requested to draw a map of their communities. The emphasis was on the participants indicating what they see as **strengths** in their communities and what they see as challenges and would like to **change** within their communities. The focus of this exercise was to establish and share with each other where the participants came from, how they saw themselves and in relation to their communities. After all the participants had finished drawing their community maps they shared their stories with fellow focus group members in this format:

- a. They described what they had drawn and what their drawings said about their communities.
- b. They then described the challenges that face their communities and how can these be turned around to benefit the community.

During the second session participants were requested to draw the 'rivers of their lives'.

- a. During this exercise all the participants were encouraged to reflect on the journeys of their educational lives reflecting on the ebbs and flows of their experiences up till the point when the research was conducted.

Again participants shared their drawings with the rest of the group indicating;

- a. What each drawing, colour and building in their drawings meant for them

This exercise encouraged the participants to reflect on the journeys of their lives. When they conducted an introspection of where they came from, along with where they would like to be, they became conscious of the distance they had travelled and how much was yet to be done before they achieved their objectives. It also highlighted the social context of their familial and community challenges and strengths. This was an important process for the participants as self-discovery in the context of a focus group has been highlighted as inherent in the transformative potential of focus groups (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999).

3.7.3 Semi-structured individual interviews

The second session of the research process was a one on one semi-structured interview with an intention to reflect on the first session and allow each participant an opportunity to share what he/she could not say in the focus group. The distinguishing characteristic of interviewing in qualitative research is the use of open questions, which allow participants to focus on the issues of greatest importance to them, rather than the agenda being determined entirely by the researcher's interests (Barbour, 2009; Creswell, 2002). Semi-structured interview schedules define the line of inquiry. It allows the researcher to be attentive to the responses of the participants in order to identify new emerging lines of inquiry (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Students were then requested to respond to the guiding questions listed below:

1. What are the **negative** educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
2. . What are the **positive** educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
3. What do first generation students do to overcome the negative experiences that they have at the university?
4. What can university bridging programmes do to further support first generation students?
5. What can all lecturers do to support first generation students?

After the focus group interviews and before the one on one interview, I asked the students to keep a research journal of the emotions that came up or observations they made after realising that there were other people who were going through the same experience that they were going through.

3.7.4 Research Journals

Research journals are an accepted data collection method to access rich qualitative data (Hayman et al., 2012; Ortlipp, 2008). Participants were invited to reflect on the focus and process of the research project in their research journals. These reflections would have been a useful mechanism of ensuring that the concerns of those taking part in the research are incorporated into the design and analysis of the research (Barbour, 2009; Hayman et al., 2012; Ortlipp, 2008). The research journals would have given the participants an opportunity to provide useful insight with regard to what is happening in participants' lives between the interviews carried out at various points.

The participants in this research were higher education students. Part of their everyday lives is to attend classes and be part of a bigger group of students in learning or extra-curricular encounters. By asking students to reflect in their research journals, I was giving them an opportunity to capture their reflections and emotions while being part of all the activities of HE.

The majority of the participants were not able to keep the research journals updated and I decided to abandon this method of data collection. I also kept my own research journal of reflections after each interview with each participant.

3.8 Recording of Data

The participants were informed in good time that data collection sessions would be audio recorded. The participants consented to this arrangement. During the first session data were collected using two methods of data collection. There were two sessions of drawings; the first drawing was a drawing of the participants' communities. The second drawing exercise involved the participants drawing their rivers of life. They then shared both drawings with the rest of their group members. This was used as a stimulus for discussion in the focus group. These drawings were photographed and copies kept in a lockable cupboard. Only the researcher and the supervisor had access to the drawings. Within that session students discussed their drawings with the focus group and these discussions were audio recorded. The

recorded discussion was loaded onto a flash disc and kept in the same lockable cupboard that was used to store the drawings.

The second method of data collection was a follow up of the drawing and focus group sessions with one on one semi-structured interviews. These interviews were one hour voice recorded individual sessions. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews to allow the participants to share as much as they wished and not be restricted by the structure of the interview.

The third method of collecting data was a research journal kept by participants immediately after the focus group session. These journals were to be used to reflect on emotions and interactions within the focus group environment and the greater university context. Participants were given small exercise books to write their reflections whenever a need arose. The research journals were collected after three weeks of reflections but only a few participants were able to capture their reflections on their research journal and I, in consultation with my supervisor, decided to abandon this method of data collection.

3.9 Data analysis

Transcripts of individual and focus group interview data were audio-recorded, and transcribed. I analysed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) embedded within transcripts from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

I started the process of data analysis by reflecting on all the field notes I had taken during the process of data collection. Patterns in terms of themes that were emerging were highlighted on my field notes. I listened to voice recorded data and began to identify specific ways in which the participants talk about, understand and think about an issue (Smith et al., 2010). The voice recorded data was then transcribed into written text. The transcripts were read and reread and data from both focus groups as well as individual interviews were chunked into meaning units and categorised into themes.

Thematic analysis was the main form of analysis used and it offered an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ely et al., 1997; Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 2006).

3.10 Verification of Data

In qualitative research a number of factors, different from the traditional forms of “objectivity” used in quantitative research, are used to measure the rigour of qualitative research. These factors include credibility (authenticity), dependability, transferability and confirmability (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; Maxwell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). These concepts used in qualitative research will be discussed below.

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the accurate presentation of a particular context or event as described by the researcher giving assurance that the researchers’ conclusions stem from the data (Kobus et al., 2007). One of the conditions to ensure the credibility of this study was to put in place the “tactics to help ensure honesty in informants” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). The participants were informed before the beginning of the research that they have a right to withdraw from the research at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the process. They were also informed that trustworthiness of the information they share would be highly appreciated. To verify credibility of the information the researcher shared the interpretation of the data with each participant to confirm its correctness. This process is known as member-checking (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009) and is one of the processes that may contribute to validity in qualitative designs. The use of member-checking allows the researcher to check that his/her interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings with the participants (Maxwell, 2013; Mc Millan & Schumacker, 2001; Merriam, 2009).

3.10.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings indeed occurred as the researcher says they did (Kobus et al., 2007). Babbie and Mouton, (2007) and Shenton (2004) further explain that dependability can be used to determine whether the same research findings and conclusions could be obtained if this study were carried out with the same participants and in the same context. I summarised and reflected on the participants’ responses and then verified the transcriptions with the participants to determine the accuracy of the findings.

3.10.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the research findings and conclusions of a particular study can be applied to other contexts and with other participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The

principle of transferability in qualitative research is impractical as the study is conducted in the naturalistic setting with the aim of describing the experiences of a particular group of participants (Kobus et al., 2007). This implies that the qualitative researcher therefore does not maintain or claim that knowledge gained from one context will necessarily have relevance for other contexts or for the same context in another time frame.

Shenton (2004) stresses that “since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations” (p. 69).

3.10.4 Confirmability

De Vos et al. (2011) describe confirmability as the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher. I shared the transcripts, drawings, interpretations and findings with my supervisor so that she can enhance the neutrality of the data. Lincoln and Guba (2013) refer to conformability as ‘an adequate trail’ that should be left to enable the auditor to determine if the conclusions, interpretations and recommendations can be traced to their source and if they are supported by the inquiry. Shenton (2004) emphasises that researcher bias can be minimised by using triangulation across different forms of data. In this research, triangulation was done by comparing the notes that I constructed during different methods of data collection to determine the trends.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles emphasize that researchers have to protect their participants against deception, dangerous procedures and invasion of privacy. Participants had a right to know what the study involved, and I gave them enough clear information so that they could freely decide for themselves whether they would like to participate in the study or not (Graziano & Raulin, 2010).

There are a number of factors that contribute to a study being sound from an ethical perspective. Some of the most important components of an ethical study include institutional permission to conduct research, participant’s acceptance to be part of the research process, participants’ right to withdraw from the study, autonomy and informed consent and confidentiality. These will be discussed below.

3.11.1. Institutional Permission

Before I could conduct the research with university students I requested institutional permission from the university. Ethics clearance was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the university where the research was to be conducted (See Appendix E- Ethics proposal number HS923/2013). I also obtained permission to conduct research with university students. (See Appendix D for the permission letter)

3.11.2 Participants' right to withdraw

Participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to participate or to discontinue participating in the study at any time, even after having agreed to participate. (See Appendix D for the letter explaining the participant's rights)

3.11.3 Autonomy and informed consent

Informed consent means that researchers must provide the participants with enough information about the research to enable them to make reasonable, informed decisions about their participation. The researcher first called the participants one by one and explained the intended research and then sent letters of invitation to the participants. (See Appendix E for the letter of invitation) All participants completed an informed consent form.

3.11.4 Confidentiality

The participants were informed that whatever they share with the researcher will be treated with confidentiality. All names would be changed to protect the identity of the participants. Raw data would be securely locked in a lockable cupboard at the researcher's office and only the researcher and her supervisor had access to the cupboard. The raw data was destroyed after the study was completed. (See Appendix D for the letter of confidentiality)

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the paradigm, and methodology that informed the research and described how the research was conducted. In the next chapter the data analysis and findings from the research will be presented.

Chapter 4

Data analysis and findings

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter one I discussed how this study aimed to answer the following research question:

What can we learn from the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education institutions?

In an effort to unpack the question I divided the primary research question into five secondary questions as follows:

Sub questions:

1. What are the negative educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
2. What are the positive educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
3. What do first generation students do to overcome the negative experiences that they have at the university?
4. What can university bridging programmes do to further support first generation students?
5. What can all lecturers do to support first generation students?

4.2 Background of participants

In order to understand the participants that were part of this research we need to explore the contexts where they were raised and their perceptions of the backgrounds that they came from (i.e communities that shaped them). The background section will therefore be divided into two subsections. The first section highlights participants' personal and family backgrounds. The second section highlights the group perception of strengths and challenges of their communities of origin. All this information was extracted from their community

maps and rivers of life done at the beginning of the focus group. Below is the sample of community maps and rivers of life drawn by the participants:



Sample 4.1 of community maps



Sample 4.2 of community maps

4.2.1. Participants' personal and family background

Koli

Koli was born in one of Pretoria's townships and attended primary school there. In 2000 his mom passed away, an event which motivated him to work hard to honour his mother's dreams for him. He joined the university via the bridging programme to improve his Mathematics and Physical Sciences marks so he could have a better chance of acceptance within the same university.

He was one of the first black students to study Computer Science in that university and in spite of his doubts about meeting the strict demands of the programme, he was close to graduation when this research was conducted.

Pam

Pam was born in one of Johannesburg's townships. She attended both primary and high school in that area. In 2007 she passed Grade 12 but her results were not good enough for her to join her desired field of study. She became depressed because she felt that she had let herself and her family down. She felt this especially in relation to her father because she saw him as an "intellectual person" who had always achieved very good marks while he was still at school.

In 2009 she joined the university via the bridging programme to improve her Mathematics and Physical Science marks. In her first year she performed very well because she reported having a very good support structure from friends and family. In 2010 she failed some modules and became despondent because she realised that her friends were progressing and she was stuck at the same point. Her mother continued to support her and in 2011 she passed all her other modules except a module in which she felt that the lecturer was not willing to explain anything further than what had been done in class.

She reflected on her 2012 experience as her "super bad year" (Focus Group). She felt that everything that was important in her life disintegrated; her studies, she broke up with her boyfriend and her part time job was too demanding. She moved out of student's residence and decided to stay in one of the Listen, Live and Learn (LLL) houses. She passed one out of six modules and did not want to go home as she felt that she was a failure and wasting her

mother's money. The support of her mother once again lifted her mood and she realised she had to "dig deeper into herself" to be successful. She graduated at the end of 2013.

Sive

Sive was born in a rural area of Kwa-Zulu Natal and spent her primary school years in that area. Even as a young girl she remembered vividly the strife between her parents and how her mother had left her father to raise them on her own. Shortly after leaving her father, her mother passed away and her maternal aunt raised her and her siblings.

In her matric year she decided it was time for her to be "her own person" because she had always tried to please her aunt. She joined the university via a bridging programme to improve her Mathematics and Accounting marks to give herself a better opportunity of acceptance within the university.

Despite the good preparation in the bridging programme she failed a module during her first year. She was extremely disappointed and started to question her ability to be successful in higher education. Her friends were very supportive and encouraged her to continue with her studies.

In 2010 she changed her programme in the hope that her second choice would be easier to pass but she found the new programme equally difficult and had to work very hard to pass that year. She described 2012 as a very good year because she passed all her modules and graduated in 2013.

Yanga

Yanga was raised by her maternal grandmother and her uncle in one of Cape Town's informal settlement areas. In 2005 both her uncle and grandmother passed away. She had never stayed alone with just her biological mother and when her uncle and grandmother died, she had to stay with her mother for the first time in her life. It was only then that she realised that her mother was suffering from mental illness. In Grade 9 she tried to focus on netball, academics and friends but all of that could not take away the challenges of staying with a mentally ill parent. Sometimes there was neither money nor food to keep the family going. She had to start working so she could provide for herself and her mother. The reversal of roles was not something that she enjoyed doing because all she wanted was to be a child. In 2010 she joined the university where the current research was done via the bridging

programme because she had changed Mathematics in Grade 11 and decided to do Mathematical Literacy. She then realised that she needed to have Mathematics to be accepted into the Economic and Management Sciences faculty. She passed all her modules in her first year of study at university. Her second year of study was difficult but she worked very hard because failing meant she would lose her scholarship and without her scholarship she would not be able to study. In 2013 when we were conducting this research, she was doing her final year and graduated at the end of that year. She is very proud that she completed her degree in three years.

Vivi

Vivi was born in the Eastern Cape in one of the townships of East London. She attended primary and high schools in the area where she was born. Her school experience was marked by very few educational resources, regular teacher absenteeism and student truancy which contributed to the mediocre matric pass rate of Grade 12 students at that school. In 2005 she joined the university because she was accepted to study Social Work. This was not what she wanted to study but instead of staying home she decided to pursue the offer. While studying to be a Social Worker she heard about the bridging programme that helped students to improve their grade 12 marks in Mathematics and Physical Science. She explored the possibility but was too late to join because the academic programme was already in progress.

Her father passed away in 1995 and her mother was unemployed. Since there was minimal family income, Vivi looked for work while studying to sustain herself. She worked as a security officer at the female residences by night and was a student during the day. In 2007 she joined the bridging programme and was able to improve her Mathematics and Physical Science marks. She then joined the university again but to follow a programme of her choice. In her first year she obtained a distinction in Mathematics. In her second year she struggled with a specific module because (she reported) that the lecturer insisted on teaching in Afrikaans. She decided not to attend the lectures and study from the power point slides and the textbook. She said that her family was supportive in their own way but not in an academic way because they did not understand the challenges she was facing in that environment. In 2013 when we conducted the research she was finalising her Masters within the Health Science faculty and graduated in April 2014.

Lwandile

Lwandile was raised by a paternal grandmother in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape. He felt indebted to his grandmother because she ‘shaped him’ and instilled very important values of life. He later moved to stay with his aunt (father’s sister) in yet another rural area. His aunt was a teacher and his grandmother wanted him to be inspired by their values while he was still young. His aunt’s family environment taught him the ‘book value’ because it was an environment of educators.

During his high school years he came to Cape Town and stayed in an informal settlement with his father. He attended the one high school in that area. He always wanted to be part of the university as it was not far from where he stayed but did not know how. When he talked about coming to this university the rest of the students in his class laughed at him because they thought that it was an unattainable dream.

He joined the university via the bridging programme to improve his Mathematics and Accounting marks. He performed very well and was accepted at the faculty of Economic Management Sciences. His second year was very challenging as it coincided with the period that he had to go to initiation school. He was always afraid that if he failed any year of study, his bursary would be terminated.

In 2013 while we were doing the research he was doing his third year and was hoping to finish at the end of 2014 and graduate.

Bukelwa

Bukelwa was born in one of the most remote rural areas of Limpopo. Both her primary and high school education were completed in that community. She was raised by relatives because both her parents had passed away. She had a difficult childhood because she was expected to do all the chores that the other children refused to do. She learnt not to complain as she would get a hiding.

She came to the university to improve her Mathematics and Physical Science marks. Her two major challenges were not understanding a word of Afrikaans and not being proficient enough in English either. She worked very hard and with the support of other students, was able to improve her marks significantly. In 2009 she was accepted to study in the Faculty of Agriscience. Her first year was a challenge because most classes were conducted in

Afrikaans. She booked sessions at the language centre and this proved to be a good decision as it helped her to cope with her work.

In 2013 when we were conducting the research she had completed her degree and was waiting to graduate at the end of the year. She is currently registered for a Masters degree at the same institution.

Andiswa

Andiswa was born and raised in one of the informal settlement areas in Nyanga, Cape Town. Her primary school years were spent at schools in that community. She then changed schools to attend school in one of the coloured township areas where she matriculated.

She was raised by her maternal grandmother because her mother was sixteen when she was born. She had very fond memories of all the things her grandmother used to do for her and felt loved and supported. Andiswa recalled that it was her grandmother's wish that at least one person from the family should be a graduate but she had already passed away by the time Andiswa finished her first degree.

She joined the university via the bridging programme. Even though she was accepted at another university she did not have the money to pay for registration. She realised that if she accepts the offer to study at the other university they were going to enrol her in extended degree programme. She then thought that she might as well use the time to improve her Grade 12 marks and enter the main stream afterwards.

In 2009 she joined the university and passed all her first year modules. It wasn't 'a walk in the park' according to Andiswa, but it took conscientiousness to excel. In 2012 she finished her first degree and enrolled for a second degree. At the time of the research she was doing her first year of her third degree (Masters) and was hoping to finish at the end of 2014.

4.2.2 The participants' perception of strengths and challenges of their communities of origin

During the focus group session the participants were encouraged to share experiences of how their communities shaped their lives, drawing on their rivers of life and community drawings. During the focus group sessions the participants had to do two drawings: one about their community and the other about the rivers of their lives, with specific focus on ebbs and flows.

These drawings depicted the challenges and strengths in the participants' communities and personal lives, respectively. Below is the sample of the participants' river of life drawings:



Sample 4.3. Drawing of the participants' river of life.



Sample 4.4 Drawing of the participants' river of life

There were numerous experiences that participants shared about their communities. These included teenage pregnancy, criminal activities, perceived lack of commitment, community values about education and schools as institutions of learning. These will be discussed below

4.2.2.1 Teenage pregnancy

The participants agreed on the factors that characterise the communities where they came from. These communities were made up of working class, unemployed, or child headed families. Teenage pregnancy was rife and it affirmed the cycle of poverty because the children that were to be born to these teenagers would grow up in the same environment in which their mothers/fathers grew up.

Youth pregnancy is rife and this is because when the school children go to health care facilities to get family planning advice the nurses patronize them. (They highlight the fact that the students are sexually active and that is why they want family planning or protection) Students end up not going to health care facilities and risk getting pregnant because the boyfriends are also not keen on using condoms. (Vivi, focus group)

4.2.2.2 Criminal activities

The participants indicated that even though the country was celebrating its 21st year of democracy, there seemed to be ignorance about opportunities that the government presented to people in disadvantaged communities and a tendency to wait for the government to provide for the community's needs. In the absence of this providence the community resorted to criminal activities to maintain a superficial lifestyle.

Crime in my community is a bigger problem. I mean like at 7p.m. it's dangerous to be out there. So dangerous to the point where they can break into any house. They don't care if you are there or not (Lwandile, focus group)

Can I add on the crime? I think it's also like with criminals now it's a sense of entitlement. They feel entitled to think you have this phone and I want it and you are going to give it to me whether you like or not (agreement from the group) (Pam, focus group)

Crime is a big issue, and the youth see it as a way of life to get the things they want. If people can start interacting then change is possible for the whole community not just individuals (Koli, focus group).

4.2.2.3 Lack of commitment in communities

The participants noted a lack of commitment among both the youth and adults. They thought that adults seemed to have lost interest in pursuing job opportunities because of their minimal education, since most job advertisements in South Africa looked for people who had a minimum qualification of Grade 12. Some of these adults had left school very early because their parents couldn't afford to pay school fees or because there were no schools close to their homes.

Community building initiatives should be enhanced and be more effective to change people's perception of themselves (Koli, focus group).

The community in my area is complacent about their circumstances; they don't seem to want more out of life (Lwandle, focus group).

The value system is very irregular because different people coming from different backgrounds have different reasons why they have come to Cape Town. This has an impact on what they are willing to do to change their circumstances (Sive, focus group).

The participants thought that youth in their communities did not make use of their opportunities. This was for various reasons including the perception among youth that school was uninteresting, that the quality of education at their schools was poor and that their schools were overpopulated.

The younger generation needs to change their perception of school (Vivi).

Schools do not provide good quality of education (Sive).

Overpopulated schools (Yanga,) (all in focus group).

4.2.2.4 Community values about education

Participants thought that communities were very judgmental of people who were trying to improve their circumstances through loyal school attendance and could sometimes cause young people to build their values by resisting community challenges. The community placed a lot of pressure on young people when they realised that person was a university student.

They kept tabs on their activities, and some community members waited in anticipation of graduation dates. On the other hand there was an expectation that once those students completed their degrees they would then be a financial resource to the family because they would stand a better chance of good employment opportunities.

Every time I go home during vacation they ask me if I am going back to University again in anticipation of when I will ever start working to share my financial resource with the rest of the family (Vivi, focus group).

There is a strong sense of pull him down syndrome when people discourage your educational dreams, the notion of “why are you leaving us behind” in a negative way of indicating that you think you are better than they are (Koli, focus group).

To be cool you either have to drink this expensive alcohol or do drugs (Pam, focus group).

4.2.2.5 Schools as institutions of learning

The participants agreed that schools did not help the students to make good academic choices. In the participants’ opinion this happened because most schools had what they called ‘helicopter educators’. This term referred to educators who only came in the schools for a specific time and display little interest in the needs of either the students or the community. The overwhelming sense from participants was that these educators did not care for the learners.

There are these ‘helicopter teachers’ who come to school driving their 4X4 cars and do not provide good quality education to students because their children go to upmarket suburb schools (Koli, focus group).

These ‘helicopter teachers’ do not relate with communities they work in (Yanga, focus group).

The ‘helicopter teachers’ do not care about the well-being of the students (Vivi, focus group).

Participants in the study had a fairly negative view of their communities of origin. This was contrasted with both encouraging and discouraging experiences in their immediate personal backgrounds. It was important to provide a brief sketch of some of the experiences that FGS brought when they joined HE. The rest of this chapter will focus on the themes that emerged

from their discussion on their experiences in HE. The themes that emerged are summarised in the table below and will be discussed..

4.3 Themes and categories

Table 4.1

Summary of the Themes and Categories

Themes that emerged from the data analysis	Categories
Negative educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in higher education	Language, Teaching and Learning Lecture hall experience Student residence experience Institutional culture Prejudice in sport activities
Positive educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in higher education	Access to higher education Financial support Quality of education
Coping strategies	Family support Peer support Resilience Extended support of the bridging programme
Support provided by lecturers to FGS	Giving of their time

It is vital to note that the themes that emerged from the collected data and the process of analysis displayed a variety of issues that could be regarded as important but we will focus on the themes that addressed the research question that was posed to the participants.

4.3.1 The negative educational experiences of first generation students in higher education institutions

Human beings' experiences of environments can either be positive or negative or both. I will now look at the negative educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in higher education. These negative experiences include language, teaching and learning, lecture hall experience, institutional culture, residence experience and prejudice in sports activities

4.3.1.1 Language of learning and teaching

The FGS that were participants in my research are all African Black students who attended a historically advantaged higher education institution. They were born and raised in rural areas of other provinces or townships in South Africa. All these students were taught in their second language because the language of learning and teaching in South Africa is either English or Afrikaans.

Bukelwa who grew up in the rural area of Limpopo had a rude awakening in her first class when the lecturer started lecturing in Afrikaans. She felt disorientated like she was rolling 'like a snowball' from one activity to another not understanding what was happening.

I was from the rural areas. Never met a white person never thought I would go into class and they would 'gooi' in Afrikaans. I was under immense pressure. I felt like I was a snowball in my own world (Individual interview).

Lwandile shared this frustration because for the first time he was unable to comprehend what was happening in class and was overwhelmed by the feeling of missing out on important information. He shared his experience with us:

Most of the time lectures are in Afrikaans. Some lecturers will say you can ask a question if you don't understand. You can't really ask a question on something you didn't hear that's the thing (Individual interview).

Sive had a different experience because she was fortunate to have attended a bilingual medium high school before she joined this university. She shared her experience below:

With me it's different because I come from an Afrikaans background so if maybe I didn't understand Afrikaans it would be a major issue (Individual interview).

Vivi had an extremely unpleasant experience in one of her classes when the lecturer asked if there is anyone who doesn't understand Afrikaans:

I raised my hand, and the lecturer asked where do I come from, I responded Eastern Cape and the lecturer's response was "I am sorry my dear that is in South Africa". So he was implying that if I am a South African I should know Afrikaans.....The lecturer is South African and should know other South African languages. I raised my hand and asked 'Do you know Venda" and the lecturer responded "that's not the point (translated from Xhosa) (Individual interview).

In Vivi's mind the important language in that institution was the language that was known and understood by the majority of lecturers and students instead of a language that had potential to embrace the students that come from different linguistic groups.

Yanga felt that she wasted a lot of time on the issue of language, time that could have been spent fruitfully in understanding what she came to learn at the university.

You always have to prove yourself the whole time and then I think we don't get taken seriously they just give you an attitude. Just the people who don't want to change will always remind you 'If you want English lessons you can go to..... (name of university) or..... (name of university) like they are pushing you away. But I am here now so change needs to happen (Individual interview).

4.3.1.2 Lecture hall experience

First generation students tend to fall into the category of marginal students, who are admitted as an extended cohort of admission. These students tend to remain on the periphery of the institution with limited chances of success.

The participants highlighted that one of the reasons they were at risk of taking longer to graduate was because of their lecture hall experiences. The one concern that came through strongly in their lecture hall experience was when lecturers requested students to work in groups. This is common practice in most institutions of learning to allow students to share their understanding of concepts. It is unfortunately not the case for the African Black first generation students who find themselves in the minority.

Bukelwa who was the only Black student in one of her modules had difficulty finding students who wanted to include her in their group and collaborative work.

And this group work 'thingie' they say you need to work in groups. Then you group yourselves it is very difficult if you don't have a friend in class. White people group together and I was the only black student and nobody wanted to group with me (Individual interview).

Koli concurred even though he was registered with another faculty; he experienced the same attitude with fellow class mates.

I wasn't getting support from my classmates. I sort of feel excluded in class maybe during practical they just sit there on their corner and I would work there on my own.....Sometimes you envy them and wonder why they don't include you. At times you could feel they look at you as, I don't know, inferior or you are not at their own level although you know how much you can do but you just feel.....(sigh) ja (Individual interview).

Pam observed how the Coloured and White students operated during the group sessions and shared:

Other groups worked well and distributed the questions among group members. You do this and I do that and one person does a section and send an e-mail to all the others to add some information (if you have one) correct some mistakes if possible (Individual interview).

The participants then thought students from other race groups did not want to collaborate with them because they were African Black students. They indicated that the reality of South Africans is that we embrace others on our terms and not with intention of creating a united citizenry.

4.3.1.3 Institutional culture

In South Africa higher education institutions have a historical legacy that continues to play a significant role in the culture of that institution. These legacies tend to exclude those who are not born into the practices or culture that aligns with the institution. Students who bring a different culture to these higher education institutions struggle to fit in because some of these practices are never translated to be understood by those who are not familiar with them. Institutional culture is usually passed down from generation to generation in families that have attended the institution. This becomes a defining sensitive issue for those who have no

point of reference because their parents had never attended higher education. The participants in this research were all African Black FGS who came to join a historically advantaged institution.

I think the University is too stuck on maintaining, I won't say heritage, but their history. They don't want to let go of how they used to do things, it's a struggle. There is now this new '..... Project' that is meant to include everyone. I don't think it's working because I think at this university in order to have a positive experience you need to adapt to the university's way of doing things and if you don't then you are an outcast.

In order to for me to be friends with different races I had to adapt to their lifestyle. It's difficult to retain your individuality as a person. The environment of this university is not receptive to new ways of doing things (Andiswa, individual interview).

It's a comfort zone and their bubble is too big. Someone has to burst their bubble at some point (Sive, individual interview).

Yanga agreed with the fact that even though the university was trying to diversify its student bodies it did not have systems that embraced the presence of those that were different.

Researcher: *Do you think change is not happening at the pace you would like to see?*

Yanga : *No, change is not happening at the pace that the world would like to see, and it's not even only me who feels like that, it's like everyone would like to see change in this environment (Individual interview).*

4.3.1.4 Student residence experience

This research explored how Black African students who had joined a historically advantage institution experienced staying at the students' residences. Below we will share some of those experiences; we first look at how the female students experienced the students' residence and then the male students' experience of student residence. Andiswa a female student shared her experience below;

Researcher: Can you share some of your experiences at the student residences.

Andiswa: I stayed at the students' residence for four years. It was very different because my residence was different from others. I was at(name of student residence) I would say the most backwards residence in terms of change. The majority of the girls are white Afrikaans speaking. In our first year, there were only five of us who were black. The following year there were two accepted. I think somewhere the minimum number of black students to be accepted at the students' residence is decided.

It was really different because if you stay with Afrikaans White girls it is very difficult. You know even if there are five black ladies that is not a lot, there will be a united force they can bring. But we didn't really care. We didn't attend our residence functions because they were not really for us. They focus on what they like. Someone needs to do something (sighhh) (individual interview).

Researcher: Is it a stumbling block to the transformation they wish to achieve?

Andiswa: I think for them diversity is a different concept. They don't understand diversity and what it means. I also think they shouldn't even try to focus on that but rather on transformation first and then celebrating and embracing diversity. The university is not diverse at this point. In colour yes, in the outside. It is window dressing but deep down if you ask people then it's a different ball game. At the student residence we would sit in meetings, house meetings, these (Residence heads) only two can speak English fluently so now they try to accommodate the non-Afrikaans speakers but it's so difficult for us to understand because their English is bad. So they are forced to speak in Afrikaans. That's also something that is disadvantageous on their side. I don't know why they don't focus on improving their English but it is really bad at the student residence. I stayed at the student residence because I didn't have a choice but it was terrible.

Another student Bukelwa had a different experience of the student residence. She came from a rural area and was very anxious of what was going to happen to her. She had seen students struggle with accommodation in other higher education institutions and how these students would end up renting spaces that were not conducive to learning. She shared her experience below;

Residence, I was actually fine, enjoying my residence. Because coming to Varsity, it's like, you are not from this place and you have nowhere to go. Residence is a good start, because at the residence they provide everything for you. There is food in there even when you want to go to town, you can gather with friends and travel together. For orientation they took us in groups around Cape Town and showed us where to find what. That is a good thing.

.....and at the student residence if someone is making a noise you go to report that person. In private lodging students do what they like, people drink, they make noise and are not worried about others then you have to go to the student centre. So student residence is like a home for me you work there comfortably. And you are closer with all the facilities of the university as well (Bukelwa, individual interview).

Koli a male student agreed with the above student, because when he came to the area where he was studying from Pretoria there was a lot of fear and uncertainty in terms of a place to stay. After hearing horrific stories of what happened at the students residences he experienced it completely different, he shared his experience below:

The culture was very strong, it was really essential to be able to cope. The house father was very helpful because he knew what we were experiencing. He knew what you wanted to do before you even think of a plan. He knew even if you are cheating trying to do something that wasn't allowed. He would respond in a very calm way like this (displaying action) (Individual interview).

Lwandile who was also a male student had a different experience but saw that experience as part of finding oneself within the context of higher education.

With Res that's when I saw the separation between us brown people and white people. There is exclusion even if we talk about transformation and diversity to me they are all just words that will lead to profitability and growth of organisations but the people will still be on the same point (Individual interview).

4.3.1.5 Prejudice in sport activities

Very few FGS student involve themselves with extra mural activities in higher education. They try to spend all their time either at the library or study centre, either translating notes or sharing an understanding of their academic work with fellow students or in their part time

employment. Three of the participants in this research participated in extramural activities but were not impressed with the way that they were treated.

The two male participants were passionate about sport and would have liked to share their skills with the rest of their teams. To their disappointment they would go to practice at all times but when there is a match they would not be given game time.

Researcher: And within sports facilities?

Koli: (Pause) I played cricket in primary school I never played soccer. When I got here I started playing soccer and then I started cricket again. In cricket it was a matter of them saying you are not better than they are and it starts by you not being given time. Sometimes you asked yourself why I am not given time because you can see you are better than them. You just let it slip, because it takes a lot of my time to argue this (Individual interview).

Lwandile played soccer and was very passionate about the sport; he used to coach a private soccer club of township children:

Sport is great but we have stereotyped coaches that are in the university, you tend not to get more games than other races because it's like, coloured coaches so they don't really believe we have talent. When they see a black person they just see a poor man with no skill (Individual interview).

4.3.2 Positive educational experiences of first generation students in higher education institutions

4.3.2.1 Access to higher education

The participants mentioned that most higher education institutions have designed an online application form. This is seen as giving equal opportunities to all the students who wish to join higher education. The problem according to the participants with this arrangement is that not all students have access to computers and internet facilities. The FGS are sometimes among the group of students who because they come from less resourced communities have no access to computers or internet facilities. This lack of resources implies that these students have to sometimes spend money on internet café' trying to source the application forms.

The participants view their access to this university as easier because they were already at the university bridging their NSC Mathematics and Physical Science or Accounting than other students who were still in high school. They were exposed to some of the university systems and were encouraged to apply and were assisted with their applications. They commended the support they received from the administrators who processed their applications.

This is what Vivi who came from the Eastern Cape had to say about her experience of the administration unit of the university;

I can't pinpoint just one thing that they do right, because it has a general good system going on especially let's take Admin. I've been to Admin of.....(name of university), I've been to Admin of(name of university) it gave me a shock. I thought it would be easy because there are black people that are working there. The admin here (mentioning university) has white people and a few coloured people I have never seen black people but I have a good experience with the administrators. I don't know if they are trained for their tasks but their service is excellent. You don't stand in long queues because the person is busy on the phone but because the person is busy serving another student (Individual interview).

This sentiment was shared by Yanga who grew up in an informal settlement in the Western Cape;

The admin system here is also so much better, like you can just go to Admin A and everything is sorted out. If a person can't help you they will send you to a more senior decision making person (Individual interview).

What stood out for the researcher was the fact that these students had to navigate all these processes on their own with no parent/adult accompanying them and without knowing what the outcome of the inquiry would be.

Sive was very emotional when she thought that because she was raised by extended family members, she couldn't expect them not to go to work and accompany her to negotiate funding. She mentioned that she would forever be grateful to her aunt for raising her but when she saw other students with parents she realised the reality of her situation i.e. that of being an orphan;

You have to deal with finance like I had to literally go and be my mother, my father in Admin (referring to the administration section of the university). You get people that go with their parents or their parents have to speak with people and have things done (Individual interview).

Yanga also allowed herself to wallow in self-pity during her first year when she saw some students accompanied by their parents. When she joined higher education she thought the role of parents wouldn't have the same impact as it did in high school. Not having a parent there did however leave her feeling excluded as students who were accompanied by parents seemed to be assisted faster than the ones who were not accompanied by their parents.

Other people, their parents are here and they knew what needed to be done because they were here before so at that point I felt I was so out (Individual interview).

This revelation made the researcher aware that in most cases FGS have to play dual roles and take responsibility for the things they wanted to achieve in life.

4.3.2.2 Financial support

The participants were vocal about the effect of financial constraints in the academic decisions they had to make. They viewed the inability to afford education as one of the massive challenges that the FGS face when they wish to join higher education institutions. In some families the whole family relies on a government grant and this can easily be a family of five or six members.

When the students have obtained good marks and have been accepted to a higher education institution then they need to find money for registration to secure their space at the institution. The inability to raise the funds becomes a significant defining issue as early as registration. The participants felt that asking for registration money when they know that the earnings are not even a third of what higher education registration costs tends to distance the hope of ever enrolling in higher education. For some of the participants this inability to raise registration money became the reason they chose to come to the university where the research was conducted. At this university if a student has been granted the NSFAS bursary that the government provides they then do not have to pay for the registration fee as this will be deducted when the funding has been made available to the institution.

Researcher: What made you choose this institution against the other higher education institutions in Cape Town?

Andiswa : Okay, two things, first at the time I couldn't come up with the registration fee. Secondly I didn't think I would survive at (name of university). My option was..... (name of university)or(name of university) because I think academically that environment is friendlier than(name of university) is. (individual interview).

When the participants were accepted to the higher education institution they did not expect to receive pocket money from their family members because they knew the circumstances they had left back home. They then looked for employment within the university structures to support their other needs that were not covered by the bursary. They either worked as door guards at the hostels or involved themselves with work study opportunities like laboratory assistance. Having to work and study at the same time had its own disadvantages of divided loyalties and could have had a negative impact on academic attainment.

The burden that children from a disadvantaged background carry is financial assistance. I will always be grateful to NSFAS I don't really mind that I have to go back and pay because if it wasn't for it I would be working at Shoprite (Vivi, individual interview).

4.3.2.3 Quality of education

When students choose a higher education institution they first do research about the quality of education that institutions offer. For FGS this research is done by word of mouth from students who are already at that institution. For non- FGS it is an experience that their parents or relatives have of that particular higher education institution.

The participants in this research were impressed with the quality of education at the higher education institution that they attended. They all agreed that the standard of education was very good.

Researcher: When you say the University is Number 1, what do you mean?

Koli: The standard of education is excellent; it is one of the elite. The resources are out of this world. The computers are of the latest technology so you can't complain

Pam: It is a good university in terms of academics but it's way too expensive especially with my background. The student must have a good academic background otherwise it would be very expensive if you don't perform well. (individual interview)

Andiswa who was studying a different degree also believed that there was a good value in attending that university:

I do like their emphasis on good standard of education, they don't compromise on that. Its academic standard is first class or nothing... (name of the university) if you have a good degree from... (name of university) you know it is a good degree from a very good university (Individual Interview).

These quotes suggest that the participants were willing to face the other challenges that they were facing as long as they would achieve the objective of graduating from a good university which would enable them to change their life circumstances.

4.3.3 Coping strategies in addressing negative experiences of higher education

FGS enter the higher education with little understanding of what it means to be a student at that level, they design coping strategies that will help them to deal with challenges that their parents cannot help them with. They understand that it is not their parent's fault that they cannot help them but the systems around education within the South African context. I will now look at some of the strategies that FGS use to cope and succeed in higher education.

4.3.3.1 Family support

FGS come from families who do not understand the challenges that they go through in higher education. Sometimes their families put them under pressure to finish studying so that they can contribute to the financial wellness of the family. The participants concurred with the above statement and felt they sometimes are reluctant to go home during the holidays because the pressure becomes too much for them.

Koli who lost his mother in 2000 felt that he owed it to his family to graduate, find a job and support the family because they had been through a lot since his mother's passing.

It wasn't a case of (pause) Okay I was proud for the family and I could feel that I had a task to make them proud as a family. The pressure that I have is because I need to make their life better. That is what is expected from me. They don't expect me to buy

cars or houses but I know I have a responsibility to them. Everything that happened we stuck together for so long. I need to deliver. It's a burden in a sense because I can't afford not to do anything. It would make me feel better to be able to do the things that I want to do then I can start with my own life (Individual interview).

Vivi was concerned that as much as she would like to contribute to her mother's wellness, there would be secondary beneficiaries to her contributions, her siblings. She indicated that her siblings refused to improve their education to have better chances of employment because they knew that she would make changes in their home for her mother once she finishes her studies and in that way they will also have a better life. She also highlighted the burden of being the only one that is financially self-sufficient. As much as she would like to improve her mother's standard of living, she felt that she could not do that for her mother alone. Her siblings, who are living with her mother, as well as their children, would also expect to be supported. This left her feeling conflicted because she could not carry the financial responsibility for the entire extended family.

It's not a nice thing; it doesn't make me feel proud that I am the only one (that has completed higher education). It would be nice if all of us were exposed to the same situations, why don't they take advantage of that. It is of concern to me that at the end of the day because obviously I won't be able to stay in upmarket suburbs and watch my family struggling because they are my family (Individual interview).

4.3.3.2 Peer support

The participants relied heavily on the support they received from their peers. The participants had joined the university via the bridging programme of the university and during that time they were able to form some friends and study groups. These groups proved to be a solid educational support system because these people had worked together to succeed during their bridging year. Some students from the bridging programme joined the same faculties and attended the same classes while others had joined different faculties but still draw on their fellow former peers for support. On inquiring about their coping strategies from the participants, they indicated that these peers become their 'family' on campus.

Bukelwa reflected about the times when she had to swallow her pride and ask for help when she wasn't coping with her academic work.

I had to ask my friends if I could join them when they study, and we would go to the study centre and spend long hours studying, that changed my life (Individual interview).

Yanga believed that she might not have made it without the help of her peers. Because the university is highly focused on academic excellence, she said a person needed the peer support as a spring board to share anxieties. She realised that every student needed someone that will check on them, on how they were doing especially when things were not going very well.

I think I met some people that I will hang on to for the rest of my life I have this one friend and we always make fun of life because we know we are not stuck. We know where we are going, we can see the breakthrough is coming (Individual interview).

4.3.3.3 Resilience

For many first generation students, academic preparation and financial constraints are challenges that impact their early departure from higher education institutions. The dream to achieve their goals of graduating lies between their aspiration and dealing with the challenges they have to overcome to get their degree.

Koli reflected on the reasons why he stayed on to complete his studies even though circumstances were difficult. He felt that the family relied on him to finish his education, get a good job and sustain the family.

I kept home in mind home, back home what I have left behind and what is expected of me. Even when I got marks that were not that good I always persevered (focus group)

Sive realised much earlier in her university life that finishing her degree is the only path that will bring about the change she desired in her life. She made a crucial decision not to give up against all the odds she was facing:

*I think my university experience has shaped me more than anything. **It has broken me down at some stage but it's been a blessing to be here.** I don't think if I've been at home after matric and got a job I wouldn't have been the person that I have become today. Yes, I've always been strong and it*

was only for survival. But now I can be strong, survive and still want more in life

She felt a need to explain herself further when the researcher asked her to elaborate on how the university had “shaped” her:

Because when I said it shaped me I meant being by my own, in this place whereby you have so many things attacking you at the same time... .. I know where I am coming from so I go where I am comfortable (Individual interview).

She felt very strongly that her resilience is more a personal attribute than what the university had given to her.

4.3.3.4. Extended support of the bridging programme

In chapter one I mentioned that all the participants in this research gained access to the university via the bridging programme. They attended the bridging programme for a year to improve their National Senior Certificate marks so they could be accepted into the careers of their choice within the university. The bridging programme became their pillar of strength because it assisted the students in career choice, filling in application forms to the university, applying for available bursaries as well as application to student residences.

They then regarded the personnel of the bridging programme as family away from home. It became easier for the students to go to the bridging programme’s offices than to try to approach the university staff. They would go to the relevant university staff member once an appointment has been set for them.

Lwandile reflected with a heart-warming smile when asked if he was getting any support from his family. He shared an experience that he said he will take into his adult life:

First of all I don’t know of any office for FGS but then something comes to mind. There was a person who didn’t stand for that but stood for that for me. I don’t think I ever told you. You remember, for me she was my FGS office. Even when I was still with the bridging programme she would come and assist me with a lot of things. I remember during that time the family was really not good and even the money I got from the bridging programme I sent back home sometimes. She is the person that would show up at the student’s

house and bring some plastics (groceries) without me even asking. So for me it felt like that was my office (that person) (Individual Interview).

On how he related with the rest of the staff from the bridging programme:

Each time I talk to the people around here I feel like they are part of my family. Everyone understands me, I don't know, I feel like they have seen me before. When I come to this office everyone is happy and welcoming. Even if the day is bad, like, that's my grandmother. No matter what she is going through, no matter the circumstances? She is always the same woman towards everybody. So for me that is the treatment I've been receiving with everyone not certain people but everyone (Individual interview).

4.3.4 Lecturer support for first generation students

Some lecturers are aware that not all the students who come to join higher education are aware of how things are done at that level. We now look at the efforts that some of these lecturers make to support the FGS in navigating higher education life. These include lecturers giving of their time.

4.3.4.1. Giving of their time

Some of the participants are grateful and display appreciation for the effort that some of the lecturers give to support them. The lecturers schedule time after class to talk to them about their academic work, in some instances just to share life skills lessons. The participants made a clear distinction between the lecturers who were willing to give their time and those who did not make an effort to support the participants outside the lecture hall.

Koli shared a very good experience of the support he received from his lecturers

This one lecturer is so welcoming and supportive. You don't feel inferior or as if you don't know what you are doing. Some lectures are offered in Afrikaans so if I don't understand and go to the lecturer, the lecturer doesn't give me attitude, the lecturer tries to help me and explain it in English (Individual interview).

Bulelwa shared a different experience of the response she received when she went to consult with the lecturer:

..... sometimes going to a lecturer to tell them you don't understand anything. They tell you at this level you should understand. I didn't have anyone at home that can help me or give me background to what I don't understand. So I find it very hard and very discouraging to even go to that lecturer even though I was struggling (Individual interview).

Pam shared the same experience that whenever they had a consultation with the lecturer, the lecturer would insist that they didn't do their work and want the lecturer to do the work for them.

Yhoooo, with some lecturers it works but others it's like: Oh so you don't know your work and study before you come to me..... (Individual interview).

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the data analysis and the themes that emerged from the collected data. In the next chapter I will now discuss the findings, limitations and recommendations of the research.

Chapter 5

Discussion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of this research study and they will be interpreted and discussed in the light of the literature review and perspectives of theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. These theoretical frameworks include Bourdieu's (1994) social and cultural capital, Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory, Ungar's (2006) resilience theory and Bronfenbrenner's system's theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1998) systems theory is a meta theory or framework that helps us to locate the psychosocial; that is, it helps us to locate human experiences or phenomena at micro, meso, and macro levels. This is important as it provides an explanatory opportunity to show how human experiences are nested and connected to individual, family and macro political systems. Bronfenbrenner's theory, however, does not have explanatory power in terms of the dynamics and specific processes involved when considering first generation students (FGS). It is for this reason that I drew on additional theories such as Bordieu's social and cultural capital, Yosso's cultural wealth theory and Ungar's resilience theory.

In Chapter 1 I pointed out the aims of the study as an attempt to provide an answer to the following question:

What can we learn from the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education institutions?

This research study aims to learn from the educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in order to share with other FGS who wish to join higher education as well as to inform decision makers about the experiences of FGS in higher education.

The participants in this study were selected purposively as mentioned in Chapter 3. It is therefore important to note that all the students who participated in this study shared similar characteristics in term of being FGS and were able to share their experiences based on what they encountered every day. There were also differences among the students that will be highlighted.

To explore the research question, participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What are the negative educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
2. What are the positive educational and psychosocial experiences that FGS have at the university?
3. What do first generation students do to overcome the negative experiences that they have at the university?
4. What can university bridging programmes do to further support first generation students?
5. What can all lecturers do to support first generation students?

This study was conducted at a university in the Western Cape region of Cape Town, South Africa. The data in this study were analysed using the process of qualitative thematic analysis. Through this process, themes and categories were identified in Chapter 4 and will now be discussed in this chapter.

5.2 Research findings

The research findings and the extracts that will be discussed in this chapter are compiled from data collected through focus group sessions and one on one semi-structured interviews. These findings will be discussed using different theoretical frameworks that were found to be relevant to the research as mentioned above.

Before I discuss the participants' responses about their negative experiences of higher education I wish to allude to the role that the background of the participants play in how they view higher education. In Chapter 4 I presented the data analysis and findings that included information on the background of the participants. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) systems theory emphasises that systems around the individual should work together for the benefit of the recipient. Participants suggested that the schools that they attended did not prepare them sufficiently for higher education. They felt this was a result of the absenteeism of teachers, lack of resources and their inability to choose subjects appropriate to their career choices. Their communities, furthermore, did not encourage the participants to continue further with education because they viewed education as an extremely expensive entity. The communities also perceived education as reserved for white people who they perceived were able to afford expensive higher education fees. In that environment the participants found themselves in conflict with their own educational desire and how their families and communities viewed a

life path of someone who had passed Grade 12. The mesosystems in which the participants were located were in conflict which meant that they were not optimally supported in their decisions. Participants therefore had to straddle between the values of their families and communities and the values inherent in focusing on higher education. I am including this finding because it is a characteristic that students bring when they join higher education. This led to students being ambivalent as to whether they were doing the right thing by defying the expectations of their community and joining higher education. They aspired to follow a path less travelled by the majority of community members and some members of their families. The finding that FGS come from communities and families that are not familiar with HE and are unable to assist FGS, is similar to the findings from numerous studies on FGS (Basit, 2012; Jehangir, 2010; Letseka & Breier, 2008; Sellar & Gale, 2011). What is however, different in this study compared to previous studies (Croll, 2004), is the participants' experience of non-support for their aspirations from their communities. Their experience of non-support was largely felt through racialized and classed beliefs from their community about who have access to HE. Akhtar (2014) also found that students who are in the minority often feel unconsciously guilty at having exceeded the productivity and social success of their relatives and friends.

5.3 Participants' responses on negative experiences of higher education

5.3.1 Language of teaching and learning (LOTL)

The findings from this study indicated clearly that the participants in the research felt that the use of Afrikaans as a LOTL, which is their third language, was the main reason for their academic struggle. Even when they had indicated on registration that they wished to attend the English stream of classes, they found that those lessons also turned into Afrikaans because the majority of students and the lecturer were comfortable with the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. A number of authors including Tickoo (2006) and Mqgqwashu (2011) have raised an important aspect about multilingualism in education policy because they believed that language plays a significant role in the process of teaching and learning. They raised this issue because they believed that meaningful teaching and learning in higher education lecture halls depend on the language used to address the needs of the diverse students in that particular lecture hall. The participants in this study were Black African students who were isiXhosa, isiZulu or seSotho mother tongue speakers and the institutions' LOTL is predominantly Afrikaans with some faculties offering their classes in English. This

issue was raised and discussed by Van der Westhuizen (2012) who suggested that learning is unequal where learners do not benefit because of the language they speak, the resources they have, (Boughey 2005; Cassim, 2005) the environments where they stay and learning content that is decontextualized and not reflective of the learner's life experiences.

The participants joined a higher education institution that had advertised itself as a dual medium stream (English and Afrikaans classes) but when the participants were in class they discovered that the majority of the classes they attended were actually conducted in Afrikaans. This created a challenge to individuals who constantly had to adapt to language changes, while they were striving to succeed in an academic world. This implied that these students had to be proficient in three languages. Yet the non-FGS who were also attending the same institution were taught in their mother tongue (i.e. Afrikaans) since Grade R and had an advantage of being taught in the same language when they proceeded into the higher education context. Bourdieu (1997) views language as a social and a cultural value that children bring from their families, relatives and communities. This value has stock in the higher education context because it might be used as a LOTL. Those who bring a home language that has a different value from the dominant language (in the case of participants' experience of the institution, Afrikaans) find it difficult to understand the nuances of the LOTL and take longer to understand the content of what is taught. This finding resonates with Kiguwa's (2014) study at a historically White university in the Northern part of South Africa. She argues that some higher education institutions post 1994 in South Africa still reflect cultural practices and expressions of experience that exclude the minority of students whose mother tongue is different from the LOTL of that institution.

5.3.2 Lecture hall experience of diversity

The participants experienced lecture halls as alienating spaces with a massive distance between the lecturer and the students. Narismulu and Dhunpath, (2011) believe that if an attempt is made to adopt a dual medium approach to teaching and learning, many resources and innovative, creative approaches to teaching and learning will be needed. This requires ongoing work at the institution where the study was conducted as this university is increasingly becoming a more diverse institution rather than an Afrikaans institution in terms of the language policy. The higher education institution where the research was conducted initiated and is still striving to diversify the student body to be inclusive of all racial groups. The university is also focusing on transforming to a bilingual medium of instruction where

English and Afrikaans have equal status. Hatton (2012) agrees that diversity, change and intervention are concerns for the higher education institutions (HEI) due to the continuing, and worrying, statistical gaps between student groups and their retention and achievement profiles.

Lecture hall dynamics have a massive impact on the success of all students. Bengesai (2011) agrees that learning spaces are not necessarily physical spaces but constructs of the person's experience in the social environment. Lecture halls are spaces where students should be given an opportunity to express themselves without fear of manipulation or mockery. The participants' experience of lecture halls in this study was that of isolation and inability to participate fully during the tuition session. This was a result of a combination of contributory factors like, not being proficient in the language used, not sure of the relevance of their questions and the fact that they were outnumbered by the other race groups made the participants withdraw from activities that could have benefitted them. This finding is similar with Delpit's (2012) findings where Black students in predominantly White institutions related how they would make a contribution in class and not be acknowledged until a White student repeated their point of view. The participants interpreted their silence as self-censorship, that is, a means of protecting themselves from ridicule from the rest of the class. This means that they end up being invisible (Akhtar, 2014) and voiceless in class (Delpit, 2012; Jehangir, 2009).

It is well established that there are better learning outcomes when students learn within a group because they can share their understanding of what is being taught and learnt. These group exercises were a cause for distress for the participants because they were either the only Black African people in the class or the only English speaking students. This created a problem because other students who had friends in the same group, grouped together and used their home language to communicate amongst themselves and this arrangement left the participants with no one to group with or not understanding the discussion within the group because it was in Afrikaans. These findings resonate with Bengesai's (2011) work where she shows how students respond to the experience of dominant power. She suggests that power asymmetries that exist between students and between students and lecturers characterise educational practice. This was evident in the current study because the participants were Black African students who had to deal with language barriers, self-esteem and compromised confidence in themselves which lead to them avoiding consultations with lecturers. This scenario is not unique in the South African context because Bishop, (2009); Borisoff and

Chesebro, (2011); Carr and Lund, (2009); Donadey (2009); Jackson, Warren, Pitts, and Wilson, (2007); Kahn, (2009) and Kim, (2009) also indicated that in American educational institutions classrooms are diverse in a number of ways and White, male, heterosexual perspectives dominate the classroom landscape. If these opportunities to engage across differences do not take place in the classroom, it may impact on all learners' educational experience. Arkoudis et al. (2013) suggests that working in coordinated groups increases the opportunity of interaction between FGS and non FGS in teaching and learning contexts and develops cognitive skills, effective communication skills and cultural awareness.

When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1994) systems theory, it can be acknowledged that a reciprocal interaction between the person and the environment they are in can lead to success especially in academic contexts. However, if there is a poor fit between the environment and person, as all the participants in this study experienced, it can also lead, at best to frustrating and humiliating experiences, and at worst to failure. However, students in this study did not fail. They were in fact, very successful academically. Theoretically aspirational capital and resilience theory may be drawn on, to understand their success. Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth theory also highlights aspirational capital because it entertains the possibility for students who are in a minority group to maintain hopes, aspirations and visions of success despite social and structural barriers. The results suggest that participants always took time to reflect on where they were coming from and their reasons for pursuing higher education. Their main reason for pursuing HE was to change the cycle of poverty in their families. They then chose to be resilient against all the negative experiences and continued to focus on their studies to graduate and have better chances of employment.

5.3.3 Institutional culture

South African higher education institutions have different and strong historical backgrounds. In post-Apartheid South Africa, particularly HAI (White institutions) were expected to transform their demographics and include more Black students and staff. This became an attempt at demographic transformation while exclusionary institutional cultures still remained intact. Covarrubias, Stephen, Markus, Fryberg and Johnson (2012) believe that the culture of higher education plays a pivotal role in 'social reproduction' of the society.

In this context the cultural dichotomies of higher education play a significant role in the success or failure of FGS in higher education. The first generation Black African students who participated in this research joined the higher education institution where they studied

during the time of societal transition in South Africa. Opportunities that were offered at this time were previously unheard of to FGS (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005). The flip side of those opportunities became stumbling blocks to the success of many FGS because they were not familiar with the culture of the institutions they wished to join and there was a perception that minimal support was offered by the institution. Tinto (2008) is vocal about the fact that access without support is not an opportunity.

The participants in this study highlighted some of the realities that they had to face while they were students at that higher education institution. Those experiences ranged from having to attend meetings where they couldn't understand anything that was being said because the majority of the students were Afrikaans speaking. There was furthermore little effort to accommodate the English speaking students. Bhabha (1994) refers to this experience as 'hybridity' where FGS have to straddle two worlds; that of their families and communities and that of the higher education institution. Hybridity can be regarded as self-formation in an unfamiliar environment to satisfy the values of the dominant culture of that environment. This means that the ambivalent space that students occupy could potentially also be a resource of creativity and empowerment, where students may learn how to negotiate contradiction, rejection and sense of conflict in academic contexts (Bhabha, 1994).

The worst experience for this group of participants was how many middle class non-FGS students, especially those known to come from wealthy families, appeared to flaunt their wealth and the power that came with being middle class. The latter distressed the participants most because they knew that they could never measure up to the level of wealth that existed among some of their fellow students. When it comes to student's wealth most research done with students like FGS who may come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds the study focuses on the student poverty in higher education. This is of interest because it measures the challenges that students have to go through and determines if the students will drop out of higher education or find other means of raising funds to support themselves (Letseka & Breier, 2008; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). The participants indicated that as time passed, it became easier to ignore other students' wealth and persevere with their own studies. Lundberg, et al. (2007) defines cultural capital as an individual's general familiarity with the traditions and norms necessary to be successful in a specific context. If we look at the role that institutional culture plays in the success or non-success of FGS in this research, we can align it with Bourdieu's social and cultural capital's implication that scholastic achievement of children coming from different social classes will always differ. According to

Jansen (2004), the final bridge to cross in order to achieve social integration at formerly-white higher education institutions in South Africa is to create an inclusive institutional culture, which he describes as, “the way we do things around here”, in which students from diverse backgrounds “feel at home” (p. 122). The participants in this study found it difficult to ‘feel at home’ but coped by ignoring their discomfort.

5.3.4 Student residence diversity experience

Student residences in higher education institutions serve as a prime, concentrated area in which symbols, practices, and values can create both inclusive and discriminatory institutional cultures (Robertson, 2014). Mdepa and Tshiwula (2012) alluded to the fact that higher-education institutions in South Africa tend to be located far from where the majority of students live. Public transport is expensive and often unsafe, and students who have to commute to university often live in accommodation that is not conducive for studying. These factors necessitate accommodating students in residences on campus. The experience that most students have of higher education residence is strongly influenced by the culture of that particular institution. This is where cultural practices tend to be condoned and promoted among students. Tinto’s (2000) theory of student departure suggests that students are more likely to remain at a higher education institution if they have opportunities to become connected to the life of the institution, in both their social and academic lives, through a process of academic and social integration. Student residences have a potential to play a pivotal role in changing the FGS perceptions of higher education if the institutions could embrace the diverse personalities and needs that they bring to the institution.

This study found that participants who had joined this historically advantaged institution had varied experiences of staying at the institution’s student residences. Participants had different opinions about the impact of staying at the higher education student residences; some were quite content with the security and opportunities offered by the institution’s student residence. Others were not happy with the things they were expected to do in support of the culture of a particular residence. One of the students’ residences at the institutions where the research was conducted has an accepted culture that demands that first year students perform some rituals that are demeaning and humiliating like kissing the wall when a senior student who has authority is passing by, and the participants felt that this practise was extremely offensive. Some students also found it difficult to share a room with students who did not even greet them in the morning or when they enter the space they share with the participants.

There was also a general feeling that rules at that institution favoured White students and the adherence to rules was quite flexible when White students transgressed the rules but very rigorous when other racial groups were found guilty of the same transgression. Robertson (2014) highlights strategies that students use to support aspects of institutional culture that are exclusionary. Some students who are discomforted by the residence cultures opt to leave student residence and rent private lodging to have 'peace of mind'. Tinto (2000) supports the notion of student residences offering positive influence in promoting student integration and engagement through social supportive residential setups to promote academic success and persistence.

5.3.5 Prejudice in sports activities

Extra-curricular involvement can have a positive impact on the experiences of FGS in higher education. The National Department of Sport and Recreation (2005) encouraged students to participate in sport to enhance their academic abilities. Pascarella, et al. (2004), Fisher, (2003), Kirk, (2003), Klein,(2003) encourages extra-curricular involvement because he believes that the benefits of being involved in sport include positive effects on critical thinking, degree plans, internal locus of attribution for academic success and a preference for higher order cognitive tasks. The institution where the research was conducted had a variety of sports activities in which students could participate. FGS in this research rarely participated in sport because they spent most of their time either studying or being kept busy with part time employment to raise funds to provide for their needs. Three of the participants were very keen on being part of the sporting activities but they experienced the teams in which they were playing differently. Two of the participants experienced discrimination and exclusion even though they were seasoned players and had brought expertise in the sport of their choice. One participant felt a sense of belonging where she could forget her academic challenges and enjoy the sports activities. However, students also described ways in which they coped with challenging experiences at university

5.4 Participant's responses on the positive educational and psychosocial experiences in higher education

I will now discuss the positive educational and psychosocial experiences of FGS in higher education, keeping in mind the background where the participants came from and their educational aspirations for the future. The positive experiences that the participants had included access to higher education, financial support received from the higher education

institution as well as the good quality of education when they compared it to their peer's quality of work who attended other higher education institutions.

It is important to note that FGS enter higher education with less knowledge of higher education experience as they are the first in their families to attend higher education (U.S Department of Education, 2006). The participants confirmed that as much as the schools offer career guidance as a subject this subject is never taken seriously by some educators who are supposed to be guiding students into the careers they would like to follow. On the other hand, parents relied on the schools to guide the students because they (parents) have no knowledge of what higher education entails. This meant that these students had little guidance as their teachers and parents, for different reasons, could not provide career based education about accessing higher education. Cook (2004) agrees with the fact that FGS had no knowledge of entry requirements because of their family background in relation to prior higher education engagement and social support (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; Thomas, 2002; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie- Gauld, 2005).

5.4.1 Access to higher education

Mdepa and Tshiwula (2012) highlight the notion that access to higher education in Africa is not without barriers. People from disadvantaged social backgrounds in most African countries face a range of obstacles and tend to be poorly represented in higher education institutions. Harmon (2012); Jones and Jackson (2003) and Roach (2001) agree that higher education institutions around the world are experiencing a contemporary crisis, as predominantly White higher education institutions are less able to recruit and retain African students.

The above statement was not applicable to the participants of this study. One of the positive experiences of higher education for the participants in this study was the ability to access a historically advantaged institution and be successful in a very complex environment. The findings from this study show that the participants agreed that it was not easy for them to access higher education institutions because they came from families who were not familiar with higher education. They had to rely on the support offered either by the institution or support from individuals who saw potential in them and had knowledge of the higher education processes. These individuals could be relatives, church members or prominent people within their communities.

Morrow (2009) examines access as a concept that extends beyond the idea of providing a place for a student to study at a higher education institution. He talks about epistemological access which includes access to the academic ways of knowing how to navigate the higher education context. Boughey and Niven (2012) and CHE (2010) further explain that epistemological access is not only about the individual agency of students, but is also recognised as an institutional responsibility to create the necessary conditions for students to gain admission to the tools for academic practice. Tinto (2008) alludes to the fact that it is not enough to provide low-income students access to higher education institutions and claim that they have been given opportunity. Higher education institutions should construct environments that support FGS' effort to learn and succeed beyond access.

The participants in this research commended the institution where they studied for having administrative systems that are effective even for the benefit of students who are not familiar with what higher education entails. They said that they always received a warm reception from the administrative staff who dealt with processing entrance and funding application, even though historically advantaged institutions are known to have selection criteria that are difficult for those who had attended school in disadvantaged areas to meet. The participants in this research had a better chance of acceptance after attending a bridging year within the higher education institution to improve their NSC marks. Burke (2012) agrees that traditionally higher education institutions had crafted their admission policies and requirements around fitting prospective students with predetermined profiles dependent on the specific expectation of the discipline. The exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's systems theory suggest that there will be matters that are outside the individual's control that will affect the individual. In this case the FGS qualify to study in higher education but there are other challenges that make it difficult for them to access higher education institutions like other students.

5.4.2 Financial assistance in higher education

According to Li (2007) the financial barrier is intertwined with higher education attendance for FGS and it is through bursaries and loans that this barrier can be overcome. This notion is supported by Mdepa and Tshiwula (2012) when they relate that in the African higher education context there seems to be a direct correlation between student access and funding in higher education. The participants revealed that it was extremely difficult for them to make a decision of coming to higher education because they knew that their families could not

afford the high tuition and residential fees and other added financial burdens that accompany being a higher education student.

The challenge that the participants in this study had to deal with emerged even before they joined the higher education context. It started when they wanted to apply to higher education institutions because higher education institutions need an application fee to be able to process prospective students' applications. The participants in the study report that they had to weigh up applying because it meant paying the application fee from meagre family income where parents were sometimes surviving on a government grant or were unemployed. The second implication is that participants couldn't apply to more than one institution because that implied paying three or four application fees to different institutions. This means that FGS may often queue for hours outside HE institutions only when they have received their NSC results and are sure that they qualify to study towards a degree course. Other expenses that became prominent when students in the study had joined higher education included a travelling allowance, textbook money, living expenses and other costs that arise from time to time. Steyn (2009) agrees that a lack of finances constitute a challenge in terms of the necessary resources to participate in the academic practice but also contribute to the feelings of inferiority when FGS compared themselves to non-FGS.

The researcher found that all the participants in the study opted to join this higher education institution because they felt that they stood a better chance of qualifying for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary. At this predominantly White institution, African students have a better chance of being awarded this bursary. This is so because fewer Black African students attend this institution and so the institution is able to offer a bursary to most Black African students who meet the bursary requirements. Once student receive this bursary they do not have to worry about registration fees because this institution deducts the registration fee from the bursary funds. Other higher education institutions still expect students to pay registration fees even if they have secured a NSFAS bursary which is only paid later. In historically disadvantaged higher education institutions the majority of students are Black African students who come from very difficult financial backgrounds. They apply to study at higher education institutions with the hope that they will receive the NSFAS bursary and have no other means of supplementing the bursary. This makes it virtually impossible for students to register at those universities because they often do not have registration fees. It is therefore very important that the practice of having to pay registration

fees at universities even though a bursary is secured be reviewed as it is a major barrier to access higher education for students who come from poor backgrounds.

The participants highlighted that they complemented their NSFAS bursary with tasks such as being a door guard at the student residences overnight or they secured work study opportunities that were made available to students at the university where they were studying. These opportunities included activities such as being student assistants in the various academic departments or being a student assistant at the library. The financial boost from the part time jobs gave them some financial independence and allowed them not to rely on an allowance from their families. This plight is highlighted by the United States Department of Education (2006) when they suggest that the inability to acquire the necessary financial assistance for the needs of FGS, forces them to frequently do part time work to earn some money because the family has a limited income and more dependents to cater for. A study of a Carnegie Corporation-funded scholarship programme for women shows that student-funding initiatives are a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in student success (Chisholm et al., 2009).

While lack of funding is highlighted as the main reason for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds to drop out of higher education, Tinto, in Letseka et al. (2010) indicated that research in other countries believe that lack of funding is a mask for other factors some of which have been highlighted above. Research into the difficulty of securing funding for higher education studies show that addressing student poverty and funding needs is essential to improving access and success in university (Chisholm et al., 2009; Letseka et al., 2010; Van der Berg, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's (1998) systems theory provides a framework in which to understand the structure of students' challenges in relation to familial financial difficulties. Linkages and processes take place between two settings (i.e. the student's study and home environment) indirectly influences the student's experience even if s/he is not directly in his/her family setting. FGS may have no influence on the financial stability of their parents and yet are directly impacted by the income that the parents receive from their employers. Constant worry about their familial finances may have a negative impact on the student's academic success.

5.4.3 Quality of Education

Although the South African government generated policies that sought to redress inequities that existed within higher education under apartheid (Barnes, 2006), there was no corresponding plan with respect to realising its objectives (Cloete, 2006). Hence historically advantaged institutions still have better resources and better results when the quality of education and resources are compared.

All the participants agreed that they were highly impressed by the good quality of education offered by the higher education institution that they were attending. They compared their knowledge with the stories told by friends and acquaintances who attended other higher education institutions. They mentioned though that studying at this higher education institution is not a 'walk in the park' and that it demands dedication especially because most FGS attended poorly resourced schools that sometimes did not have qualified educators who could engage students critically on the subject content..

5.5 Coping strategies in higher education

To cope means to deal successfully with a difficult situation. When I look at the challenges that FGS had to face when they joined higher education institutions, it became important for the researcher to know what strategies they use to cope with so many challenges and succeed in their studies? These strategies could be mechanisms that may have helped them to navigate higher education successfully and graduate in the expected time. The findings revealed that all the participants relied on peer support, sometimes family support and their own resilience.

5.5.1 Family support

Dyson and Renk, (2006) believe that FGS' transition to higher education can be characterized as a stressful life event due to the variety of life changes that typically co-occur at this time. These events include but are not limited to social stresses associated with higher education, anxiety about moving away from home, family, friends, and a familiar environment and the need to forge new social relationships with roommates, friends, and dating partners in higher education. The participants in the study felt that they do get support from their families but not the support that would make them succeed in the new HE environment. Basit (2012) and Appadurai (2004) refer to this support as aspirational capital. Participants looked forward to receiving phone calls and being updated about events at home. Not all of the participants were keen on going home during the holidays because home is also a reminder of lack. In

their opinion they wished to go back home when they had the means to change their family's situation around. The families of FGS in the sample were not familiar with higher education because they did not have an experience of what higher education entails. Some literature seems to suggest that FGS cannot rely on support from their families to understand and navigate HE systems (Stuber, 2011, Tinto, 2014). However the students in this sample suggested that their parents assisted them in numerous ways, both psychologically and academically. When these families could not help their children they sought educational mentors in the form of relatives or former teachers who could help the students. They also motivated them by visiting or phoning to check on how they were coping at university. Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth also includes familial capital which notes that parents play a significant role in motivating and supporting their children to succeed in higher education even if they are not familiar with the higher education systems. They appreciate being informed about the progress or challenges so they can look for help in their own circles. It is therefore vital that the family keep the lines of communication open so that the student can feel their support. Yosso (2005) refers to the familial capital as an extended view of family and kinship that incorporates community history and memory in order to foster collective consciousness.

5.5.2 Peer support in higher education

I have mentioned in earlier chapters that the participants in this research all accessed the university via a bridging programme. When they started their first year they already had friends that they had met during their bridging year. These friends played a significant role in sharing challenges or helping to resolve challenges. Their support ranged from listening to FGS and sharing information that they generally could not access easily. They spent time together because they understood the backgrounds where they came from, something they felt that not all the people around them understood. This did not mean that their peers were restricted to the students they knew from the bridging programme, they made efforts to make new friends even with other students who attended the same classes with them. Eames and Steward (2008) believe that peer interaction provides learners with a greater sense of belonging and support which may have a positive impact on student retention and learning achievements (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Huijser & Kimmins, 2008).

5.5.3. Resilience in higher education

Resilience is the ability of individuals to perceive stressful situations, in general, as manageable rather than overwhelming and the ability to cope effectively (Seery, 2011). FGS have multiple identities and roles that they must juggle (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherel, 1987). These identities include coming from a different social background and community (working class) and finding themselves in a completely different social background and community (middle class). Often these identities are unnamed or masked in an effort to acculturate to the academic world. The participants learnt to mask their feelings and struggles because they did not want to be seen to be different within the higher education context. Education exposed these students to difference, new ideas, and new creative endeavours that extended their world view. In working class communities, vulnerability is seen as a sign of weakness that is to be avoided or at least hidden. The participants felt that they had to be resilient in these challenging circumstances because they were trying to conquer a new frontier of academia by pretending that all is well while simultaneously holding onto the world in which they were born (by being grounded in the values of family and community). Resilience theory can be seen in individuals but is also evident in interpersonal and community ecologies (Fisher & Sonn, 2002; Luthar, 2006). This implies that individuals and systems must cope and adapt to changing conditions within an ecosystem.

5.5.4 Extended support of the bridging programme

The bridging programme that these participants attended prior to joining the specific higher education institution mainstream sometimes became the only source of reference when these students needed support. They always went back to the staff of the bridging programme to seek assistance or to be referred to services that are available on campus at the institution. The assistance they received ranged from merely showing them where the counselling services were, to huge concerns of what they should do when they were not ready to write a test and realised that this might have a great impact on their end of the year results.

5.6. Support provided by lecturers to FGS

The participants of this research were drawn from different fields of study and therefore studied in different faculties. Some of the participants reported that there were some lecturers who were happy to assist them in various ways, as discussed below.

5.6.1 Giving of their time

Individual lecturers structure their time according to the work load they have. Students sometimes need extra time to consult with these lecturers and they are referred to tutors who are meant to deal with smaller groups of students. Lemin and Mawoyo (2014) believe that lack of contact time with lecturers means that many students do not have direct engagement with academic staff. It is known that positive student engagement and regular contact with academic staff are important facilitating factors in student success. Students' engagement with their academic work can be mediated more effectively with regular and positive teaching and academic support. Some of the participants shared how some lecturers would give their time to explain concepts to them even if they would have preferred to use that time for something else. This made the participants feel embraced and given an opportunity to have a voice in their own learning. Unfortunately not all lecturers were willing to do this. Thomas (2012) agrees that students who find it difficult to approach academic members of staff have a less good relationship with academic members of staff and are more likely to think about leaving the higher education institution.

5.7 Summary of the findings

The findings of this research show that the participants in the study had both negative and positive experiences of the higher education institution where the study was conducted. The negative experiences included the language of teaching and learning which was different from the mother tongue of the participants. Most participants had difficulty in dealing with the concept of being taught in Afrikaans except for one participant who even though her mother tongue is Xhosa had attended a dual medium school during her high school years and therefore being taught in Afrikaans was not a new concept to her. Secondly all the participants experienced the lecture halls in the same way, that of being an alienating space and not embracing the diversity brought by students of different races and languages. Thirdly the participants felt that the institutional culture is making little effort to include diversity in its activities. They all felt some policies have been adopted but the actual institutional

practise is different from the documented policy. Fourthly the participants had different opinions when it came to student residence. For those who came from rural areas they enjoyed the security and subsistence that university student residence provided. The participants who came from urban backgrounds chose private lodging as opposed to staying at the student residences. The last point on the negative experiences was prejudice in sports activities. Only one participant had a positive experience of these activities the rest of the participants experienced it negatively because they felt prejudiced even though they brought expertise from their home teams.

The positive experiences of higher education for the participants included access to higher education. All the participants were FGS and access to university was an opportunity that was impossible because none of their family members had ever attended higher education. Secondly because the participants came from working class families the issue of funding was an obstacle in their desire to attend higher education. With the assistance of the university staff they were able to secure financial support for the duration of their studies. Thirdly the participants applauded the quality of education of the institution where they were studying because they established from their friends, relatives or neighbours who studied at other higher education institutions that the standard of the participants' was very high.

The participants didn't just share their negative and positive experiences of higher education. They also shared the coping strategies that they used to be successful because all the participants were completing their studies during the period when the research was conducted. They related family support as playing a significant role even though sometimes the support was not academically aligned they still looked forward to receiving phone calls and getting updates about things happening back home. The participants applauded the impact of the support they received from their peers. This had significance because when their families couldn't advise them accordingly about higher education related issues they then resorted to their peers who were in the same context and understood the challenges that they were going through. The last point of coping strategies is resilience. Resilience can be defined as positive adaptation despite adversity.

All the participants had accessed the higher education institution where they were studying via the bridging programme that assisted them to improve their NSC marks. This bridging programme became their first point of experiencing higher education because it operates

within the university. When students experienced difficulty when they were university students they contacted the bridging programme staff members for support and advice.

5.8 Concluding remarks

The participants in this research took a journey that was less travelled within their families by venturing into higher education. It may seem natural to other young people who are not FGS that when they finish high school they will go into higher education because they know the value of what higher education holds. Yet FGS in this study were always guided by second hand information of what higher education entails. They did not anticipate nor understand what it meant to be a higher education student and be successful in their studies because no one in their families had ever ventured into higher education.

This was a very emotional journey for the participants because they became aware that as much as they thought they were born into a democratic country being a higher education student, for FGS, who are from a diverse group, had many implications. One of these implications was that FGS view higher education as an avenue for upward mobility not only for the student but their family and the communities where they came from, as Jehangir (2010) has emphasised.

While conducting the research it became evident that cultural and historical legacies continue to shape people's lives. As much as higher education institutions are institutions of learning, the activities around social and cultural perspectives shape the experiences of individuals involved with the business of teaching and learning. The theories that were used in this research (i.e. Bourdieu's social and cultural theory, Yosso's cultural wealth and Bronfenbrenner's system's theory) reflect significantly on the effect of social and cultural issues in the different systems that play a pivotal role in the success of FGS in higher education.

The participants were shocked to realise that even though South Africa is celebrating 21 years of liberation people from different race groups still displayed intense racial aggression. They all agreed that the experience that they went through can only be understood by a person who had to deal with the environment every day for three or four years to understand the effect it has on the individual. FGS experiences of ambivalence were strong in the student residence cultural and social activities because they had to engage and be part of their residence activities. The culture of the dominant group took precedence and did not embrace the

diversity of the demographic groups in the residence. They found themselves continuously straddling two worlds; that of their background and the university culture, highlighting hybridity in their experience of university (Bhabha, 1994).

Tinto (2008) shared the frustration experienced by FGS when he mentioned that access without support is not an opportunity. Higher education institutions should be making an effort to support FGS if they want them to be successful in higher education. The decision to diversify an institution goes hand in hand with the responsibility of extending access to those who come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Social – cultural studies serve as reminders that student engagement in one setting (e.g. home) can greatly influence the range of social- educational experiences and opportunities they enjoy (or not) in others (Barton et al., 2013; Wylie & Hodgen, 2012).

Access for success emerged as a dominant theme when the researcher realised that the participants were in different years of study within different faculties. The similarities of their experiences could have easily formed a pattern of how an FGS can experience the historically advantaged higher education institution where the study was conducted.

5.9 Limitations of the study

Even though twelve students who had attended the bridging programme were invited to participate in the research, only eight students eventually participated. The four participants had already left this particular higher education institution and joined other higher education institutions in different provinces. It became difficult to have constant communication with these students because of their schedules and distance. The scope of the study was then limited to eight Black African students who attended a historically advantaged higher education institution. This study exclusively recruited participants who are Black African FGS and so the study comments are directed to the experiences of these particular successful FGS's. However, the reality is that not all Black African students are FGS, as well as the fact that not all FGS are Black African students. There are students who come from other racial groups, both Black and White, who are FGS.

5.10 Further research possibilities

It would be interesting to know the reasons why the other FGS who left the higher education institution after one or two years of study decided to leave as well as learning more about these students progress in other higher education institutions. It is acknowledged that not all

FGS are Black African students. There are also white and coloured FGS students. It may be important to incorporate all FGS across different racial categories and examine the nuanced dynamics that impact on students across racial categories.

5.11 Recommendations

Access for success: It is important to note that even though higher education institutions have extended their access to admit FGS, more structural diversified support may enhance FGS students' ability to succeed. Support across all systems of higher education ranging from administrators, lecturers, fellow students, residence committees as well as sports coaches, should be encouraged as an isolated support office may not be enough to meet FGS student support need in multiple university environments.

Language usage in a multilingual context: The historically advantaged higher education institution should make an effort to be a dual medium stream institution. This policy should be monitored in both lecture halls and residential spaces because policy is not always implemented in practice.

Teaching and learning: FGS struggle to deal with a curriculum that is not always relevant to their lived experiences. There is a recommendation that the lecturers should make an effort to use examples about experiences that all students can relate to in order to facilitate understanding of the concepts generated in lectures. They could also set assignments where students are able to incorporate their own lived experience as examples in relation to theoretical concepts. This may be one of the ways in which diversity may enrich the lecture hall experience for all students.

Financial assistance: Financial challenges continue to plague FGS and there is a need to educate these students about bursaries that are available to them and to suggest how bursary information can be accessed.

Mentoring: FGS would rather be mentored by other FGS because they believe that they may understand their circumstances and may be able to motivate and inspire them to succeed.

Peer leaders: there is an increase of diverse students participating in higher education. Senior FGS students can be peer leaders and guide the junior FGS to co-curricular issues and the importance of engaging those issues.

Lecturers need to make an effort of embracing the diverse students that they have in their different classes. They need to acknowledge their presence and encourage their efforts in class.

5.12 Concluding reflections

In conducting this research I have experienced what the participants had to go through when they joined higher education institution. I became aware of the anxiety in each student as they go through higher education as if they are going through a transformation process. I now realise that when FGS join higher education, they are in the prime of their lives and more vulnerable because they are trying to define who they are. The number of years they spend away from their families in a different environment with a different culture play a significant role in the young adults that they would become when they graduate. The experience might be twofold because it prepares them to understand that the world of work has multiple cultures and has equal expectations of performance just as higher education does. It also challenges FGS to step out of their comfort zones and deal with the challenges at hand and find solutions.

Through the process I realised that many FGS had very strong feelings of isolation, doubt and exclusion. This made me realise that as much as the White Paper (1997) had good intentions in forcing to higher education institutions to transform, little has been done effective in monitoring what is really happening in different institutions and how to address challenges directly

In conclusion it is important that higher education institutions should undertake a direct responsibility towards actively facilitating the transformation process. FGS should be given ample opportunity to be more vocal about the support they need to be successful in higher education. Higher education institutions should make an effort to highlight the structures and processes that can be put together to offer the tacit knowledge that FGS need to know when they pursue higher education. This knowledge is often elusive to those whose parents and siblings have not attended higher education.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Students will be introduced to the researcher and her supervisor at the workshop/group session. The researcher will do the introductions as follows:

Hi there. My name is Nokwanda and I am doing research for my Masters degree in Educational Support. I have mentioned to you that I would like to talk to you about your experiences as first generation students who came into the university after attending a bridging programme. In today's exercise, we are going to do some drawings and I will follow today's session up with interviews in the next few days. Once you have completed the interviews and I have analysed the data, I will invite you back for a session at the end of August to discuss how I have analysed the data.

Opening question to group:

Phase 1 a) What do you understand by the term "first generation student"?

Possible probes:

- a. Do you regard yourself as a first generation student?
- b. Do you feel included or excluded at the university because of your FGS status? Explain.
- c. Do you know anything about support for the first generation students on this campus?

Phase 1b): Draw a community map of your educational community:

- Describe what you have drawn about your educational community
- Indicate three resources that you enjoy and three difficulties that you would like to change in your educational community?

Phase 1c): River of life exercise

- Draw a river of your life showing the ebbs and flows of your educational and psychosocial experiences up till now. You may start at any stage in your life up till where you are at present.

Phase 2: Individual interviews

What came to mind about your educational and psychosocial experiences in the focus group since we last spoke?

Probes:

Is there anything more that you would like to tell me about your home and educational background that you did not mention last week?

Is there anything more that you would like to tell me about your university experiences, as a first generation student that you did not mention last week?

What was it like for you to be part of the focus group?

Further probe questions if not elicited above:

1. Would you encourage other students, to come to this university?
2. Can you share some of your experiences in physical spaces on campus for example, lectures, residences, student centre, and sport facilities?
3. Tell me about your interactions on campus with students who come from different backgrounds than you do (class, race, gender)
4. Tell me about your interactions on campus with students who come from a similar background than you do (class, race, gender)
5. What have you done to overcome challenging experiences on campus?
6. What support networks have you used? (lecturers, student support services etc?)

Appendix B

Permission letter



UNIVERSITEIT □□STELLENBOSCH □□UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot □□your knowledge partner

07 June 2013

Ms Nokwanda Siyengo
Department of Educational
Psychology
Faculty of Education
Stellenbosch University

Dear Ms Siyengo

Re: *The educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education: a case study*

The researcher has institutional permission to solicit the participation of former SciMathUs students for the purpose of this research project as stipulated in the research proposal. Institutional permission is granted on the following conditions:

- the researcher must obtain ethical clearance from the SU Research Ethics Committee,
- the researcher must obtain the participants' full informed consent for all the facets of their participation,
- participation is voluntary,
- participants may withdraw their participation at any time, and without consequence,
- data must be collected in a way that ensures the anonymity of all participants,
- individuals may not be identified in the results of the study,
- data that is collected may only be used for the purpose of this study,
- data that is collected must be destroyed on completion of this study,
- the privacy of individuals must be respected and protected.

The researcher must act in accordance with SU's principles of research ethics and scientific integrity as stipulated in the *Framework Policy for the Assurance and Promotion of Ethically Accountable Research at Stellenbosch University*.

Best wishes,



Jan Botha
Senior Director Institutional Research and Planning Division

Afdeling Institusionele Navorsing en Beplanning □ □ Institutional Research and Planning
Division

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Appendix C : Permission from the Research Ethics Committee

Approved with Stipulations

New Application

20-Jun-2013

Siyengo, Nokwanda N

Dear Mrs. Nokwanda Siyengo,

Your **New Application** received on **08-May-2013**, was reviewed by members of the **Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)** via Expedited review procedures on **17-Jun-2013**.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (HS923/2013)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research:

Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218839027.

Sincerely,

Susara Oberholzer

Proposal #: HS923/2013

Title: The educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education

Proposal Approval Period: **17-Jun-2013 -16-Mar-2014**

Included Documents:

Research proposal letter

Revised informed consent

Revised DESC form

Revised Research proposal

Revised REC Application letter requesting permission

Interview guide

REC Application revised permission letter

DESC form

Informed consent

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Appendix D : Explanation of participants rights

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education

You are requested to participate in a research study conducted by Nokwanda Siyengo, from the Educational Psychology, at Stellenbosch University. The research forms part of a thesis I have to write to complete my Masters Degree in Education Support. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were astudent and has since joined theto further your studies.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore the educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education institutions

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Familiarize yourself with the process.
- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- The research will take place from July until end of August.
- There will be one session where the process will be explained in depth
- There will be one session of a focus group.
- Each participant will then have a follow up interview.
- You will be expected to keep a research journal/ diary during this process.
- You can withdraw from the process by informing the researcher at any time.
- The researcher will not use the names of any participants.
- The researcher will share the findings of the research with all participants.
- The first session will take three hours with two twenty minute breaks in between.
- The interviews will take one hour each participant.
- The reflection sessions with each participant will be thirty minutes.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The research has no risk potential but may cause discomfort as participants might find the engagement emotional. Measures have been put in place with the counselling service of the University

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study wishes to highlight the plight of diverse students who come to the university as first generation students. This research can be used by both the University to improve their interventions or students to know how to navigate the university systems.

South African Higher education institutions are struggling to implement the democratic change needed to allow equal opportunities to all students irrespective of race, class or gender. This research would like to bring to the fore the plight of students who do not fall into the acceptable institutional culture.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no payment to the participants when participating in this research.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of

After each session the researcher will code the data and present it to the participants to edit before it is included in the research. Data will be collected with voice recorder, research journals/diary and maps/ drawings. This data will be locked in a safe at the offices. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these documents.

Data will be kept for five years after the completion of the research and will then be destroyed by the researcher and her supervisor.

If the researcher writes an article based on the research all participants will be protected by using pseudo names.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer

any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me ator my supervisorBoth the researcher and her supervisor are at the Education Faculty, the researcher is on the third floor room and my supervisor is on the second floor.

8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms..... at the Division for Research Development,University.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by Nokwanda Siyengo in English and I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____
[*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [his/her] representative _____
[*name of the representative*]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any
questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used in this
conversation.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix E – Letter of invitation

Institute for Mathematics and Science Teaching (IMSTUS)

Department of Curriculum Studies

Faculty of Education

Stellenbosch University

7602

Dear

Request for your permission to participate in my research

I am currently studying at the University of Stellenbosch towards MEd (Education Support) degree. I am preparing to conduct my research with former SciMathUS students who have now joined the Stellenbosch University or have left the university to either work or continue with their studies at other institutions.

The title of my research is **The educational and psychosocial experiences of first generation students in higher education**. The literature defines first generation students (FGS) as those students who are the first persons in their families to study at higher education institutions. Even though a fair amount of research exists in the USA on this topic, little research that uses the term FGS, exists in South Africa. I would like to explore this issue in the context of the access and equity debate in South African higher education.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research. You will be required to attend one focus group meeting that will last about 90 minutes and one individual interview, a week later that will also last about 90 minutes. You have a right to refuse to participate in this research. Whatever you say will be treated confidentially and will only be used with your permission. Your identity will not be used anywhere in the research. You can withdraw at any time when you feel uncomfortable with being part of the research. I will be aware of any emotional aspect of the engagement and be sensitive to the things that you are not willing to share with the group.

Could you please contact me via email atif you are willing to participate in the research or pop in to my office to let me know whether you would like to participate in this research?

Yours faithfully

N. Siyengo (Ms)

Appendix F – Sample of Themes emerging from one on one interview.

Themes	Name	Quotation	Comments
Language as a barrier to learning	Bukelwa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was from the rural areas. Never met a white person never thought I would go into class and they would ‘gooi’ in Afrikaans. I was under immense pressure. I felt like I was a snowball in my own world. • If I am in class I can read my slide notes that are in English while they lecture in Afrikaans 	Feelings of anxiety
	Lwandile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In lecture rooms people are not treated differently but with lecturers it’s this English/ Afrikaans thing and then we are not treated equally. But with other lecturers if you want to ask a question you are free to raise your hand and speak in English or Afrikaans and will be responded in that language 	Different approaches
	Sive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With me it’s different because I come from an Afrikaans background so if maybe I didn’t understand Afrikaans it wouldn’t be a major issue. Most of the time lectures are in Afrikaans some lecturers will say you can ask a question if you don’t understand. You can’t really ask a question on something you didn’t hear that’s the thing 	
First generation status	All participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They don’t have a specific unique programme that they give to FGS, they just treat you as a normal student. We don’t have that “this one will need special treatment.” You just have to follow what they do with all students. 	

Good/positive experiences	Sive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They kind of made me stronger, they gave me strength; they have opened my eyes to the new things that I never thought existed. 	Inner reflections of maturity
	Bukelwa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student residence is a good start, because in res they provide everything for you. There is food in there even when you want to go to town, you can gather(meet) with friends and travel together 	
	Lwandile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have grown and it's taught to me things even though those things are not normal to me. I don't see them as a bad experience. They are a learning curve. The University for me has done so much. I like the University, I don't know, there is no word to explain what it has done for me. I feel like it was one of those If it was a person and sitting right next to me. I would just hug for an hour and be like 'THANK YOU!!' • My English is not fluent enough but then the University approached me and made part of leadership of a project _____ for me seeing them believing in me in such a way that they put so much trust in me that you can do this it creates something in me. • I feel like I'm in this firm of accounting firm. I don't know much, yet, I'm still given so much work. I am being trusted into doing everything and that grows me, still humbled, that grow me. 	Self reflection

	Yanga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each time I talk to the people around here I feel like they are part of my family. Everyone understands me, I don't know, I feel like they have seen me before. When I come to this office everyone is happy and welcoming. Even if the day is bad, like, that's my grandmother. No matter what she is going through, no matter the circumstances? She is always the same woman towards everybody. So for me that is the treatment I've been receiving with everyone not certain people but everyone. I don't know how she would react. But with all the lecturers even though they teach in Afrikaans and everyone say this and that. With me there is love behind that. 	General feelings of gratitude to be in the environment
	Koli	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What I can tell is the University can change you. You can either be a reckless person or a good person. You have to know what you want, know your work and what you stand for. You need to balance your social life and your academic life, learn to communicate with people, have a backbone. As much as peer pressure is associated with it. One thing that I have noticed is that people want to belong and do things that are not part of them. There is a lot of competition. It is a fake; you can't go to every party and expect to excel in your academics. It doesn't happen. 2. The lecturers are so welcoming and supportive. 	Institutional culture

		<p>You don't feel inferior or as if you don't know what you are doing. Some lectures are offered in Afrikaans so if I don't understand and go to the lecturer, they don't give me attitude, they try to help me and explain it in English.</p>	Lecture hall experience of diversity
	Pam	<p>1. This compared to universities back at home where there are too many black people because the black people find excuses to party all the time. So there will be peer pressure and that will be a negative stripe on my academics (that is a positive for me to be here). Here we don't have much of a social life that you can go it.</p> <p>2. It is a good university in terms of academics but its way too expensive especially with my background. The student must have a good academic background otherwise it would be very expensive if you don't perform well. Finding a loan means even if you graduate finding a job is not easy and you have to pay back your debts so I have to think again.</p> <p>It's been a long journey I went through a roller coaster of ups and downs that I had. It's been (pause) mind opening and pretty much privileged to be in this university. I have met a lot of people even to have that privilege to come to University. Like being such a high standard university</p>	<p>Institutional culture</p> <p>Good quality education</p> <p>Gratitude and acknowledgment</p>
	Sive	<p>1. I can't think of any at the moment but with things like finance when they can, they do help you but it's a struggle to get things done.</p>	Financial challenges

		<p>2. I think for one to come here you have to be very strong because anything can happen. The thing is there is not a lot of us here people prefer to go to than come here. At least there you can find social groups, you don't feel different. This university is just something else, the standard yes, in terms of the standard of education I would recommend people to come here. Then also tell them to be very strong.</p>	<p>Referring to how things are done in the institution</p>
	<p>Vivi</p>	<p>3. I can't pinpoint into one because it has a general good system going on especially let's take Admin. I've gone to Admin of, I've been to Admin of..... it gave me a shock. I thought hayi kukho abantu abamnyama. Iadmin yalapa inabantu abamhlope few abebala ukuba bakhona ngoku abantu abamnyama andazi but I have a good experience ngabo. I don't know ukuba bayaba trainer but iservice yabo is up to standard. Iline yabo awuzube umile uba une ixesha elininzi ethywini its because lomuntu ubusy sesinye istudent not because uchat nefriends zakhe over the phone. So iadmin yalapha they know ukuba bazokwenzani baphume ezindlini zabo bezazi ukuba bazokwena lento and they do that. Especially if I could pinpoint umntu oyi one the person odealer noNSFAS she is a gift kubantwana who are from the poor background and she is always there to help.</p> <p>There is also iHead yeFinance like some of abantu abendifunda nabo abanike imali yophila, yokutya, yeencwadi so uyabanceda.(of the people that</p>	<p>Administrat or's assistance</p> <p>Processing of financial application</p>

		were in my study group, who were receiving money to survive, eat, buy books)	
Negative experiences	Pam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The negative experience is ignorance sometimes going to a lecturer to tell them you don't understand anything. They tell you at this level you should understand. I didn't have anyone at home that can help me or give me background to what I don't understand. So I find it very hard and very discouraging to even go to that lecturer even though you are struggling, she is gonna say this and that because of my previous experience (with that lecturer). 	Support from lecturers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Going around campus and greeting somebody and they just give you a 'flash light' smile. I would like when I say hi, you say hi back. Even when they pretend we don't know each other but we attending the same class 'Not Ayoba' (Not acceptable). And this group work 'thingie' they say you need to work in groups. Then you group yourselves it is very difficult if you don't have a friend in class. White people group together and I was the only black student and nobody wanted to group with me. I just attached myself with one of the groups that was willing to work with me. And whenever you raise a point they see you as stupid or something (ignore your contribution). They never take you seriously. It's difficult but you just learn to swallow it and keep in track. Raise a point whenever you can and there was this 	<p>Institutional culture</p> <p>Lecture hall diversity experience</p>

		<p>subject where we had to evaluate each other. They will give you low marks and say you didn't do this and that. Other groups worked well and distributed the questions among group members. You do this and I do that and one person does a section and send an e-mail to all the others add some info (if you have one) correct some mistakes if possible</p>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With Res that's when I saw the separation between us brown people and white people. There is exclusion even if we talk about transformation and diversity to me they are all just words that will lead to profitability and growth of organisations but the people will still be on the same point. • I wouldn't say it's the University, it's the people that have no understanding; maybe, I find it hard to believe that some white people have never seen us brown people. I don't see myself as black; this is black (pointing to computer screen). I am brown. • Most bad experiences I met them in res, because we are like squeezed there and most bad experiences happen there. • Sport is great but we have stereotyped coaches that are in the university you tend not to get more games than other races because it's like, coloured coaches so they don't really believe we have talent. When they see a black person they just see a poor man with no skill. Yes, I go because I love the sport, I just want to play I don't care about the profile of the sport as long as you can give me a ball then I will play. 	<p>Student residence experience</p> <p>Racial issues</p> <p>Prejudice in sports</p>

		<p>for bursaries for hours and sometimes you have to juggle between clashes. Sometimes finding the finance is a big thing. And then negatives, accommodation, sometimes people are not privileged to have accommodation closer to campus. You have to walk far from campus and you end up not going to class especially the 08h00 o'clock class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In class, discrimination especially of English speaking students. Cause I have a couple of lecturers that are not willing enough to accommodate the English speaking students • Mentors are basically in first year after that every man for himself. Second year if you need a mentor you must go for a private one which you have to pay. They are pretty much expensive. In other faculties, they don't have mentors like you just go to class, that's all. • Not really, the student centre is mixed, during lunch everybody is there mostly coloured people not much black people. If there is any discrimination it is from the people that serve us when we go to buy food from the shops. • Yes, but some of the white people are not happy, because sometimes I would try and help them and they would be like or this and this or that as if what I am saying is not good enough they already know. And I am like if you don't need my help its fine 	<p>challenges</p> <p>Choice of private accommodation based on experience from student residence</p> <p>Language issues</p> <p>Academic support</p>
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			White students not acknowledging the fact that she can help them with what they need
	Andiswa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I stayed in residence yho000 there was a big preference to Afrikaans speaking students. It wasn't so nice you could literally feel... (that you are different). There was literally five black students excluding coloured people and there was a big gap. And there was coloured activity and section meeting which were not inclusive. • But the meeting you were punished for not attending because the section and house meetings are compulsory 	Reason why she left the university student residence