



UNIVERSITY OF TM
KWAZULU-NATAL
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**EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL
TRANSITION FROM RURAL HIGH SCHOOL TO FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY:
A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

by

**INNOCENTIA NONDUMISO CELE
(205519936)**

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SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR SARASVATHIE REDDY

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DECLARATION

I, Innocentia Nondumiso Cele declare that this project is my own work which has been conducted under the supervision of Dr Sarasvathie Reddy titled: **“Experiences of Academic and Social Transition from rural high school to first year university: A case study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal”**. Where the work of others has been used, it has been acknowledged. This work has not been submitted for any other degree.

Signed _____

Innocentia Nondumiso Cele

Student No: **205519936**

Date _____

SUPERVISOR:

This dissertation has been submitted with/without my approval

Signed _____

Dr Sarasvathie Reddy

Date _____

ABSTRACT

Numerous studies show that the transition from high school to university is disconcerting and stressful especially for first generation students from rural communities, who experience additional challenges of disadvantaged schooling backgrounds. This study focused on the Bachelor of Commerce – Extended Curriculum (BCom4) Programme students’ experiences of academic and social transitioning from rural KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) schools to higher education – in this case the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Phenomenology was used to understand, interpret and describe the qualitatively different experience of students. Data was collected through the interviews to get an in depth understanding of rural students’ experiences and purposive sampling to identify participants of which seven students were identified as participants.

This study of rural students is located within the two clusters of student development theories: (a) psychosocial, which focuses on self-reflection and interpersonal dimensions of student lives and (b) the cognitive structural, which explains how students think, reason, organise and interpret their experiences and it was informed by the Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Student Development Theory.

This qualitative study argues that universal access to technology minimises the psychosocial effects of distance. Consequently, with improved technology and the rising number of “Millennial” students, first year transition to higher education is not quite the archetypical image portrayed in the literature. This contradicts the belief that rural parents are disinterested in students’ studies, since it suggests that rural families who themselves have received a university education are more involved and invested in academic matters. Finally, emerging evidence signals that the BCom4 programme offers an abundance of academic support to ameliorate rural schooling deficits.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents:

Father: **Phillip M. Cele** who has instilled the value and importance of education from a very young age.

Mother: **Gretta N. Cele** who even though she had nothing, she made sure that I get the education, and for sacrificing the little that she had to support my dream, and from whom I have inherited the spiritual wealth.

“Ngiyabonga boNdosi, boMagaye – Iphupho lenu lifeziwe”.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Globally, entry to university provides students with an opportunity to define and advance their careers as well as opportunities (Wangeri, Kimani & Mutweli, 2012). Students who have attended university are expected to have a better chance in life. Burke, Davis & Stephan (2016), attest that those students who hold a bachelor's degree are most likely to earn substantially more in a lifetime and experience better working conditions than those without a university degree.

Higher education is a major determinant of economic growth and social development and a fundamental tool for achieving a better life (Lamprianou & Sünker, 2014; Burke, Davis & Stephan, 2016). Rural students who are first in the family to attend university (first generation) signifies a great achievement and a sense of pride to their families and communities. The transition period from rural living to urban university life is characterised by growth and independence as most students are beginning a new life away from their familiar environment (Kreig, 2013).

According to Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry & Kelly (2009), moving from high school to college is an important pathway for success in life. Bozick (2007) referred to this romanticised rite of passage as an elusive image about students who are enjoying a carefree time of learning and self-exploration at college. The reality of this transition to college bears little resemblance of these fascinating images.

Mendaglio (2013) further cautioned that the transition from school to university can present novel, if not unique demands on students during their first year, in the same way that Knight & Rochon (2012) said that it can be challenging. This transition also represents a significant developmental milestone in a student's life that holds the potential for personal growth and behavioural change. A student's behaviour is sensitive to environmental factors, with decreased supervision and increased freedom they might change during the transition from school to university. Increased drinking of alcohol drug abuse and uncommon behaviour by

the student might be expected (Fromme, Corbin & Kruse, 2008). Students are required to adjust to the academic challenges, increased levels of independence, being away from home and the new role of expectations (Kreig, 2013). The movement from school, a controlled environment to an environment where students are expected to take responsibility for their own social and academic aspects of life, can affect their coping mechanisms (Lowe & Cook, 2003). These influences have the potential to affect the student's academic performance during this transition. A smooth transition from school to university is crucial to academic success especially in the first academic year (Hudley *et al*, 2009).

Depending on the student's background (home environment and setting), the new university environment can be very intimidating and overwhelming since some students are moving away from familiar places and people for the first time (Wangeri, *et al*, 2012). Rural students are further compromised by the new university life that can be extremely challenging and stressful as it presents a whole new way of living. Czernewics & Brown(2014) confirmed that the adjustment can be acute for students from rural backgrounds while Tinto (2004) argues that where you come from influences the many life decisions one must make. Mendaglio (2013) reinforces the point that students find it hard to adjust from school to university life by proclaiming that the established network of social support and parental supervision is often lost when students are attending universities away from home. It is against this background that the study sought to understand how rural students were able to make the transition both academically and socially to university life.

Many scholars are of the view that there is no universal agreement on an objective definition of rural/rurality. Rurality may be defined in various ways based on the population size, occupation and other socio-economic variables as well as political proclamations (Muula, 2007; Sookrajh & Joshua, 2009; Woods, 2011; Hlalele, 2012). This may be due to the character of rural areas being nation specific. Rurality is neither a simple nor an exactly definable concept for labelling certain areas (Duenckmann, 2010). In the South African context, this is not different as there is no standardised definition of rurality, and governmental bodies, research institutions and other stakeholders use a range of criteria to define rural. Du Plessis (2014) definition of rural is ambiguous since South Africa has diverse rural areas. There have been some attempts to develop definitions, including the use of population densities, size of towns, characteristics of the infrastructure. (Gaede & Versteeg, 2011). These are the same reasons that Woods (2010) defined rural as an imagined

entity. Woods (2010) based his definition of imagined entity on sociologist Marc Mormont's theory who argues that rural is a category of thought since it is first imagined, then represented, and finally taken on as a material form such as places, landscapes and a way of life which is shaped to conform to the idea of rural embodied. Masinire, Maringe & Nkambule (2014) further defined rural as a space which sustains human existence and development outside the authority of metropolitan. Typical rural areas are remote and relatively underdeveloped (Mohangi, Krog, Stephens & Nel, 2016). Rural schools and communities are diverse which makes it complicated to establish universal characteristics of definition (Sookrajh & Joshua, 2009). In South Africa, rural schools are located on the outskirts of the country (du Plessis, 2014) and many of them are within poor and disadvantaged communities (Mohangi *et al*, 2016). These schools still lack resources and facilities such as water, electricity, libraries, laboratories and computers (Chisolm, 2005; Gardiner, 2008).

The definition of an urban area, like rural also differs across the world. Similarly, in South Africa, no standard definition exists for the country (Laldaparsad, 2012). UNICEF State of the World's Children (2012) defined urban based on administrative criteria and political boundaries as well as population size, while according to Statistics South Africa Census (2001) urban is defined based on settlement type and land use such as cities, towns are typical urban settlements. The research was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) College of Law and Management Studies. UKZN is a large multi-campus University located in urban centres of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, Pinetown, Pietermaritzburg and Westville).

An urban university is therefore, defined as the university that serves an '*urban mission*' (Severino, 1996, p. 39). This means that it has the moral responsibility or obligation to serve the city in teaching, research and service (Waetjen & Muffo, 1983). A university is mainly established to make substantial contribution to solve the problems of urban society (Blizek & Simpson, 1978) and primarily to serve their cities (Waetjen & Muffo, 1983).

The participants of the study were students undertaking the BCom4 programme which is one of the Foundation/Alternative Access programmes offered by UKZN. The Foundation programmes are designed for under-prepared students from socio-economically disadvantaged communities and schools who do not meet regular admission criteria for

mainstream programmes because of their schooling background (Scott, 2012). The UKZN Undergraduate Prospectus (2016) reads:

“Alternative Access programmes caters for South African students whose academic potential was not realised due to a disadvantaged educational background. These students come from schools that do not equip them for admission to university – they may not obtain the required entry scores or subject level passes. The programmes identify candidates with potential and once registered, they receive the required support to enable them to succeed” (p23).

According to the College of Law and Management Studies Undergraduate Prospectus (2016), BCom4 is designed to meet the needs of students from disadvantaged schools who have the potential to succeed academically. The programme is divided into the BCom4 Extended Curriculum (General) and the BCom4 Extended Curriculum (Accounting) both offered at the Westville and Pietermaritzburg Campuses.

Additionally, the UKZN Undergraduate Prospectus (2016) stated that the admission requirements for these BCom4 Extended Curriculum Programmes are:

“NSC-Deg with APS 28 with Mathematics Level 3 and English and Life Orientation Level 4 for BCom4 (General) and NSC-Deg with Admission Point Score (APS) 30 with Mathematics, English and Life Orientation 4 for BCom4 (Accounting). Students must be from quintile 1-3 for both programmes” (p25).

In South Africa, schools are divided into five categories which are referred to as quintiles ranging from quintile 1 to 5 (Hall & Giese, 2009). Quintiles refer to the ranking of schools that are based on three weighted poverty indicators: income level of the community, unemployment rate; and literacy levels of the community where the school is located (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012; Dass & Rinqest, 2017). The quintile ranking of schools are significant in determining the no fee status of the school and the subsidy received from the government, hence the poorest schools receive a greater allocation than schools in wealthier communities who can raise funds (Hall & Giese, 2009; Dass & Rinqest, 2017).

Schools in the lowest quintiles which are quintiles 1 to 3 are designated as no-fee paying schools and receive the majority of funding from the government, while schools in quintile 4 and 5 are fee charging schools (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012; Mestry & Ndhlovu, 2014; Dass & Rinqest, 2017). Fees as described by the Department of Education (DoE) Government

Gazette (2003) refers to any form of payment for registration and tuition made by the parents in relation to the learner's school attendance. The school fee exemption and no fee schools are the government's attempts to improve access to quality education and redistribution of resources (Hall & Giese, 2009).

Low quintile schools serve the poorest communities, and many (if not all) schools in quintile 1 and 2 are in rural areas (DoE, 2004; Zikhali & Bokana, 2012). In determining the classification of the school, factors such as the infrastructure and how many homes are made of bricks, iron sheeting or similar are considered (Dass & Rinqest, 2017). If the school has more resources and facilities, it is placed higher up the quintile ladder. Schools which are classified and placed on lower quintiles are regarded as disadvantaged due to the lack resources and facilities including toilets, water, library, laboratories and other necessary resources (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012).

The College of Law and Management Studies Undergraduate Prospectus (2016) described the foundation programme as follows:

“BCom4 is a three-year programme degree extended over four years. It is designed to help students to develop competencies in language, numeracy, writing and critical thought. Specifically developed learning opportunities are provided alongside a reduced load of courses. Students who have attended the university or any other tertiary institution, whether in a degree or access programme of any kind for a complete semester will not be admitted” (p25).

Additionally, the BCom4 programme offers a scaffolded academic and non-academic support to assist students to navigate and negotiate between their studies and university life and it runs alongside mainstream courses. Students are expected to finish the programme within four years and should they progress slowly or have academic problems, a maximum of six years is allowed after which they are excluded in accordance with the University rules (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012).

In South Africa, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is the primary gateway between school and higher education. However, it does not guarantee a learners admission to any programme of study in higher education. Institutions have the right to set specific admission requirements to programmes in terms of section 37 of the Higher Education Act (DoE, 2008

& 2009). Institutions must admit applicants who are likely to succeed given good teaching, good facilities and appropriate academic and other support in the programme for which they are enrolled (DoE, 2008). Additionally, institutions' admission policies must also allow for alternative routes of entry (DoE, 2009). For this reason, several South African universities including UKZN responded by establishing a variety of programmes, most of which are the state-sponsored foundation programmes that help in achieving social imperatives of equity, transformation, skills development and economic empowerment (Dhunpath & Vithal, 2012; Kioko, 2010). The UKZN Teaching and Learning Report (2012) confirmed that foundation programmes were established to address the uneven access to universities. On the contrary, Young & Campbell (2014) argued that as much as historically white universities in South Africa have widened access, their focus is still on academic throughput rather than the psychological wellbeing of students, especially black students to whom the psychological distress rests upon because of past inequities.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

1.2.1 Personal Motivation

The motivation in choosing this topic was mainly based on my personal experiences of being a first-year student at UKZN who was born and raised in a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal. I had to make the transition from rural schooling to a student at an urban higher education institution. The lack of preparation from high school to the lack of knowledge of the big city and even the university teaching methods which are completely different from school were some of the major challenges that I had to navigate during my first year. However, the quest for knowledge coupled with the drive to be the first in the family to graduate were the reasons I managed to navigate the transition process successfully and further my studies up to this point.

1.2.2 Rationale

The majority of studies on transition focus on students' transition from high school to higher education in general and those that focus on rural or disadvantaged students are not based within the South African context (Bujuwoye, 2002; Davidowitz & Schreiber, 2008; Guiffrida,

2008; Jama & Mapasela, 2008; Nel, Troskie-de Bruin & Bitzer, 2009; Petersen, Louw, Dumont & Malope, 2010; Abbot-Chapman, 2011; Contreras, 2011; Shamah, 2011; Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012; Mudhovozi, 2012; Ganss, 2016; Hurst, 2016). In South Africa, there are few studies which have been conducted on transitional experiences of rural students, especially students who come from poor backgrounds (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Petersen, Louw & Dumont, 2009; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Czerniewics & Brown, 2014; Maxwell & Mudhovozi, 2014; Speckman, 2016). Limited studies have considered whether transition may depend on the size of students' home community setting or the process of adjustment over the course of their first year in higher education (Ames, Wintre, Pancer, Pratt, Birnie-Lefcovitch, Polivy & Adams, 2014). Historically, rural education in general has faced, and continues to face, more challenges and greater inequalities compared to its urban and suburban counterparts (Jaeger, Dunstan & Dixon, 2015). This in turn results in rural students facing unique challenges during their transition.

Factors affecting the transition of rural students stem from their upbringing, family, and community specific to a rural area (Ganss, 2016). Students from backgrounds with little or no experience of higher education, makes them vulnerable during the transition, and at risk of academic failure (McMillan, 2014). Additionally, socio-economic status has a major influence on student success of first year students (van Zyl, 2016).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Historically, South Africa has been characterised by intense political conflict and socio-cultural divisions along race and class lines (Subotzky, 2003). The conflicts and divisions of the South African apartheid era further affected the education system of the country. Higher education opportunities for white students were prioritised and the other race groups were marginalised (Council on Higher Education, 2013a, p.3). In 1994, the South African democratic government made a commitment to transform higher education as well as the inherited apartheid social and economic structure by institutionalising a new social order (Badat, 2010). This was for the first time in the history of South Africa that the government planned the development of education and training that will benefit the entire country (DoE, 1995).

As South Africa was transitioning from apartheid and minority rule to democracy, it was required that all the practises, institutions and values that existed be revised to fit the new era (DoE, 1997). This gave effect to the National Plan for Higher Education in 2001 which provided an implementation framework and identified strategic interventions that were necessary for the transformation of higher education (Ministry of Education, 2001). Post-apartheid, the higher education sector underwent a great change as public institutions are now open to all South Africans irrespective of race. This in turn led to the establishment of foundation programmes at many institutions and most of which are funded by the State. (Council on Higher Education, 2013b, p. 50; Dhunpath & Vithal, 2012; Boughey, 2005).

1.4 Significance of the Study

Being a first-year student at university can be very challenging especially for students from rural backgrounds. The change from the rural to urban way of living can cause additional challenges for some students. The socio-economic backgrounds and inadequate resources in rural schools are among some of the factors which can lead to underperformance of these students; leading to some of them not achieving enough points to be admitted at the university. Because of their disadvantaged background, first generation rural students find themselves faced with challenges during their transition from school to university which are related to their experience (Padgett, Johnson & Pascarella, 2012). However, Foundation programmes have been found to enable these students to achieve their dreams.

1.5 Objective of the study

This study sought to understand the academic and social experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who entered the university through alternate routes with the view of understanding their experiences of transitioning from rural schooling to urban university life. The findings of the study can also be useful for UKZN to design teaching and learning experiences to support rural students during the transition period or increase the support systems and even create more facilities for rural students.

1.6 Critical Questions

The following research questions guided the study: -

1. What are first year BCom4 students experiences of **academic** and **social** transitioning from a rural KwaZulu Natal schooling context to an urban university context?
2. How do the first year BCom4 students construct a relationship between their experiences of **rural schooling** and first year experiences of academic and social transitioning at an urban university?
3. Why do first year BCom4 students experience academic and social transitioning from a rural schooling context to an urban university in the way that they do?

1.7 Focus of the Study

The focus of the study was to trace first year Bachelor of Commerce – Extended Curriculum (BCom4) student’s experiences of transitioning academically and socially from rural KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) schooling context to an urban university in particular at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations were noted during the study:

- The study is limited to one university, which is UKZN.
- The study is limited to one Foundation programme whereas there are other Foundation programmes run by other Colleges within the University.
- The study is limited to one race (Black students) and a single Province (KwaZulu-Natal) and yet there are students from other race groups as well as other Provinces who are also coming from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds who might share similar experiences.
- The initial plan was to interview twelve (12) students however, only seven (7) students were interviewed. Interviews were conducted during the “fees must fall” strike and because of the academic workload and exams which were behind schedule not all students were able to avail themselves.

Therefore, the findings for the study are more suggestive.

1.9 Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter One

This chapter lays a foundation for the study and it highlighted the introduction, background and context of the study as well as the reasoning behind the research. It provides an overview of the study on transitioning from rural schooling to an urban university context. It also describes the motivation for undertaking the study, significance of the study and critical research questions as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter Two

This chapter is a review of relevant literature on the experiences of social and academic transition to higher education for rural students; factors influencing transition of rural students as well as support required by first year rural students during their transition. The literature was drawn from research done internationally and nationally on students' transition from school to university. Thereafter, literature on rural students' academic and social experiences and support provided to students during this transition is presented.

Chapter Three

This chapter is an outline of the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. Chickering's seven vectors of student development is the theory used as the lenses through which the data was produced and analysed for this study. This theory is located within two clusters of student development models which are psychosocial and cognitive-structural

Chapter Four

This chapter describes the research methodology and design of the study. It focuses on research tools used in the study, research design, research instruments as well as how the participants were selected. The ethical considerations and credibility of the study are described here.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents the research findings, analysis and discussion of the responses from participants. The data is organised according to themes as they emerged from the data analysis process.

Chapter Six

This chapter presents the summary, recommendations and suggestions for further research as well as conclusions.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter lays a foundation for all the chapters of the study. It outlines in detail the background and context of the study, rationale, significance, statement of the problem, focus and limitations, research questions and finally outlines the whole dissertation. The study attempted to understand the academic and social experiences of rural students who transitioned from high school to an urban university. The context of South African rurality, schooling system as well as urban university life and purpose were highlighted. The next chapter portrays the body of knowledge that this study contributes to.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is presented according to research that was undertaken on transitioning from school to university in general, international and nationally. Literature on rural student's academic and social experiences while transitioning from high school to university is also presented and the chapter concludes with studies reflecting academic and social support which is provided during the transition.

2.2 Transition

For the purpose of this study, the process of transition involves movement from one environment to another in any life situation. In most instances, it involves moving into a completely new environment from the one an individual is used to. Bolt & Graber (2010) agreed that the fact that transition involves movement from known situations into the novel environment makes it painful. According to Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer (2000), it means change in the person or environment or both and entails the reconstruction of relations between the individual and the environment. In the case of students, Hassim, Strydom & Strydom (2013) define transition as an experience of change involved in joining the university. On the other hand, Briggs *et al* (2012) define transition as a social displacement and may be intensified if the student is first in the family to attend university.

The transition period is usually regarded as highly stressful for first year students who are moving from high school to higher education for the first time. There are several challenges faced by students during the transition from high school to higher education. Among the challenges that are reflected in the literature are students being separated from their families (many for the first time in their lives); and becoming independent and responsible for their own lives (Hassim *et al*, 2013). The independence comes with its own challenges ranging from relocating to a new setting to adapting to a new learning environment. Students are being introduced into a completely new culture and environment of which they must learn to adjust to. These adjustment problems result in stressful experiences as students are subjected to various conditions, events or situations in their new environment (Bujuwoye, 2002). The

change from school to university is a major life transition to which many students have considerable difficulty adjusting; it is also regarded as an important factor in predicting university outcomes (Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson & Strauss, 2003; Petersen, Louw & Dumont, 2009). Entering a new life introduces new information and experiences to which people must adapt (Morton, Mergler & Boman, 2014). According to Mudhovozi (2012), the university presents the opportunity for the student to become more individualistic. Kreig (2013) views this separation and individuation from parents as a crucial development issue affecting the student's adjustment to university. Mendaglio (2013) adds that the university life places novel and unique demands on first year students confirming Cross, Shalem, Backhouse & Adam's (2009) statement that the university environment appears to be more open than the experience at school.

Transition entails the reconstruction of relations between the individual and the environment (Tao *et al*, 2000). According to Gordon, Henry & Dempster (2013) some of these challenges are universal while some are unique to institutions. Carrant & Keenan (2009) mention that everything is new, and adjustments have to be made in terms of self-identity and self-reliance resulting in additional stress by the student. Students are also at a point where new social routines and experiences are explored.

In a study conducted by Dias & Sá (2012) transition from high school to higher education was viewed as a continuum of learning new codes of conduct that guide the exercise of a renewed student craft. The continuum of learning new codes is described in the study as a set of coping mechanisms which enable students to adapt to a new environment using their existing competences. They further state that transition depends on the challenges that the new institution offers to new comers and support mechanisms provided to them which enables them to develop ways to master and deal with their new environment. Dias & Sá (2012) study focused on the need for students to trigger a set of adaptive skills to a new and dynamic environment by using their competences acquired in high school. The study concluded that transition is perceived by students as a hard challenge and required the learning of new codes that brand intellectual and social life, and in general, all developmental transitions imply changes associated with crisis and stress.

On the contrary, for some students this can be the most exciting period of their lives as it signifies growth and development. It can mean that students are starting their journey to

adulthood and will enjoy the freedom of being away from home which also means less parental control. Bujuwoye (2002) confirms that not all students are stressed, and they may not all experience different aspects of the university the same way.

In fact, transition is a period with mixed feelings, especially for first year students, it can be exciting and challenging as it is one of exciting intellectual and personal discoveries, independence in growth and confidence (Scott, 2009; Elias, Noording & Mahyuddin, 2010). It is more of an 'in-between-ness' – 'betwixt space' as referred to by Palmer, Kane & Owens (2009, p. 37). This means that some students feel supported while others feel they do not receive the level of support they require (Leese, 2010). Some students may even feel marginalised by their backgrounds (Buchanan, Ljungdahl & Maher, 2015).

The university is characterised by several distinctive interpersonal-societal demands that occur without the support associated with the familiar, structured nature of high school (Lenz, 2014). According to the results of a study conducted by Sevinc & Gizir (2014) it showed that freshmen who were experiencing adjustment problems describe their Faculties as less caring and supportive. The shift from high school to university is generally regarded as a major developmental leap since it involves a dramatic change in the lives of students (Steyn, Harris & Hartell, 2014). Numerous scholars view transition to higher education as representing a significant milestone and its importance is related to students' retention and satisfaction. Similarly, the nature of student experiences during their stay at the university has an impact on successful completion of their undergraduate studies therefore it requires students to adjust to academic challenges and increased levels of independence (Fromme, Corbin & Kruse, 2008; Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyj, Burke da Silva & Brinkworth, 2011; Lubben, Davidowitz, Bluffer, Allie & Scott, 2010; Kreig, 2013). Rahat & Ilhan (2016) assert that resilience characteristics contributed to overcoming adjustment challenges during transition to university. According to Briggs *et al* (2012) the studies on transition of students to university emphasise the interplay between the social and academic circumstances of students and institutional systems that should support them. Furthermore, the quality of transition is highly influenced by the balance between challenges and support received by students which enables a sense of mastery in dealing with their new stage of their life (Dias & Sá, 2012).

First year as described by Reason, Terenzini & Domingo (2006) provided the foundation for subsequent years of study and persistence. This is evident in Tinto's student integration

model (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), which suggest that the match between academic ability and motivation of the student with social and academic qualities of the institution resulted in academic and social integration into the university system. According to this model, if the student is not integrated, she/he is likely to develop low commitment levels at university. Morton *et al* (2014) state that if students do not adjust successfully, it often results in attrition in the university. Lowe & Cook (2003) concurred that if students fail to make a satisfactory transition to the social and academic demands of the university life, it can lead to drop-out and under-achievement. Adjustment problems (Bojuwoye, 2002) affected the students' integration and ultimate success. Peel (2000) highlights that the element of isolation is usually the main problem for many new students not adjusting successfully. Klemme Larson and Bell (2013) agree that unsuccessful adjustment can have profound negative consequences.

Students require a lot of support during this period from families, schools and even institutions of higher education in order to navigate their transition smoothly. Carrant & Keenan (2009) suggested talking to students during this phase since they have not yet become familiarised and inducted into university processes and practices. On the other hand, Setlalentoa (2013) stated that high school educators can assist during this transition by equipping their learners with skills to cope in institutions of higher education. A study conducted by Hudley *et al* (2009) showed that for successful adjustment to college, talking to teachers and counsellors during high school had a strong relationship with social and academic adjustment as well as with positive attitudes for students. Hudley *et al* (2009) used Attinasi's model as a theoretical basis of their study. Attinasi's model conceptualised high school behaviours, attitudes, and experiences as the process of getting ready for college and described students' attitudes and experiences soon after they matriculate as getting in.

Transitioning into a new environment can be hard and challenging. Rural students require a lot of academic and social support when transitioning to urban higher education. This is because the urban environment is a whole new experience for them compared to both school and rural way of living.

2.3 Rural Student's Experiences during Transition to Higher Education

Rural students are usually perceived to be those students who come from low socio-economic or disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Polesel (2009), rural communities experience relatively severe economic and social hardship when compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Rural college students are considered by many retention theorists and practitioners to be an 'at-risk population since they lack experience with large towns, large campuses and the diversity found in the college environment (Schultz, 2004, p. 48).

In the South African context, this might be because of the geographic location of rural areas mentioned by Hurst (2016) during the colonial history of the country which took an explicit spatial form through the implementation of segregationist and the apartheid legacy. Young and Campbell (2014) further added that during apartheid, South African education policies were designed to deprive the majority of blacks the skills and opportunities which in turn resulted in socio-economic inequality. Transition may be difficult if the student is from an ethnic group under-represented in the university population making them vulnerable (Briggs *et al*, 2012; McMillan, 2014).

These assumptions about rural students entering higher education for the first time may make them feel and/or viewed as inferior by their urban counterparts posing an additional challenge to them. Guiffrida (2008) pointed out that cultural differences between rural and urban students who are transitioning to large institutions create an additional burden for rural students. These challenges (Jaeger *et al*, 2015) ranged from affordability to academic preparation. A study conducted by Czerniewics & Brown (2014) reported that while adjustment for first year students can be challenging for all students, it can be acute for students from rural backgrounds.

Shamah (2011) added that, in a rural place, young people generally run into someone they know everywhere they go, making it difficult for them to try new identities as part of their identity development. According to Ganss (2016) the student's sense of self and identity is often based on their rural background. The study revealed that students experienced new forms of diversity ranging from ethnicity, faith and political affiliation. University, for them, is a completely strange environment often leaving them isolated and not knowing anyone.

Rural students need to be supported by all parties involved including families and universities in order to avoid these transition challenges. Schultz (2004) recommended that institutions of higher education that enrol new students who are from rural areas might improve the likelihood of early student acclimation by having a heightened presence in rural high schools.

When rural students are unable to cope and adjust to the new university life, like all other students, it might negatively affect their academic and social life and may lead to them dropping out. Academic and social adjustments are among other issues that influences retention of rural students (Williams & Luo, 2010).

2.4 Academic Experiences of Rural Students

First year is a very crucial period for students to be acclimated to college life, it can present a host of frustrations and problems for both students and institutions (Tinto, 1993; Gordon *et al*, 2013) and it is the foundation for the student's entire academic career. "Education plays a transformative role as it fosters, in some sense change and adaptation" (Mesidor & Sly, 2016, p. 266). Therefore, it is important to make transition from school to university an easy and smooth process to ensure academic success (Amri, 2014). "First year-experience, in terms of cognitive, personal and social development, largely determines students' first-year performance, which in turn is a key foundation for advanced study" (Scott, 2009, p. 3).

Adjusting from school teaching methods to new lecturing methods at the university can be very challenging for first year students. Coping with requirements of the course, large classes, difficulty in dealing with lecturers who use different teaching styles are some of the academic adjustment issues faced by first year university students (Mudhovozi, 2012; Aderi, Jdaitawi, Ishak & Jdaitawi, 2013). Due to widened access to higher education, students bring with them diverse needs mostly related to academic skills necessary to succeed at university (Goldingay, Hitch, Ryan, Farrugia, Hosken, Lamaro, Nihill & Macfarlane, 2014) and this increases pressure for higher education institutions to engage with different levels of students who are disadvantaged in the learning environment (Pym & Kapp, 2013). Consequently, college students need to adjust to the university-level academic environment, which may be more challenging than their previous academic experience (Gray, Vitak, Easton & Ellison, 2013). First year students learning difficulties range from poor concentration when studying to being afraid to ask questions in class and even choosing courses. This may be attributed to

teaching methods that are different in higher education from what they are used to at school (Marland, 2003; Liu, 2012). The learning environment is very different since students are expected to be responsible for the own progress (Yorke, 2000).

Amri (2014) is of the view that there is a discrepancy between the academic level of freshmen and the academic requirements for them to succeed at university. “When students enter university, they are faced with a myriad of institutional discourses which include everything that is said, done and valued in the institution” (Clarence, 2010, p. 18). Stress levels among university students impact on their level of functioning and academic performance (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010).

Students from remote, rural regions confront many obstacles in their pursuit of higher education, including difficulties in getting to classes and lack of preparation for the level of work (Davies, Hamilton, Salois & Crow, 2006). In addition, they are often not advised why they should enrol or what to expect. The student’s persistence can be determined by how the transition process has been experienced. During or at the end of the first year of higher education sees a proportion of non-completion due to insufficient attention given to preparation for the transition (Yorke, 2000). The key factors in student success in academic and formal learning depends on whether students can or do respond to the educational process in higher education (CHE, 2013). Learning to adjust in the new academic environment is the first learning experience (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Geographic characteristics influence a student’s consideration to persist in completing college and rural students tend to have lower completion rates (Williams & Luo, 2010).

Students are responsible for their own transition experiences, however, Bolt & Graber (2010) advised that educational institutions need to prepare students for transition from secondary to tertiary education. According to a study by Currant & Keenan (2009), the educational or social background of students will benefit from an induction providing supported guidance and introduction to university life and must begin before arrival at university. This is done to avoid the information overload effect which is often experienced during the induction phase, turning the induction experience from passive and negative to being contextualised, meaningful and relevant to students.

2.5 Social Experiences of Rural Students

Social adjustment is fundamental for everyone, but particularly important for adolescents engaged in the process of individuation from their families which is a crucial developmental task affecting adjustment of students to college and a critical role in persistence to college life (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007; Kreig, 2013; Gray *et al*, 2013). For most of the students, it is the first time away from home as mature and independent adults and may even represent the first time they have moved in their lives (Hassim *et al*, 2013; Chow & Healey, 2008). Transition involves learners creating for themselves a new identity as higher education students (Briggs *et al*, 2012).

One of the adjustment challenges among first year students is whether or not they will make friends. For rural students, this period may be the first time they have to find new friends which can cause anxiety (Ganss, 2016). Building friendships are very crucial for new students as friends or peers becomes their main source of social support (Yau, Sun & Cheng, 2012).

Students who are away from home may have less family support making them more likely to have feelings of loneliness and challenges in adjusting to their new life style when transitioning to higher education (Williams & Luo, 2010). Students transitioning from home to a less structured university life which often happens without existing networks of social support intensifies the transition process (Young & Campbell, 2014).

Forming social networks is an important factor in predicting early withdrawal and adjustment; students often experience personal and emotional problems as they transition from the high school environment (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). For first year students, the need to belong is important and social relationships provide security and helps in reducing isolation (Kantanis, 2000; Chow & Healey, 2008; Yau *et al*, 2012).

Most scholars are of the view that a students' ability to develop meaningful connections affects their successful adaptation to college; without friend's students have fewer resources at their disposal to assist them in the transition process. Social adjustment assists students in integrating to campus life. This is intensified if the student is coming from socio-cultural, linguistic, and economic capital that does not fit the dominant discourse within the university

(Gray *et al*, 2013; Kantanis, 2000; Gerdes & Mallincrodt, 1994, Lawrence, 2005). The feeling of connection with, and integration into the college community determines the students' college experience and whether they will persist or not (Gray *et al*, 2013). Therefore, social adjustment is a key element that helps new students transition successfully to the university and assists in providing information such as campus resources (Yau, *et al*, 2012). A relationship exists between social and academic factors as university life requires that students learn to cope with challenges and to integrate into academic and social life (Sevinc & Gizir, 2014). Belonging to a study group can assist students to overcome difficulties in academic adaptation (Yau *et al*, 2012).

However, Wang, Chen, Zhao & Xu (2006) cautioned that freshman may have difficulties in their psychological developments if they cannot adapt to the new environment. This may in turn affect both their academic and social adjustment. It is important that students learn to adjust in all domains such as social and academic adjustment, college adjustment and emotional reaction to the environment (Aderi *et al*, 2013; Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

2.6 Factors Affecting Rural Students during Transition

2.6.1 Schooling Background and Under-preparedness

Differentiation in school performance between rural areas, townships and urban areas in South Africa is one of the legacies of the apartheid (Hurst, 2016). The different schooling systems resulted in further segregating of schools according to the quintile system. Many Black students had to cope with the legacies of apartheid including inequality and poor educational preparation. The previously White-only schools continued to enjoy privileges as compared to township and rural schools which were the only option for Black African children (Msila, 2005; Young and Campbell, 2014). Currently, the South African higher education context promotes student-centredness where the student is expected to be actively engaged in the learning process while the schooling system promotes teacher-centredness where the teacher is actively engaged, and the clash in the two systems creates an additional challenge for students (Mungal & Cloete, 2016).

Under-preparedness became an issue in South Africa when the participation of Black African students started to grow in the 1980s (CHE, 2013). Academic Development Units were

created to address the problems of transitioning between schooling and higher education as a key barrier to learning. The introduction of the extended curriculum programmes intended to address the articulation gap which has been identified as a cause for failure and drop out for most students from disadvantaged backgrounds (CHE, 2013). Under-preparedness is commonly associated with Black students because of their poor schooling experiences in most of their communities and influences their successful transition from school to university. Universities find it difficult to catch up with the backlogs caused by under-preparedness during the transactional stage or even during first semester (Nel *et al*, 2009; CHE, 2013).

Several scholars are of the view that South African first year students are underprepared for the reading demands placed upon them when they enter higher education (Boughey, 2002, Nel, Dreyer & Kopper, 2004; Nel *et al*, 2009; McKenna, 2010 & Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). Subject-based academics attributed English, as an additional language, creates difficulties for underprepared Black students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds at university (Boughey, 2002). Secondly, students bring to the classroom literacy practises that may or may not be considered appropriate (McKenna, 2010). Thirdly, they are academically less prepared than their peers from privileged schools as most non-urban schools in South Africa do not prepare students sufficiently for university education (Nel *et al*, 2009; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010). As a result, many students often become part of the “revolving door syndrome” (Nel, *et al*, 2004, p. 95). The revolving door syndrome refers to the ease with which students are able to enrol and drop out of university; it is a cyclical pattern of short-term readmission (Ignash, 1993; Garrido & Saraiva, 2011).

Under-preparedness manifests itself in a range of ways, from struggling in the formal curriculum to difficulty with adjusting to independent study and a university environment. It takes different forms in different subject areas but the common feature in all settings is that what the students know and can do – attainments that were good enough to gain them entry to higher education – do not match the expectations of the institution. From the literature it may be determined that the major cause of under-preparedness is poor schooling which is exacerbated by unfavourable family conditions, which are all factors outside of higher education. Although under-preparedness due to inadequate schooling does not imply lack of intellectual capacity, the way in which it manifests itself can lead academic staff and even other students to equate the two (CHE, 2013). Dhunpath & Vithal (2012) are of the view that

universities are in part the source of under-preparedness. The reason according to Nel *et al* (2009) is that universities are also ill-equipped to accommodate students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of the issues that rural students face at university such as language and teaching methods are discussed below.

2.6.2 Language and University Teaching Methods

English is the medium of instruction in South African higher education institutions and this is due to the apartheid legacy and colonial history of South Africa; English dominates higher education institutions (Hurst, 2016). Consequently, this may be one of the possible barriers for many African students in successfully completing their studies in higher education (Ngcobo, 2014). First generation students who attend historically white universities are instructed in a language other than their mother tongue and may find it challenging to navigate the language barriers during transition (Young & Campbell, 2014). This may result in lower confidence and ultimately lower grades (Hurst, 2016). According to Parmegiani (2014), most of the African language speakers are highly invested in their mother tongue since it symbolises identity and traditional culture. Language also plays an important role in student's interaction on campus, as higher education institutions have students from diverse backgrounds (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016).

2.6.3 Diversity

Historically, the South African Higher Education sector primarily targeted and served a minority racial group. This was due to the fact that between 1948 and 1993, South Africa was characterised by legalised unequal separate development, namely apartheid which was a deliberate adoption of racist policies and laws that legitimised discriminatory practices (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). The apartheid inequities resulted in the low participation of Black South African students in higher education (CHE, 2013) because of the “Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953) which classified and separated education along racial lines” (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012, p. 20). In 1994 the South African democratic government transformed the education system that aimed to benefit the entire country (Badat, 2010). The South African government was committed to increase the participation in higher education by increasing the admission of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds (Smit, 2012). This widening of participation had led to the increase of students from previously

under-represented groups (mostly Black students) with historically White institutions experiencing a dramatic shift in demographics (Gale & Parker, 2014; Steyn et al, 2014). The increase in the diversity of the student body has created challenges to higher education institutions by bringing with them a variety of educational backgrounds, of which, not all of them are sufficiently prepared to meet the higher education demands (Smit, 2012). Smit (2012) further advised that higher education institutions needed to value diversity and tap into its riches in the same way that the cultural diversity on campus created ideal social forums for intercultural learning (Volet & Ang, 2012).

2.6.4 Cultural Background

Culture plays an important role in rural areas especially amongst Black communities. It is common practice in rural areas to instil cultural values and pride in the upbringing of children. This is also confirmed by Stone (2014) who noted that culture influences students' upbringing as well as educational experiences. When rural students adapt to cities they tend to integrate the rural into urban culture. As rural students adapt into cities they eventually become transformed into urban residents. This sometimes leads to some rural students even becoming ashamed and self-conscious of their own rural identity and they completely reject their previous cultural beliefs believing that it is backward (Xiulan, 2015). Supported by Buchanan *et al* (2015), some rural students may experience a sense of alienation when they move to higher education and feel that their social culture and cultural practises are inappropriate, and their tacit knowledge is of little worth. However, there are some students who do not adapt to the urban university culture and are not ashamed of their background, consequently it is advisable that students should integrate both cultures (Xiulan, 2015).

2.6.5 Institutional Culture

The new university culture can become very challenging to adapt to for students who are coming from rural backgrounds. Wangeri *et al* (2012) contended that the physical and social environment can be overwhelming and intimidating. Most students from low socio-economic backgrounds lack familiarity with university life and expectations. The reason for this is that most students from rural communities are first generation, i.e. first in their families to attend university and lack the support of family and friends to help them successfully integrate to their new environment (Byun, Irvin & Meece, 2012; Becker, Schelbe, Romano, & Spinelli,

2017). Additionally, higher educational institutions habitually endorse dominant cultural practises, values, knowledge and ways of knowing, and students from other cultural influences are often disadvantaged in these contexts (Young & Campbell, 2014).

2.6.6 Socio-economic Status and Finance

Rural students usually come from severe economic hardship (Polesel, 2009). In South Africa, schools are classified into quintiles which are determined by socio-economic status/income level of the community (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012) and higher education creates an additional financial burden for rural students who come from poor backgrounds.

Financing their studies is one of the challenges faced by students and may be a determining factor on whether a student will continue with their studies or not. Apart from managing the demands of academic workload, students often must endure financial hardship (Young & Campbell, 2014). Affordability of higher education in South Africa is a challenge (Langa, Wangenge-Ouma, Jungblut & Cloete, 2016). Higher education in South Africa is inadequately funded by the state with state funding having declined since 1994; universities have made up the shortfall by increasing tuition fees (Badat, 2016). The same increase in tuition fees led to the student protests at the end of 2015 - “Fees Must Fall” protests also referred to as #FeesMustFall (Calitz & Fourie, 2016, p.152). Social and economic factors, as well as the use of technology are some of the external factors influencing the inner life of higher education, allowing education providers to accommodate the needs of students in terms of mode, pace, place and time of study (Sarkar, 2012).

2.6.7 Technology

Internet and computers have become an important aspect of our daily lives with people depending on information communication and technology (ICT) to obtain any information. For areas with low economic status it is difficult to access technology and may result in the lack of information and knowledge (Chen & Liu, 2013). Apart from dealing with adjustment challenges during transition to higher education, rural students face additional challenges in adopting new technologies into their learning (Czerniewics & Brown, 2014). “Competences in using technologies is another potential determinant of confidence and success in tertiary education” (Buchanan, et al, 2015, p. 297). Technology can be a good tool in minimising

geographic location especially for new students in higher education through the use of social networks (Wohn & LaRose, 2014).

2.6.8 Homesickness

Homesickness is distress or impairment caused by separation from home. Not all students experience homesickness the same way. Any life transition that includes moving to a new location can be stressful and can create intense homesickness making the move difficult and unstable. For some students, the whole experience may be a stimulating adventure both socially and intellectually (Thurber & Walton, 2012; Terry, Leary & Mehta, 2013). It is important for new students to make friends on campus to avoid finding themselves being isolated; new friends and peers can also aid in forming study groups (Yau, *et al*, 2012).

2.7 Support during Transition to Higher Education

Support is crucial for first year students who are transitioning from school to higher education. Students need to be provided with tools which are necessary like campus resources and academic programmes to assist with smooth transition (Yau *et al*, 2012). Both sides of the transition bridge (i.e. school and higher education) need to provide support to enable students to adjust to university and develop learner identity and autonomy. This is a process which should start while students are in high school through visits to higher education institutions and being in contact with university students. Developing special programmes designed to raise aspirations, enabling learners to visualise themselves as university students (which include visits to schools by university students and staff and high school students to universities) can assist first year students with their studying difficulties during transition. Guidance counsellors in high school should create opportunities in schools to discuss the novel demands that students will encounter in university (Briggs *et al*, 2012; Mendaglio, 2013; Amri, 2014).

Students from families with low-income or who do not have experience with college require assistance to find the right institutional fit. Fit may include cost, location and counselling because students adjust quicker if they learn the institutional discourse and feel they fit in (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). South African universities need to do more to provide social and academic support for Black students by creating institutional cultures which are more

inclusive. It is the supportive university systems that enables socialisation and adaptation (Briggs et al, 2012; Young & Campbell, 2014). Students from a particular school may not attend the same university and scatter to a range of universities; and funding for special programs to support students during transition is often insufficient to reach all students in need of them (Briggs et al, 2012; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

2.7.1 Academic Support

For students to be successful at university they need to develop abilities to think critically, deal with emotions, life changing events and be able to find ways to adapt to new environments (Hassim *et al*, 2013). Chan (2001) recommended learner autonomy which is concerned with the decision making on the learner's part. On the contrary, she argued that autonomous learning does not turn dependent learners into autonomous ones, it needs frequent consultation with students. Amri (2014) conducted a study which identified sources of confusion for first year students entering the university and it served to create an awareness among academics and institutions about the difficulties faced by first year students and how they struggle to succeed academically. It also made it possible to identify the presence or absence of study skills the students need to succeed and thus, assist in tailoring the content and teaching methods to match the student skills during the first semester.

Universities need to alleviate the student's anxiety by creating an environment where the students are empowered by knowledge and information about registration, curriculum and grading systems (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Schools on the other hand need to understand how best they can prepare their students for the transition, and universities need to ensure they support their first-year students as the transition occurs. Educators can equip learners with a firm foundation and skills required to cope at institutions of higher education (Setlalentoa, 2013; Morton *et al*, 2014). Students need to be optimistic to be able to adapt to new educational environments (Morton *et al*, 2014). Budny & Paul (2003) suggested that pre-college orientation can assist students to cope with the change by creating awareness for both students and parents about university services and to develop a positive attitude towards the first year.

Gray *et al* (2013) suggested the use of social media like Facebook as one of the ways to help students adjust to college activities. This allows interaction between students to not only

discuss homework or classes but develop friendships and create social support. Knight & Rochon (2012) cautioned that students mostly engage in activities and informal aspects of the environment on social networks rather than academic activities. Van der Meer's (2012) study about first year students understanding of the objective and purpose of their studies argued that teachers need to be transparent and explicit about the organisation and objectives of courses they are teaching. The school-university gap is not only increased by school systems that produces inadequately prepared learners for higher education, but universities are also ill-equipped to accommodate these learners especially those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds (Nel *et al* 2009). When students cannot learn the way they are taught, they need to be assisted to find ways of doing their own learning (Chan, 2001).

2.7.2 Social Support

A study by Dias & Sá (2012) focused on the need for students to trigger a set of adaptive skills to new and dynamic environments. They advised that students can use their 'old' pupil competences acquired in high school and recycle them to cope with new challenges in higher education. "The identity that adolescents negotiate during their high school years not only has major implications for their personal and social adaptation to adult society but will also lay a foundation for future educational and occupational choices that will circumscribe their life course" (Gándara, Gutiérrez & O'Hara, 2001, p. 75).

Most universities provide orientation for new students' and this can be used to network and familiarise themselves with institutional resources such as libraries and counselling services. However, this only facilitates successful adjustment if students are flexible and open to seeking advice (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Developing and maintaining a local support network may assist with such adjustment (Gray *et al*, 2013). Living in university residence can assist with social adjustment by fostering relationships for rural students (Ames *et al*, 2014).

For students from rural areas attending university, it may be the first time they need to seek out new friends causing anxiety. They will require a wider variety of social support sources to cope with the stress associated with first year of university (Ganss, 2016; Rahat & Ilhan, 2016). Universities should prepare social activities to reduce the number of students who fail to adjust adequately to university life (Aderi *et al*, 2013) whilst Lenz (2014) suggested

partnerships between student affairs professionals and university counsellors in providing supportive programmes to meet the needs of first year students.

2.8 Conclusion

Students entering university for the first time face considerable life changing challenges (Hassim *et al*, 2013). Moving from the life the student knew to the world of the unknown requires a lot of adjustment academically and socially. “All developmental transitions imply changes, which underpin notions of crisis and stress” (Dias & Sá, 2012, p. 277). University expectations, academic and social demands are among the emotional challenges they experience in higher education.

For successful students, the level of resilience plays a very important role for their development and future growth. Students who adjust well to the university environment display greater academic performance compared to those who have difficulty in trying to adjust to university life (Hassim *et al*, 2013; Wangeri *et al*, 2012). The next chapter will deal with the theoretical lens that was used to understand how students develop during their stay at university.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Student development theories are concerned with how students develop during university; how they learn; what elements come together and contribute to their success; and how the university environment relates to student success (Komives & Woodard Jr, 2003). These theories have evolved over the years and primarily deal with change or growth in adolescents and young adults; however, this does not mean that older students are not important in higher education. A wide range of theories on change or growth in adult years are covered in adult development rather than student development literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The focus in this study however is that of first year student's experiences of transitioning and thus it draws on student development theories as discussed below.

Student development theories and models are grouped into two broad families:

- (a) Developmental theories focus on the nature and content of ***intraindividual*** change and describe one or more student development theories and the stages involved. Development involves change and growth and represents a qualitative enhancement of the self in terms of self-complexity and integration.
- (b) The second family focuses on the environment and ***interindividual*** origins of the student change, which need not to be seen as developmental. They emphasise change associated with the institutional characteristics or experiences students have while enrolled in an institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 18).

There are several taxonomies of developmental theories or models of student change that exist such as (i) ***Psychosocial theories*** – focus on the self-reflective and interpersonal dimensions of student lives, (ii) ***Cognitive Structural theories*** – explaining how students think and make meaning of their experiences, (iii) ***Person-environment Interactive theories*** – focusing on how students behaviour and growth is affected by educational environment and (iv) ***Humanistic Existential theories*** – describe how students make decisions that affect themselves and others (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012).

For the purpose of this study the following two theories were used. The theories are located mainly within both types/ clusters- they are *psychosocial* and *cognitive structural*. Both theories are sequential in nature, with cognitive development unfolding by stages as students build upon their past experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012):

3.2 Psychosocial Theories

Psychosocial theories focus on self-reflection and interpersonal dimensions of student lives. They view development as a series of developmental tasks or stages, including qualitative changes in thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and relating to others and to oneself. These theories describe how students' perspectives of their own identity and society develop through crises as they are experienced. Growing older and through sociocultural or environmental influences, individuals over their life span face developmental challenges (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012). Although the major focus of these theories is on the individual ("psychological" part of the psychosocial), the environment ("social" part) also plays an important role (Komives & Woodard Jr, 2003, p. 162).

3.3 Cognitive-Structural Theories

Cognitive-structural theories explain changes in how students think, reason, organise and interpret their experiences. They concentrate on the epistemological structure individuals construct to give meaning in their worlds. They also include theories specific to moral development and faith (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Komives & Woodard Jr, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012). Psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories appear to be complementary where one describes students concerns and decisions will be key whilst the other suggests how students will think about those issues.

Student development theories help in understanding why students sometimes display certain characteristics as they progress through their college years by illustrating the stages of development (De Larrosa & Butner, 2000). It is for this reason that this study is informed by **Chickering's seven vectors** of student development theory covering both aspects of the

clusters (psychosocial and cognitive structural). It is one of the most widely known and applied theories of student development (Long, 2012).

Numerous scholars attested that, vectors based on this theory are areas of growth that deal with psychological development of students which they must go through while developing their identity. Each vector is a developmental stage or phase of the student's life and vectors are a major highway towards individuation and communion with other individuals and groups. The aim of the seven vectors was to demonstrate the way in which student's development in the higher education setting can affect them emotionally, socially, physically and intellectually. The Theory was developed by Chickering based on research conducted at Goddard College between 1959 and 1965 and introduced in 1969. The latest version of the Theory used in this study was revised by Reisser in 1993. (De Larrosa & Butner, 2000; Higbee, 2002; Komives & Woodard Jr, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012).

3.4 Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development Theory

The central construct of the Theory is **identity development** of which all the other vectors give specificity to and the development of students' identities being the foremost issue during their college years (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012). While **establishing identity** students construct a comfortable sense of identity which involves comfort with body appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in social, historical, and cultural context, clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, self-acceptance and self-esteem and how their identity integrates with the broader society. This vector is dependent on the experience in the vectors before it. Establishing identity also includes reflecting on one's family origin as well as ethnic heritage. (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Long, 2012).

The first vector is **developing competence**, and this is where students acquire a wide range of cognitive and psychosocial skills (including intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal qualities) as they encounter new academic challenges, a new environment, diversity and technology. Students develop confidence as they master their newly acquired skills. Intellectual competence is a skill which involves using one's mind like mastering content, analysing and synthesising. It also involves developing new frames of reference

useful in making sense of our own observations and experiences. Physical and manual competences involve athletic, artistic achievement, fitness and self-discipline. Leisure activities can become lifelong pursuits as a result they are important in building identity. Interpersonal competences involve listening skills, effective communication and responding appropriately. They are important in making relationships flourish and effective functioning of groups (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; De Larrosa & Butner, 2000; Long, 2012).

As students encounter new academic challenges, they acquire an array of new cognitive, psychosocial and technical skills while learning to **manage their emotions** accordingly (Long, 2012). Students come with emotional baggage which can interfere with educational processes including anger, fear, hurt, longing, boredom and tension and only few students escape these emotions. Each semester, students face anxieties of new instructors, new subjects, as well as new challenges; for some it can be overwhelming while others suppress them. It is important not to eliminate these emotions but instead allow them into awareness and acknowledge them as signals. Students must therefore be aware and know these emotions and most importantly find ways to deal with them in order to navigate this stage successfully (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Eventually students achieve **autonomy by learning** to solve their problems, take responsibility for their actions rather than depending on their parents and others which in turn will lead to them appreciating others based on the qualities they possess. During this stage students also learn to function with relative self-sufficiency and mostly take responsibility of self-chosen goals without the influence of others' opinions. It also involves movement requiring both emotional and instrumental independence. Emotional independence means being free from continually seeking reassurance or approval. At this stage students accept to lose the support group and attempt to set their own goals in life and express their own opinions. The first step being separation from parents and starting to rely on peers and others, usually occurring during the first week at university. Students may experience the excitement of the newly acquired freedom. Relationships with parents are revised and replaced by new relationships which are based on equality. The ability for students to come up with their own ideas and action them is very crucial at this stage (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; De Larrosa & Butner, 2000; Long, 2012).

The fourth vector is **developing mature interpersonal relationships**. This vector is characterised mainly by two aspects which are (1) tolerance and appreciation of differences; and (2) capacity for intimacy. They involve being able to respond to people in their own right rather than being stereotyped. To understand people for the qualities they possess and respecting differences and also the levels of tolerance are increased. This assists in reducing bias and ethnocentrism, it increases empathy and students begin to understand and enjoy diversity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; De Larrosa & Butner, 2000).

Once students have comprehended the growth and development that occurred in the previous vectors this is when the most crucial vector comes, **establishing identity** (Butner & De Larrosa, 2000). Students will know and understand who they are and what they want in life after having navigated the previous vectors successfully. According to Butner & De Larrosa (2000) it is very important to know one's self and the attitudes which are crucial to develop identity, as explained.

Students continue to **develop purpose** by creating a set of clear career goals, personal aspirations and commitment to friends and family as well as self. This stage involves being intentional, assessing of interests and options, having clear goals, to plan and to be persistent against all odds. Students are at a stage where they learn to balance their career goals, personal aspirations and commitments to family and themselves. Developing a purpose of why students attend university varies and it depends upon the purpose of the student (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; De Larrosa & Butner, 2000; Long, 2012).

Lastly, students **develop integrity** where their behaviour aligns to the values and goals developed during the early vectors. Students establish integrity for their beliefs, values, and purpose. It involves considering beliefs of others and respecting their point of views, preserving self-respect and developing socially responsible behaviour (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; De Larrosa & Butner, 2000; Long, 2012).

However, according to Chickering's Theory students only progress through the first four vectors during their first and second years of university and the rest of the vectors for the remaining years. Students also move through these vectors at different rates and they may also move back and forth to re-examine their experiences (Long, 2012). This Theory is often

used as it applies to emotional, social, physical and intellectual development of college students (De Larrosa & Butner, 2000).

Identity plays a very significant role in how students manage to adjust to the demands of university education (Seabi & Payne, 2013). Student identity development theories assist in explaining rural student's experiences, as their sense of self and identity is often based on their rural background. They also reveal the ways in which a rural background may influence students when entering university (Ganss, 2016).

3.5 Conclusion

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development theory was used as a lens to understand the academic and social experiences of students transitioning from a rural schooling context to an urban university. This theory conceptualises students' experiences or stages of development during transition to higher education. The central construct of the theory, which is identity development, forms the basis of the study. This is because rural students are likely to develop a new identity (urban) during transition to an urban university. The next chapter deals with the research methodology used to produce the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study focused on tracing first year rural student's experiences of academic and social transitioning from rural high school to an urban university. Research questions were answered using a qualitative research methodology. This chapter will describe in detail the research processes undertaken in conducting the study. The research design, data production strategy, data analysis, study population and ethical issues will be discussed.

4.2 Research Design

Research design includes all decisions involved in planning and executing a research project. It is the basic plan for a piece of research and it usually includes four main ideas. They are strategy; conceptual framework; questions to be asked; and tools to be used for collecting and analysing data (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It involves emerging questions and procedures, data is collected in the participant's settings, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes. According to MacDonald & Headlam (2009) qualitative research is concerned with quality information, attempts to gain understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for actions and to establish how people interpret their experiences and the world around them. It provides insights into settings of the problem, generating ideas and or hypotheses. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practises that make the world visible (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In using a qualitative approach, I was able to carry out research about student's experiences in a natural setting and report findings mainly in words rather than statistics (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

Phenomenology was used to understand, interpret and describe the qualitatively different experiences of students. This study sought to explore how students of rural origin

experienced becoming students at an urban university. Phenomenological analysis as described by Smith (2015) is concerned with discovering the lived experiences of the participants or understanding how the participants make sense of their personal and social world. It is a design of inquiry that comes from philosophy and psychology hence it describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants, and it typically involves conducting interviews (Creswell, 2013; Smith, 2015).

4.3 Sampling

To undertake this study, first year students enrolled in the BCom4 programme were interviewed. Sampling is very crucial in research. A sample is a smaller group or subset representative of the total population, from which the knowledge about the total population is gained (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Through sampling, a researcher can elaborate the meaning of categories, discover variation within them and define gaps (Smith, 2015). The number of cases studied is not important in sampling, however, the potential of each case to assist in developing the theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied is more important (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015).

4.4 Sampling Strategy

According to Cohen *et al* (2013), there are two methods of sampling which are probability (random sample) of which every member of the wider population has an equal chance of being included in the sample, and purposive sample, chosen for this study and explained below:

Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling. The purposive sampling goal is to sample the participants in a strategic way that those sampled are relevant to the research questions posed. The sample is chosen for a specific purpose. The researcher samples with his or her research goals in mind, research sites and people within the site are selected because of their relevance to the research questions. This is usually used to get information from people who have in-depth knowledge about a particular issue (Cohen *et al*, 2013; Bryman, 2015). For this study, purposive sampling was used to identify students based on their rural background.

I contacted the College of Law and Management Studies at the UKZN to request assistance in identifying BCom4 students from rural KwaZulu-Natal schools. A list of students was obtained from the administrator and I proceeded to contact each student telephonically requesting their participation in the study. Those students who agreed to participate were provided with the informed consent letter and the entire process was clearly explained to them. Consent forms were explained then provided and they signed them voluntarily

Purposive sampling does not allow a researcher to generalise about a population or to make comparisons but to present unique cases that have their own intrinsic value. Additionally, some members of the wider population were excluded, and others included (Cohen *et al*, 2013; Bryman, 2015):

Inclusion criteria: First year students registered in the BCom4 degree in 2016 who attended rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

Exclusion criteria: BCom4 students in their second to fourth year of study; all urban schools and other countries; and any other rural school except from KwaZulu-Natal.

Hence the results for the study are more suggestive than conclusive as mentioned earlier in the limitations of the study (chapter one).

4.5 Sample Size

A sample is a smaller group that is studied, and it is drawn from larger population (Punch & Oancea, 2014). According to Cohen *et al* (2013) the sample size depends on the purpose of the study, nature of the population, level of accuracy required, and the research design used. Bryman (2015) cautioned that in qualitative research, sample size should not be too small making it difficult to reach saturation, at the same time not be too large that it makes it difficult to undertake a deep, case-oriented analysis. As this study is qualitative in nature, the sample size consisted of seven students and they were sufficient, of which four were males and three females. The process involved conducting successive interviews with selected students. Saturation was reached by the sixth student; a seventh student was interviewed to ensure that nothing new was discussed. I subsequently stopped further interviews and considered the sample of seven as sufficient.

4.6 Participants

Table 1: Demographics of participating students

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Location of school	Race	Language	NSFAS
Sbusiso	Male	19 years	Cato Ridge, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes
Mandla	Male	18 years	Cato Ridge, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes
Simphiwe	Male	19 years	Stanger, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes
Mlondi	Male	18 years	eDumbe, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes
Thumeka	Female	19 years	uMkhomazi, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes
Ntombi	Female	19 years	KwaNyuswa, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes
Zandile	Female	17 years	Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal	African	IsiZulu	Yes

For this study, the sample frame consisted of first year students registered in the 2016 academic year for the BCom4 Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. They all lived in rural KwaZulu-Natal with isiZulu as their first language and English as their second language. The students interviewed were aged between **17 and 19** years. According to literature, they are dubbed as *millennial students or born frees* from rural high schools. All participants registered from high school as per the admission requirements of the 2016 UKZN Undergraduate Prospectus for the BCom4 programme where students must not have attended any other tertiary institution.

There are several terms in the literature that is used to describe these students such as Digital Natives, Generation Why, The Net Generation, Generation Me and iKids (Nikirk, 2012). One name appears to have gained popularity and used to differentiate them from their predecessors is that of Millennials (Rickes, 2009). The millennial students are the generation of young people entering universities worldwide and born between 1982 and 2002 (Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing 2009; Rickes, 2009). Mattes (2012, p.135) described the born free cohort as “those who have come of age since the advent of democracy in South Africa, and they are comprised of young people who have spent some or all of their high school year exposed to a pre-democracy curriculum”. Cross & Carpentier (2009) believe that these students are less prepared for the requirements of the traditional university culture.

4.7 Data Production

Data production refers to data produced of sufficient quality to allow confidence in the findings. It refers to methods for producing data, how they were used and constructed (Cohen *et al*, 2013; Punch & Oancea, 2014). In qualitative research, interviews are one of the data production strategies and therefore used for this study (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine & Walker, 2013). Interviews were used to get an in depth understanding of rural students' experiences.

4.7.1 Advantages of Interviews

Interviews offer an opportunity to obtain information from the interviewees and seek clarity when needed. The interviewer can ask any question and rectify misunderstandings related to the purpose of the interview and experienced by the interviewee. If the interviewer does his job well, the respondent is more likely be motivated and sincere in their responses. Interviews allow for a greater in-depth of data production as compared to other methods and tend to have a higher response rate as the respondent becomes more involved (Cohen *et al*, 2013; Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). An additional advantage is if a respondent is illiterate and cannot read she can still respond to interview questions (Rubin & Babbie, 2016); as long as the interview is conducted in a language the respondent can understand. In this study, all interviews were conducted in English.

4.7.2 Disadvantages of Interviews

Interviews are prone to subjectivity and bias especially on the part of the interviewer (Cohen *et al*, 2013). Interviews, especially semi-structured interviews, can last for a considerable amount of time and can become intense depending on the issue in question resulting in some people being hesitant to participate in interviews (Smith, 2015). According to Patten & Newhart (2017) interviews may follow the flow of the conversation rather than the interview guide.

Semi-structured interviews are popular forms of interviews in education research as they facilitate rapport or empathy, allowing for greater flexibility of coverage, and enables the interviewer to go into novel areas, thus producing richer data. I adopted this style of interview

as I was able to think through the question wording in advance to consider if the question was complete, biased or leading. I was also able to deviate from the guide to probe more information when required, allowing the interviewer to guide and/or facilitate the interview instead of dictating (Smith, 2015; Patten & Newhart, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study, and each interview was 30-45 minutes long and took place in a private setting on Campus. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the students.

4.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis includes organising, explaining and making sense of data according to the participant's definition of the situation. It is a process whereby a researcher looks for the relations in the data (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2012; Cohen *et al*, 2013). As the interviews were recorded, I was able to transcribe the interviews and an objective and unbiased method was used to make sense of the data. The common themes were then categorised by gender and checked for differences, and thereafter thematically analysed through the lenses of Chickering's Seven Vectors. Additional themes emerged from the produced data. Notes taken and reflections during the interview were also considered as data (Cohen *et al*, 2013). A total number of seven themes were identified.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative data often concerns individual cases and unique instances, and in some cases even involve sensitive information, as a result, confidentiality and privacy of individuals participating in research must be protected (Cohen *et al*, 2013). To ensure that ethical issues were considered for this study, I followed the steps below:

1. An ***Ethical clearance*** application was submitted to the Office of the Registrar at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and approval was granted to conduct research at the University.
2. An application requesting permission to conduct research in the College of Law and Management Studies (where BCom4 students are registered) was sent to the College Dean of Teaching and Learning, and approval was granted in writing.
3. ***Informed Consent*** was obtained in writing from participants to take part in the study. This was done by giving the participants an informed consent letter explaining in

detail the purpose of the study, their role in the study as well as assuring them of their confidentiality and privacy. The letter also explained to participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the study.

4. All students who participated in the study voluntarily signed a *declaration form*, agreeing to participate.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the details of how the data was produced and analysed to answer the research questions. It also provided details of the sampling technique and the method that was used to produce the data. The ethical issues taken into consideration were also presented. The next chapter deals with the analysis of the data and the presentation of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the data as well as the discussion of the findings of the study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data was produced through interviews with first year rural students who were registered for the BCom4 programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Students interviewed were given an opportunity to share their academic and social experiences of transitioning from a rural high school to an urban university. This chapter gives a detailed account of their experiences during this transition. Pseudonyms were given to the participants to protect their identity and the direct quotations from the participants are inscribed in italics which will be used to support the themes being discussed.

5.2 Data Analysis

All themes discussed in this chapter emerged from the data produced during the interviews. Transcripts developed from the interviews were analysed using Chickering's Seven Vectors of student development. The main reason for choosing this theory in analysing the data, was that it falls within the two student development models which are *psychosocial* and *cognitive-structural*. Psychosocial models are a series of developmental stages. They also describe how students' perspective of their own identity and society develop through crises as they are experienced (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long 2012). As students transition from high school to university, they are faced with a series of challenges as they move through a number of developmental stages. Moreover, as rural students transition to urban university which is a new environment they assimilate into an urban culture thus forming a new identity (Komives & Woodward Jr, 2003; Xiulan, 2015). Cognitive-Structural models on the other hand, explain changes in how students organise and interpret their experiences and how they give meaning in their worlds (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long 2012). The theory reflects that students display certain characteristics through stages of development as they progress with their university years (De Larrossa & Butner, 2000). The following themes emerged from data analysis:

5.3 Themes

The themes are divided into two categories: family background and schooling background. Both categories will be discussed below:

5.3.1. Family Background

Participants indicated during the interviews that they came from large families. The definition of a family in the rural context does not simply refer to the immediate family, it includes extended family and even members of the community. Therefore, rural children belong not only to their own families but to the community, hence the Zulu saying “It takes a village to raise a child” – each and every member of the family and community is responsible for the upbringing of the children. Campbell (2015) confirms that African cultures embrace their relations including that of extended families. The participants indicated that it is not only the responsibility of the biological parents to raise their children. This is evidenced by what the participants below had to say:

Mandla: my father is a polygamist (he has two wives) and there are about 10 of us (children) at home.

Mlondi: I come from a big family...all of us including my uncles, aunts and cousins live in the same household.

Sbusiso: ...My grandmother raised us, my sisters, brothers and my cousins ...since my mom is working in Durban.

The above responses indicate that the entire family including grandmothers are also involved in the upbringing of children. The responses also indicate that family is the basic institution where children learn who they are, where they fit in within society and the kind of future they are likely to experience (Clark, 1983).

5.3.2 Schooling Background

All participants, as discussed in the previous chapter, were identified based on their rural backgrounds having attended rural schools. The rural schools they attended were classified as quintiles 1 to 3 and were considered as being disadvantaged based on socio-economic

status/income level of the community (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012). Participants indicated that they had limited or poor resources in schools. Some highlighted the poor quality of teaching and stated this had an impact on their performance at school. They further attributed their poor performance and the subsequent achievement of low matric points to not being admitted for mainstream programmes at university. The following participants shared their experiences of poor-quality teaching and poor resources at the schools they attended:

***Thumeka:** We did not have a library at school, one had to travel to town to access the library facilities.*

***Simphiwe:** Some of the computers we had at school were vandalised during the break in at school and we ended up not using them.*

***Sbusiso:** We had computers at school but no library. In grade 9 we were promised that one of the school buildings will be converted into a library but that never happened until I finished matric.*

***Zandile**...I still feel that the school let us down. The standard of teaching was very poor because the teachers were fighting as a result a lot of them resigned. Grade 11 and 12 we did not have a Maths teacher and we had to rely on previous years matriculants to help us.*

All participants indicated that they attended local schools and had to walk long distances to school. Mohangi *et al* (2016) also confirm that isolated setting, access to public transport and school attendance are some of the challenges presented by the rural context. Participants considered this as another contributing factor to the poor school performance. The following participants highlighted their journeys to school on a daily basis:

***Mlondi:** I walked 7km to and from school everyday*

***Ntombi:** The school was about 5km away from home and I walked every day.*

***Thumeka:** ... I walked for about 30 minutes to and from school every day ... it affected me because by the time I got to school I was already tired...it was even worse when it was raining.*

Based on the above experiences, the participants attributed their poor performance at rural schools to the lack of resources, poor teaching methods and the long distances that they had to walk each day to and from school. Masinire *et al* (2014) claim that the learning and

teaching challenges in South African rural schools may be attributed to the culture of poor teaching, lack of teacher content knowledge, inadequately supply of teachers and poor management of curriculum teaching time.

5.3.3 First Generation

All participants indicated they have a family or a community member who attended university. The participants were clear that they held these people in high regard who have become mentors or had an influence in their lives in one way or another. For students whose parents or family members were students themselves, university attendance after school is a natural next step (Nel *et al*, 2009). The participants had the following to say regarding their role models:

Simphiwe: all my cousins have university degrees.

Mandla: I am the youngest in the family and all my sisters and brothers have university degrees and they have good jobs. ...my mother is also a retired teacher.

Researcher: What motivated you to come to university? /How did you learn about UKZN?

Sbusiso: ...there were people from back home who have studied at UKZN and some of them have graduated. They inspired me to come to UKZN.

Mlondi: ...There is a neighbour who went to university who was my role model.

The above statements from the participants contradicts the assumption in the literature that all rural students are first generation university students. Hence, older members of this generation are current students' parents (Nikirk, 2012). It also clearly shows that for *millennial students* the notion of *first generation* is insignificant hence they all had family members who have received a university education.

5.3.4 Adjustment to University: Social & Academic Adjustment

Participants confirmed that when they initially arrived at university, they were not sure what to expect and had missed home. Attending university was their first time that they were living in the city of Durban. This was also the first time that they left their homes to stay on Campus. The only other times they visited the city was with school trips or under the

supervision of parents during day visits. The participants were shocked and overwhelmed at the institutional and urban culture which is completely different from the rural culture they were associated with. The following participants expressed this view:

***Mandla:** what I expected is not what I found here, the life at home is different from here... Adjusting to the life of living alone in the big city was not easy. I had visited other big cities before but only with school trips. ...having a friend from the same high school in the same programme helped in terms of adjusting. **All I can say is life at university is not what you see in the movies**... I am still trying to get used to the university teaching methods as well.*

***Mlondi:** ... I had never been in the big city or university before, I was always at home...*

***Finding friends is still hard,** most of my friends from home are not here and I still have only one friend ... The classes are big, sometimes I am even afraid to ask questions in class... I have to do a lot of work on my own without the assistance of lecturers unlike in school where teachers were assisting us with everything...*

***Zandile:**it was my first time in the city (huge buildings), I was scared...and at some point, I thought that I would not fit, everything was scary. ...**however, I managed to find friends easily** from the same programme and now I have quite a lot of friends. ...in terms of my academic performance, I am still trying to adjust to university teaching methods.*

The above participants were interviewed during their *first semester* at university and at the time when they were still new at the university. They were at the peak of the adjustment process and still finding their feet and developing their identity as university students. The statements highlighted above indicated that the participants were still finding it difficult to adjust to university and urban life. Lenz (2014) approves that difficulty in adjusting is because college is characterised by numerous typical interpersonal-societal demands, and these occur without the structured and familiar environment of high school. Moreover, students can be marginalised by their background (Buchanan *et al*, 2015) which in this case is rural background.

The perception of students during first semester at university is crucial in deciding whether to continue (Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich & Dobson, 2014). If students cannot fit in with the institutional culture, the lack of integration can be intensified (Yau *et al*, 2012). Aderi, *et al* (2013) advised that universities should try and have more social activities to reduce the number of students who fail to adjust adequately to college life.

Participants interviewed during the *second semester*, indicated the following:

*Thumeka: ... I have visited university before, but it was a school trip other than that I was always at home. When I first came to university I made sure that I attend orientation and it helped me a lot...However, the fact that I was no longer staying with my parents was a bit challenging... I am a reserved person but now **I have a lot of friends** from the same programme and I am **enjoying my stay at the university**. My academic work is manageable, and I am happy with my progress so far...*

*Ntombi: ...I had visited Durban before with my parents but still when I had to come to university on my own, I was scared and felt lonely. **Making friends was very easy**, I managed to make friends with my classmates... Sometimes I feel the lecturers give us too much information unlike at high school, but with the help of friend from the programme we study together and assist each other.*

Simphiwe: ... I have from time to time visited with my parents in the city however it was my first time being at the university.it was a huge change for me but fortunately I had a friend from the same community who is in the same programme and we became friends. The way lecturers do things is different from school, I have learnt to be academically independent and not to rely on my teachers like in school.

The responses highlighted above indicated the difference between students who were interviewed during the first and second semester. These students appear to have adjusted both socially and academically and feel like they are part of the institution and have become accustomed to the institutional culture.

Nevertheless, the difference in social skills between the male students and the female students are noted to be different. The above responses clearly show that the female students adjusted

quicker than the male students, irrespective of the semester in which the interviews were conducted. The only male student who adjusted quickly had a friend from high school who was enrolled in the same programme. A study done by De Larrosa & Butner (2000) reveal that development in female students differs from male students, females tend to rate interpersonal relations more than males. Therefore, autonomy is important to females in interpersonal relationships. The study further revealed that female students have a tendency to have an elevated rating on intimacy than male students.

It is noted that students from the BCom4 programme socialise with each other. Those participants who knew students in the main stream programmes hardly socialised or made close friends with them during the first semester. Although all participants stayed in university residents not all of them found it easy to socially adjust. Rahat & Ilhan (2016) mention that this may be attributed to the individual's ability to adjust to a new environment which is closely related to the type of self-construal that they have.

5.3.5 Dealing with homesickness

With the improved technology and the rising number of millennial students, the participants indicated that the first-year transition to higher education is not quite the archetypical image portrayed in the literature. They revealed that universal access to technology minimises the psychosocial effects of distance. With the growing number of parents who have completed matric and have access to some form of technology like smartphones, and some who are on social media platforms, communication with families is constant. The University provides free access to Wi-Fi for students making it easier for them to stay in contact. The participants below expressed how they were able to communicate with their families:

Simphiwe: ...my family call me almost every day.

Zandile: ...my mother calls me every afternoon.

Thumeka: ...I call my family two to three times a weekand I sometimes visit them during weekends.

Sbusiso: I am in constant contact with my family. If I don't have money to call them I use WhatsApp as I have access to Wi-Fi at University.

This is evident in the research conducted by Monaco & Martin (2007) showing that millennials are dependent on technology and their support systems. This is because millennials were born after the time when digital technologies began to be entrenched in social life (Jones *et al*, 2010). From the responses above it also shows being in constant contact with family reduces the effect of homesickness.

5.3.6 Being a University Student

The participants indicated that they attend universities as the representatives of their families and communities. This experience has mixed emotions attached to it. On the one hand they are fearful of the university life at first but the fact that they are representing their families and communities also gives them a sense of pride and dignity. These emotions are captured by the following participants:

Mandla: I am very excited and proud at the same time...

Mlondi: It makes me feel important and it increases my family status back at home...even back home they are proud of me.

Thumeka: I am very proud, and I can see that I am getting closer to fulfilling my dreams.

The above experiences indicate that the participants may find themselves under immense pressure to excel academically as they would not like to disappoint their families. Mesidor & Sly (2016) confirm that university students feel a sense of accomplishment and that their dreams have come true when they excel at university. The above responses therefore, clearly indicate the importance for participants to obtain their degrees as they would not want to disappoint their families and communities.

5.3.7 Developing a Student Identity

The participants indicated that by being away from home they have achieved some sense of growth and independence by learning to take responsibility for their own lives and not depending on their parents to make decisions for them. They also indicated an intellectual growth as compared to when they were in high school. This is evidenced by the following participants:

Zandile: *I am more independent now..., free to make my own choices and I am responsible for my own actions...there is no one judging my decisions...*

Ntombi: *...the way I think has tremendously changed, I feel like I am a new person – matured and responsible. I also feel independent....*

Mandla: *...I feel like I have grown both as an individual and in terms of my studies. I am enjoying the freedom (away from parental supervision) ...somehow, I feel like a man, not a boy anymore.*

For Black African male students who grew up in the rural areas where the African culture prescribes that girls do domestic chores, it was difficult to adjust to doing these chores at the university residences by themselves. This is also noted in the study done by Rahat & Ilhan (2016) who found that students when learning to become autonomous adults in an unfamiliar environment, must deal with many issues and challenges as they adjust to the university and its culture. The following male participants articulated their struggles:

Mlondi: *...I have changed the way I think and behave...I no longer act like a child since I know I am responsible for my actions... I have even grown spiritually.*

At home, boys were never allowed to cook only girls were cooking and doing all the house chores...I also had to learn how to cook here...

Sbusiso: *...I have learned how to cook and clean, something I have never done at home. Living with other students, I have also learned not only to take care of myself but for others as well...to be responsible for everything I do...*

Developing a sense of belonging is very important in the transition process and this contributes to the development of the university student identity (Holmegaard, Madsen & Ulriksen (2016).

5.3.8 Support

Participants described their experiences of receiving both academic and social support from different structures before and during transition, such as family and schools. The following support structures were mentioned repeatedly by participants:

5.3.8.1 Family as support

The participant's indicated that their parents, some community members and even the church assisted them before they came to the University. They mentioned that they were interested and even involved with the application process. The following participants shared their experiences of family support:

Ntombi: ...My mother continuously encouraged me to go to university. My church pastor assisted me with the application process in terms of selections as I did not clearly understand the CAO form...

Sbusiso:my mother works in Durban, so she helped me by bringing the CAO forms and taking them back to CAO.

Simphiwe: My father is the one who used to encourage me to go to university... and my mother was more involved with my education especially when I was in high school... There is a brother from church who helped me in terms of applying to university...

Zandile: My mother has always been there, supporting and encouraging me to go to university. Also, my sister who is a university graduate and my neighbour who is currently a university student assisted me in terms of applying to university...

The above responses differ from the popular belief that rural families are disinterested in students' studies. The evidence from the participants suggests that family members who themselves have received university education are more involved and are interested in academic matters. For students to have a successful university experience, they require family and even community support (Ganss, 2016).

5.3.8.2 School Teachers as support

Participants indicated that despite having limited or poor resources in their schools, their teachers tried against all odds to support them in academic matters and encouraged them to further their studies. This is evidenced below:

Mlondi: ...much as I come from a poorly resourced schools but my teachers were very supportive. They requested previous matriculants who were at universities to bring us application forms and to advise us about any academic matters.

Simphiwe: ... there is one teacher who was very dedicated at school and he used to advise us about furthering our studies...

Mandla: ...our teachers brought CAO forms to school...they use to make copies and we will complete draft forms first, they will then check and assist us until we complete them. Once they are properly completed, they will then give us an original form to transfer the information to..

The above experiences reflect a sense of care and support by the school teachers who were educated at higher education institutions themselves and understood the importance of life-long learning. Mendaglio (2013) advises that high school teachers should offer support by creating opportunities in schools to discuss the demands which students might encounter at university, and also disseminate information through guidance groups.

5.3.8.3 University as Institutional Support

In terms of the university providing institutional support to the participants during the transition, the views were divided, some participants indicated that they were supported by the institution during transition while others experienced some difficulties especially in terms of the registration process. Below are some of the experiences:

Mandla: I applied very late...However, the administrators assisted me, and I managed to get acceptance from BCom programme.

Sbusiso: I found that the orientation was very helpful

***Mlondi:** My application status was 'pending' until the end January ...I started panicking since I was not accepted and end of January I decided to travel from home to check what was going on with my application...*

***Zandile:** ...I was rejected for a course I had initially applied for...However, I decided to travel from home to UKZN ... and it was only then that I was advised about BCom4 programme...*

The above responses reflect different experiences from participants in terms of support offered by the institution. Some participants appreciated the way the institution was able to assist them. However, some reflected experiencing difficulties in terms of information being communicated to them in time regarding their registration statuses. This reflects that there are still some difficulties in terms of getting information to students on time. It is important that the university systems are supportive in order to ensure successful adaptation of students (Briggs et al, 2012).

5.3.8.4 Enrolling for the BCom4 Programme

According to most participants the BCom4 programme was not their first choice. They joined the programme based on their low matric points since they did not qualify for mainstream tuition. Some of them were not aware they will be enrolled in the Foundation programme and were under the impression they were being admitted to the mainstream programme. The following participants confirmed this:

***Thumeka :** ... I did not know I was registered for Foundation, I only saw when I got here...*

***Zandile:** I was not accepted for the course I wanted.. because of my matric points...*

***Mlondi:** ... BCom4 was my second choice*

However, once the participants joined the BCom4 programme, they quickly began to enjoy being a part of it. Based on their responses it is evident that the BCom4 programme offers an abundance of academic support to ameliorate rural schooling deficits. The responses indicated the level of satisfaction among students with the kind of academic support the programme offered. The following views were expressed by the participants:

Mandla: ... even if I had a choice...I would have wished to first get into access... They teach us a lot of things which were not taught in high school. If I had gone straight to mainstream I would have had a problem catching up....

Ntombi: ... I would recommend BCom4 for the academic preparation it offers.

The participants' accounts did not clearly indicate as to how much the programme offers in terms of social support. Their satisfaction was based mainly on the academic support the programme offered whereas according to the programme handbook it is meant to support them in both aspects. Young & Campbell's (2014) argument confirms that as much as historically White universities have widened access; their focus is still on academic throughput rather than psychosocial wellbeing especially for Black students. Yau *et al* (2012) further attested that there is a relationship between these two dimensions of transition where social adjustment has an impact on academic adjustment.

5.3.8.5 Funding as support

Some participants come from poor families and judging from their responses based on their family background they could not afford to attend university. In their responses, they all indicated that they are funded by National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for their tuition. The funding eases the financial burden for both the students and parents as they come from low quintile schools. The following experiences highlight the contribution of funding as support:

Mlondi:.... For the financial assistance the institution is giving to us (BCom4 Students), I will highly recommend BCom4 to other potential students.

Ntombi: ... I come from a very poor family and my parents are unemployed... Financial support from NSFAS makes things easy for my family...

The financial assistance offered by the programme enables students to focus on the academic aspects of transition and not about financial challenges, which might affect their academic performance. Students have the chance of realising their dreams which may not have otherwise been possible. High tuition fees are a problem in higher education institutions

worldwide and one of the major causes of student protests. South Africa is not exempt from these global trends and this is because higher education is not sufficiently funded (Badat, 2016; Calitz & Fourie, 2016). As a result, South Africa was faced with the Fees Must Fall protests at the end of 2015 (Calitz & Fourie, 2016).

5.4 Discussion

The themes presented in this chapter indicate that participants were still experiencing some challenges during transition from high school to university but not as portrayed in the literature. The responses from the participants indicated that transition for millennial students is somehow different. The millennials have had a huge impact on and continue to transform higher education (Rickes, 2009).

With the wealth of support from families and academic support from the programme, homesickness and academic transition is minimal. The fact that these participants come from families with members who have been to university also eases some of the challenges generally associated with transition, as well as being first in the family to attend university. They already have well established network of mentors who guide them even before they become university students. The themes also confirm findings from Howe & Straus's (2009) study that the millennial generation of students feel closer to their parents and they have a fascination for technology.

Participants moved from one stage to the other from the time they left high school into becoming university students. Moreover, the changes involved during transition focus on intraindividual (which involves change and growth of self in terms of self-complexity and integration), and interindividual (which is change associated with institutional characteristics or experiences of students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2008).

The above findings indicated the developmental stages that participants went through as they transition from high school to university, hence the theory used (Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development) is divided into stages. All the issues participants went through during transition, including the ones that are identified as themes above, were classified into

Chickering's Vectors (DeVilbiss, 2014). However, some of the themes do fall within more than one construct of the theory. In analysing data, the themes were classified as follows:

Family Background, First Generation, Being a University Student, Developing Identity - These themes are related to **identity development** which is the central construct of Chickering's Seven Vectors Theory. This is because development of student identities are the foremost issues during their university year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Long, 2012). Identity involves reflecting on one's family origin as well as ethnic heritage, sense of self in social, historical and cultural context, self-esteem and how one's identity integrates with broader society (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Long, 2012).

Schooling Background, Enrolling for the BCom4 Programme – These themes are related to **developing competence** as they involve acquiring cognitive and psychosocial skills. This occur at a stage when students encounter new academic challenge, new environment, diversity, and technology (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; De Larossa & Butner, 2000; Long, 2012). Students acquire these skills at a place of learning like at school and at university level. For this reason, the theme *being a university student* also relates to this construct as well as *family background*, hence family is the initial point of learning for any child.

Dealing with homesickness – This theme is related to **managing emotions** and it involves dealing with emotional baggage that can affect learning (including fear, hurt, longing, boredom and tension). If these feeling are not managed well, they can be very overwhelming to students. It is therefore important to find ways to deal with emotions in order to navigate the transition process successfully (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). *Support* (which includes support from family, teachers, institution as well as financial support) also relate to managing emotions as it is one way of assisting students to manage emotions during transition.

Social and Academic Adjustment to University – is largely related to **autonomy by learning** where students learn to solve their problems, take responsibility of their actions without depending on their parents (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). *Being a university student* and *Enrolling for the BCom4 Programme* also relate to this

construct. Students are at a stage where they are able to rely on their peers and are free from continually seeking reassurance and approval. Their relationship with their parents is also replaced by new relationships with peers (De Larrosa & Butner, 2000; Long 2012). These themes are also related to **developing mature interpersonal relationships** hence participants are at a stage where they form relationships with others (De Vilbiss, 2014). *Academic Adjustment* is also related to **developing (intellectual) competence**.

The Seven vectors of student development theory are a well-known and often cited theory because it applies to social, intellectual, emotional and physical development of university students (De Larrosa & Butner, 2000). Chickering's vectors are also useful for university staff in assisting students through the developmental stages (De Vilbiss, 2014). The next chapter deals with conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion, recommendations for further research and final remarks. The study focused on BCom4 students registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal coming from rural backgrounds. The intention of the study was to understand the academic and social transition experiences of these students from rural high school to an urban university.

6.2 Conclusions

Conclusions are drawn from the literature reviewed and data analysis. Admission to university for the first time signifies growth and independence, transition from school to university as described in the literature is challenging and demanding for first year students. Transition can be difficult for rural students who are transitioning to urban universities because of their background. Being in a new city environment for the first time coupled with the new teaching methods at the university can result in adjustment challenges. This is because of the combination of the institutional and urban cultures which are different from both school and rural cultures. Transition on its own involves change in one's familiar environment will be associated with some challenges. Rural students usually spend most of their lives in areas where the way of living is different from the urban areas. For rural students, the new environment can be somehow problematic to adapt to. Students' experiences on transition have an important impact on their success and retention at university. There is a need for higher education institutions to be accommodative to students from rural backgrounds.

The **schooling background** also had an impact on the participants' matric results. The lack of resources in rural schools and lack of support from teachers were mentioned as contributing to the poor performance in matric. Under-preparedness further affected participants in terms of university entrance as they all indicated that the Foundation/BCom4

programme was not their first choice. They registered for BCom4 because they did not meet minimum requirements for any mainstream programmes.

Participants mentioned an underlying fear of not belonging in university. The identity they developed in joining an urban university and becoming urban residents, poses a threat to their rural culture. The social aspect of transition when they join the university is still an issue of concern. Based on the information gathered during the interviews, BCom4 students socialise amongst themselves during transition which replicates an underlying effect of social exclusion from mainstream students.

The lack of proper communication between the university and participants during the registration process created additional confusion during the transition period. Some participants were not even aware they were accepted for a Foundation programme they arrived at the university, as their application statuses were continuously pending on the CAO system. Based on the findings, as much as the students experienced challenges during transition, millennial students bring in a new viewpoint on the issue of student transition.

The study showed that:

The issue of **first generation** or first in the family, for rural students, is irrelevant to millennial students, since they have members of their families who have been to university. This means that they can get assistance, advice and support from family members even before going to university. **Parents** are more involved and interested in their children's education as some of them have some form of higher educational background.

Homesickness usually associated with transition to university is minimised through access to modern technology for millennial students. They are in constant communication with their families and the fact that the university provides free access to Wi-Fi enables students to communicate with families even via social media.

The findings further revealed that irrespective of challenges that rural students faced during transition, they are proud to be university students and are seen as the pride of both their families and communities. This however may put them under enormous pressure to excel, which on its own, can either impact positively or negatively on their academic progress depending on how they handle the pressure.

6.3 Recommendations

Schools need to support and prepare learners pre-transition. The responsibility must not lie with individual dedicated teachers who take it upon themselves to assist and prepare students for university. It needs to form part of schooling support initiatives. Universities need to work more with rural schools in this regard to bridge the existing transition gap between these two institutions, and to ease the academic and social transition.

UKZN, in particular the BCom4 Programme needs to do more in encouraging social activities to integrate Foundation students with mainstream students to avoid the “social exclusion effect” experienced by BCom4 students in turn assisting to easily integrate them to university life. The Institution should ensure the holistic development of students.

The University should introduce and encourage diverse activities to preserve student cultures creating a sense of belonging and not feeling alienated by the urban culture and therefore preserving their identity.

6.4 Further Research

Based on the literature reviewed, there is not sufficient literature conducted in the South African context tackling the experiences of rural students transitioning to urban universities. This subject is important as it will assist both rural schools and urban universities to be able to bridge the already existing gap between these institutions. The research can inform policies on how schools can prepare students and how universities can accommodate the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they face additional challenges compared to their urban counterparts.

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APPENDICES

i. Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW GUIDE – SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Date and time:	
Interviewer name:	
Location of Interview:	
Participant's gender:	
Participant's age:	

2. PARTICIPANT'S BACKGROUND

- a. Tell me something about yourself, where did you grow up? *Prompt for:*
 - i. Location: Where were you raised? What were the living conditions like?
 - ii. Family: Who did you live with? How many family members were there?

3. SCHOOLING (PRIMARY & HIGH SCHOOL)

- a. Describe your schooling experience? *Prompt for:*
 - i. Primary school location: where did you go to primary school? What did you want to become when you were in primary school?
 - ii. Secondary school location: Which high school did you go to? Where was it located? Why did you choose to go to that particular school? Did you change schools? If yes, why? What did you want to become when you were in high school?
 - iii. Secondary school experience: What kind of teaching did you experience in high school? Where the teachers helpful? Did they give you advice about university?

4. TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

- a. When did you decide to come to university?
- b. Why did you make this decision?
- c. Who helped you make this decision?

- d. How did you go about applying to attend university?
- e. What challenges did you experience when you applied to go to university?
- f. What were your study-choices in your application (list your 1st, 2nd and 3rd choices)

5. UNIVERSITY (UKZN) LIFE

- a. Tell me about your first experiences of university. *Prompt for:*
 - i. Have you ever visited a university before coming to UKZN?
 - ii. How did you learn about UKZN? What motivated you to come to UKZN?
 - iii. How did you cope with all the changes of moving from high school to UKZN?
 - iv. Describe the kinds of support you have received from the university during your first few months (*prompt for academic and social support*)
- b. How do you feel now about being at the university? *Prompt for:*
 - i. What does being at the university mean to you?
 - ii. What has been your experience of university teaching methods?
 - iii. Describe how your academic progress so far (including the experience of your first test or assignment).
 - iv. What kind of academic support are you receiving from your lecturers?
 - v. How do you relate to other students at the university?
 - vi. Who is supporting your studies financially? How does this impact your life as a student?
- c. Briefly explain what you have identified so far as major advantages and disadvantages of being at the university. *Prompt for:*
 - i. How has UKZN met your expectations of the university?

6. STUDENT LIFE

- a. Before coming to UKZN have you ever visited any big city?
- b. How has moving from the rural environment to an urban university affected you?
- c. Describe your experiences of being away from home.

- d. Describe where you are currently staying? What is your experience of staying there?
- e. What kind of support are you receiving from your family since you started at the university?
- f. What other activities are you involved in other than academic (*extramural*)?

Thank you for participating. The interview is now over. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about being a student at UKZN?

ii. Informed Consent

University of KwaZulu-Natal
College of Humanities
School of Education
Howard College Campus

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Nondumiso Cele (205519936). I am a Masters student studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, South Africa. My research title is “**Experiences of academic and social transition from rural high school to first year university: A case study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal**”. The purpose of this study is to trace first year rural student’s experiences of transitioning academically and socially from rural schooling context to higher education, in particular the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In order to produce data, I am interested in interviewing you regarding your experiences about the topic.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality as a participant in this research will be protected (ie. your name and identity) and your views will be presented anonymously.
- All information provided will be used for the purpose of this research only.
- Participation in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw any time during the research of which you will not be penalized for such action.
- The interview will take 30 minutes to 1 hour.
- There will be no financial benefits for participating in this research; it is for academic purposes only.
- Data will be locked in a safe place for the full duration of the study, thereafter for the period of five years of which it can be discarded in line with the university rules.
- Interview will be conducted at a place and time convenient to you.
- The interview will be audio taped and later transcribed for data analysis purposes.

Indicate YES/NO whether or not you would like to be interviewed.

Objectives of the study :

1. To trace first year rural students experiences of transitioning both academically and socially from rural schooling context to higher education context in particular UKZN.
2. To determine the extent to which rural schools prepare students for the academic and social demands of their first year in higher education.

iii. Declaration

DECLARATION

I..... *(full names of participant)* hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I voluntarily consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I desire, without giving a reason and without cost.

I hereby provide consent to :

Audio record my interview	YES	NO
---------------------------	-----	----

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

.....

iv. Gatekeeper permission to conduct study in the College of Law and Management



16 March 2016

Dear Ms Cele

Permission to Conduct Research:

“Experiences of academic and social transition from rural high school to first year university: A case study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal”.

Your letter of 7 March 2016 refers.

Please be informed that your request to conduct your research among our first-year BCom 4 students is approved subject to all ethical clearance protocols being observed.

Yours sincerely

Professor Kriben Pillay

College Dean of Teaching and Learning
College of Law and Management Studies
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8300 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7596 Email: pillaykr@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

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Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

v. Gatekeeper permission to conduct study at UKZN



11 June 2015

Ms Nondumiso Cele
School of Education
College of Humanities
Edgewood Campus
UKZN
Email: celen12@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Ms Cele

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Experiences of academic and social transition from rural high school to first year university: A case study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal".

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by approaching, first year students registered for the BCom4 Programme, and who are willing to participate in an interview on the Westville Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

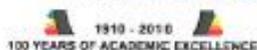
MR B POO
REGISTRAR (ACTING)

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

vi. Ethical Clearance Letter



26 August 2015

Ms Nondumiso Cele 205519996
Higher Education Training and Dev (Education)
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Cele

Protocol reference number: HSS/0797/015M
Project title: Experiences of academic and social transition from rural high school to first year university: A case study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 26 June 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Dr Sarasvathie Reddy
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele
cc School Administrators: Ms B Bhengu, Ms PW Ndimande, Ms T Khumalo & Mr SN Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

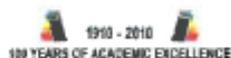
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3697/9350/4567 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4009 Email: simbap@ukzn.ac.za / smomamo@ukzn.ac.za / msbuno@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Fouring Campuses: Edgwood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

vii. Turnitin Report

Turnitin Originality Report					
Processed on: 19-Jul-2018 12:17 PM CAT ID: 983673140 Word Count: 26066 Submitted: 1	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Similarity Index</th> <th>Similarity by Source</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>10%</td> <td> Internet Sources: 9% Publications: 5% Student Papers: 5% </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Similarity Index	Similarity by Source	10%	Internet Sources: 9% Publications: 5% Student Papers: 5%
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< 1% match (publications) Ganss, Karen M., "The College Transition for First-Year Students from Rural Oregon Communities", Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 2016.					
< 1% match (student papers from 21-Jan-2018) Submitted to Upper Iowa University on 2018-01-21					
< 1% match (student papers from 12-Nov-2014) Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal on 2014-11-12					
< 1% match (Internet from 31-May-2016) http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ783837.pdf					
< 1% match (Internet from 29-Dec-2012) http://www.voced.edu.au/search/apachesolr_search/Html?page=26&filters=sm_metadata.keyterm%253AEmployees&4945_html=					
< 1% match (publications) Cynthia Hudley, Roxanne Moschetti, Amber Gonzalez, Su-Je Cho, Leasha Barry, Melissa Kelly, "College Freshmen's Perceptions of Their High School Experiences", Journal of Advanced Academics, 2009					
< 1% match (Internet from 07-Mar-2018) https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03069885.2013.779638?scroll=					
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< 1% match (publications) Mendaglio, S., "Gifted students' transition to university", Gifted Education International, 2012.					
< 1% match (publications) Aderi, Mohd, Malek Jdaitawi, Noor Azniza Ishak, and Farid Jdaitawi. "The Influence of Demographic Variables on University Students' Adjustment in North Jordan", International Education Studies, 2013.					
< 1% match (Internet from 17-Oct-2015) http://www-personal.umich.edu/~enicole/Grayetal2013_CAE_2013_forweb.pdf					
< 1% match (Internet from 26-May-2016) http://www.wits.ac.za/media/migration/files/healthr2011a11.pdf					
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< 1% match (Internet from 25-Sep-2017) http://applications.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/Application_Forms/2018_Final_Prospectus.sflb.ashx					
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< 1% match (publications) Kirsten McKenzie, Robert Schweitzer. "Who Succeeds at University? Factors predicting academic performance in first year Australian university students", Higher Education Research & Development, 2018					
< 1% match (Internet from 03-May-2014) http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-04032011-154248/unrestricted/dissertation.pdf					