



UNIVERSITY OF  
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

---

INYUVESI  
**YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

Understanding Coping Mechanisms Used By First and Second Year University Students In The Transition From Secondary To Tertiary Education: A Case Study Of University Of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College.

By:

**Siphesihle Ndumiso Kunene**

214543762

Supervisor: **Mr. Mohammed Vawda**

Dissertation submitted in partial-fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of Master in Population Studies to the

School of Built Environment and Development Studies.

University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Durban, South Africa

November 2018

## DECLARATION

I, Siphesihle Ndumiso Kunene, hereby confirm and declare that this dissertation is my own work and I have correctly acknowledged the work of others. Equally this work has been carried out exclusively by me under the supervision of Mr. Mohammed Vawda.

I also declare that:

(i) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(ii) This work does not hold other persons' writing, unless precisely acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers.

Where other written sources have been quoted, then:

a. Their words have been summarised, but the general information attributed to them has been acknowledged.

b. Where their particular words have been used, the researcher has placed their work in italics and inside quotation marks and referenced.

I acknowledge that plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's ideas, words or work either verbatim or in substance without specific and appropriate acknowledgement.

---

**Siphesihle N. Kunene (214543762)**

---

**Date**

---

**Place**

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to greatest leader I ever encountered; my late lovely mother, my queen, my inspiration; Mrs Makhosazane Venatia Mazibuko-Kunene. Thanks a million for all the sacrifices you have done for us. You have inspired hope to me, to my siblings, to my family and to the society at large. I thank you endlessly for instilling both the spirit and culture of faith and perseverance in me. Please know that you are still BIG, you are highly treasured, and you are most loved.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank God, the heavenly father for guiding and protecting me throughout the writing of this document. I give gratitude to the Almighty father because without him none of this would have been possible.

Gratitude to my late mother who has always believed in me. Despite your physical absence, I still felt your spiritual company throughout this journey. You are my mother, my friend and my angel.

I would also like to convey my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Mr. Mohammed Vawda, thank for both your noteworthy advises and patience. I thank you for helping me carry out this project. Mostly, I thank you for having faith in me.

My sincere gratitude to my family for their unwavering support, love and mostly for embracing me with prayers. Of course, 2018 was indeed a not so rosy year but with your support I managed to pull through regardless of the obstacles. I am undoubtedly blessed to have a family of your kind.

To my friends, thanks a bunch for being my support system. In you, I have found a family away from home. You have certainly made the journey endurable. I wish that our union will transcend over the scope of our engagements at UKZN and we keep our lines of communication open even into our futures. I wish you the very best in your future endeavours. Long may our friendship reign!

To my ACTS family, my home away from home. Thank you for the leadership and spiritual growth. I cannot thank you enough for such an experience, may you continue to do the same to others as well. I am deeply grateful for having met each and every one of you, I shall cherish the memories we shared together.

## ABSTRACT

The existing literature has acknowledged that student enrolment in South African universities has meaningfully amplified. However, current studies have also exposed that student dropout rates are high, especially among first years and disadvantaged students. Studies have also indicated that the transition from secondary to university education is a stressful experience and a challenging time for most university first years. The surviving literature has revealed the major challenges encountered by first year university students during the transition phase. However the coping strategies were unknown. This study therefore explored coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College.

A qualitative, exploratory and descriptive design was used in this study. The sample size consisted of fifteen (15) participants in total; seven first years and eight second years from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus. The sample was stratified according to all four colleges applicable at Howard College (college of agriculture, engineering and science, college of health science, college of law and management studies) and at least 3-4 participants were recruited per college. In this study, data was collected using semi structured interview guide.

The findings revealed that challenges faced by university first years, mostly include the monetary challenges, environmental adaptation, securing accommodation and adjusting to the university workload. Equally the findings of the study exposed that students rely on different coping mechanisms during the transition from second to tertiary education. The study revealed that university first-timers at UKZN, Howard College campus capitalise on coping mechanisms such a religion, social networks, resilience and campus connectedness/friends.

The study has shed light on the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus. The study has certified that providing support systems is essential to ensure that they mitigate the challenges usually encountered by university first-year students, equally this is vital for the adaptation of university first years.

*Keywords: Resilience; Adaptation; Coping Mechanisms: Transition Phase*

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADO	: Academic Development Officer
CHS	: College of Health Science
CH	: College of Humanities
CAES	: College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science
CLMS	: College of Law and Management Studies
EFC	: Emotion-Focused Coping
HC	: Howard College
NSFAS	: National Student Financial Aid Scheme (South Africa)
PBL	: Problem Based Learning
PFC	: Problem-Focused Coping
SRC	: Student Representative Council
UKZN	: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .....	i
DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
LIST OF ACRONYMS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background .....	1
1.3 Defining Coping Mechanism .....	2
1.4 Problem Statement .....	3
1.5 Main Aim of the Research .....	3
1.6 Research Objectives and Questions .....	4
1.6.1 Research objectives .....	4
1.6.2. Research questions .....	4
1.7 Operational Definitions .....	5
1.7.1 Resilience .....	5
1.7.2 Adaptation .....	5
1.7.3 Transition phase .....	5
1.8 Theoretical Framework .....	5
1.8.1 Resilience definition .....	6
1.8.2 Resilience model outline .....	7
1.8.3 Justification for the theoretical framework .....	9
1.9 Significant of the Study .....	10
1.9.1 Knowledge .....	10
1.9.2 Awareness-raising .....	10
1.9.3 Policy development .....	10
1.9.4 Empowerment .....	11
1.10 Structure of the Dissertation .....	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
2.1 Introduction .....	12
2.2 Challenges Encountered by Students During the Transition Phase .....	12

2.2.1 Financial difficulties .....	12
2.2.2 Adjustment challenges .....	13
2.2.3 Depression, anxiety and stress .....	14
2.2.4 Lack of accommodation.....	15
2.3 Coping Mechanisms.....	16
2.3.1 Social networks.....	16
2.3.2 Induction and orientation .....	19
2.3.3 Grit.....	21
2.3.4 Self-kindness.....	22
2.3.5 Degree of religiosity .....	23
2.3.6 Academic buoyancy.....	24
2.4 Task-Oriented Versus Emotion-Oriented Mechanisms .....	26
2.5 Gender Versus Adjustment .....	27
2.6 Development of Coping .....	29
2.7 Resilient Students.....	30
2.8 Risk Factors during Transition Phase.....	32
2.9 Protective Factors during Transition Phase.....	34
2.10 Family Background of Students .....	36
2.11 Summary of the Chapter .....	37
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	38
3.1 Introduction .....	38
3.2 Research Approach .....	38
3.3.1 Advantages of qualitative research .....	39
3.3.2 Disadvantages of qualitative research.....	39
3.4 Research Design.....	40
3.5 Research Setting.....	41
3.6 Study Population .....	41
3.7 Sampling and Sample Size.....	42
3.7.1 Inclusion and exclusion conditions.....	43
3.8 Method of Data Collection.....	44
3.8.1 Data collection instrument .....	44
3.8.2 Data collection process .....	44
3.9 Method of Data Analysis .....	45
3.10 Trustworthiness .....	47
3.10.1 Credibility .....	47

3.10.2 Dependability .....	48
3.10.3 Transferability .....	48
3.10.4 Confirmability .....	49
3.11 Ethical Consideration .....	49
3.11.1 Anonymity and respect .....	50
3.11.2 Beneficence .....	50
3.11.3 Informed consent .....	50
3.12 Data Management .....	51
3.13 Summary of the Chapter .....	51
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS .....	52
4.1 Introduction .....	52
4.2 Socio Demographics of Study Participants .....	52
4.3 Presentation of Themes .....	53
4.4 Hindrances to Student’s Adaptation .....	54
4.4.1 Inability to adjust to the academic environment .....	54
4.4.2 Financial difficulties .....	56
4.4.3 Stress, anxiety or depression .....	57
4.4.4 Accommodation issues .....	58
4.4.5 Academic workload .....	59
4.4.6 Lack of supervision/parental guidance .....	60
4.4.7 Lack of key resources .....	61
4.4.8 Language barrier .....	62
4.5 Facilitative Conditions to Student’s Adaptation .....	63
4.5.1 Motivation to study in higher education .....	63
4.5.2 Self-awareness and positivism .....	65
4.5.3 Family support .....	66
4.5.4 Academic support systems .....	67
4.6 Coping Mechanisms .....	68
4.6.1 Resilience .....	69
4.6.2 Social networks .....	69
4.6.3 Religiosity .....	70
4.6.4 Campus connectedness/friends .....	71
4.7 Summary of the Chapter .....	72
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	73
5.1 Introduction .....	73

5.2 Discussion of Findings .....	73
5.2.1 Hindrances to student’s adaptation .....	74
5.2.2 Facilitative conditions to student’s adaptation.....	77
5.2.3 Coping mechanisms .....	78
5.3 Recommendations for Further Research .....	80
5.4 Recommendations .....	80
5.5 Limitations of the Study .....	81
5.6 Conclusion.....	81
REFERENCES .....	83
ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE .....	90
ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONSENT .....	91
ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	94

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Participants.....	53
Table 4.2: Themes.....	54

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Resilience Theory.....	7
Figure 1.2: Resilience Theory Outline.....	8

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

This study seeks to uncover and gain insights on the coping mechanisms used by students in transiting from secondary schools to tertiary institutions. The study is based on the experiences of first- and second-year students at the selected university in Kwa-Zulu Natal. This introductory chapter provides an overview of the background of the study, the research problem, the significance, and the objectives of the study. This chapter also discuss the theoretical framework, which guided the study, and lastly details the value of the study.

## 1.2 Background

Hannaway, Harris and Steyn (2014) in their study reported that the transition from secondary school to tertiary education is a challenging for most university first-timers, in particular those who are members of orthodox traditional societies who have to adjust to becoming members of a more diverse community. For many first-year students, university may be their first experience living away from home for an extended period. Therefore, it may become challenging to adapt to the new environment. Sommer (2013) acknowledged the actuality that the student enrolment at South African universities has meaningfully amplified, however student retention and graduation percentage remains low. Undoubtedly first year university students are faced with many new experiences and responsibilities at the university and in life in general (Sommer, 2013).

Sommer (2013) also exposed that student dropout rates are high, especially among first years and historically disadvantaged students. Appalamy (2004) report highlighted that first-year students are expected to change from secondary pedagogy where they are accustomed to a particular approach of learning to tertiary context where the approach of teaching and learning is dissimilar. Some students experience adjustments and adaptation problems that impact negatively in their ability to cope at the university (Hannaway et al, 2014). Drawing from Sommer (2013) the transition from high school to university can be a stressful experience and a challenging time for students. This is because it involves separation from a previously

familiar environment with accustomed daily life routines to a very new environment with new rules, demands, expectations and responsibilities (Sommer, 2013).

The reason this study is important is because some students have experienced adjustment problems and were unable to cope thus delaying the attainment of their academic qualifications (Sommer, 2013). Therefore, exploring coping methods used by first years during transition phase at University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College is important for both students and institution as strategies could collaboratively be formulated to strengthen the orientation and induction of first years. Moreover, the coping mechanisms to be uncovered will be known and they will also shed light to the future university first-timers on how to cope with university demands and lifestyle.

This study will fill the knowledge gap on understanding coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year students in transitioning from secondary school to tertiary education. A study conducted amongst college students found that individuals in their early college years are faced with developmental challenges coupled with a variety of stressors, hence it is of great importance that we better understand how students cope (Ahern, 2007). It is worth mentioning that the main reason the study targeted both first and second years was based on the actuality that second years have officially passed the first-year phase. First year students were still doing their first year when the study was conducted. Second years are more likely to recall and offer coping mechanisms they used on their first year.

### **1.3 Defining Coping Mechanism**

This segment aims to critically explore different definitions of coping mechanism. This section will define the concept of coping strategies drawing from various literature and disciplines.

Lazarus and Folkman cited in Malkoc (2011) described coping as frequently altering intellectual and behavioural efforts to control specific external or internal strains that are considered as taxing or beyond the resources of the individual. Baqutayan (2015) defined coping as the cognitive and behavioural endeavours to master, reduce, or tolerate difficult demands. Kausar (2010) explained that coping mechanisms are assumed to have two main functions. Fundamentally, it is handling the problem causing stress and also governing

emotions connecting to those stressors. Kausar (2010) communicated that, it is undoubtedly that coping mechanisms deal with difficulties since the very coping styles influence subjective well-being. Kausar's definition of coping-mechanism will be adopted for this study.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

Drawing from Bwisa (2008) a research problem is the description of the concerns that presently need to be solved. Furthermore, a problem statement affords the context of the inquiry under question and creates questions, which the investigation aims to answer (Bwisa, 2008). As highlighted above Sommer (2013) asserted that the transition from high school to university can be a demanding and challenging time for students. This may be caused by the actuality that this phase involves separation from a previously familiar environment with accustomed daily life routines to a very new atmosphere with new rules, demands and responsibilities (Sommer, 2013). Reflecting on this study the problem is that some students experience adjustment and adaptation problems that impact negatively in their ability to cope at the university (Solomon, 2013).

Despite research done on coping mechanisms, relatively little is known about contributing factors to resilience in well-adjusted university students (Pigeon et al, 2015). Hence, there is a need to explore the coping mechanisms employed by students during the transition phase from secondary to tertiary education. This study sought to expand knowledge and contribute to the growing body of literature on coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students when transiting from secondary to tertiary education.

#### **1.5 Main Aim of the Research**

The overall aim of this research is to discover and gain insights on coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education, in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus.

## **1.6 Research Objectives and Questions**

According to Wanjohi (2014), an objective is the goal intended to be attained and which is believed to be achievable. Whilst Easterbrook, Singer, Storey & Damian (2008) asserted that research question is a question that your research study/project sets out to answer.

### **1.6.1 Research objectives**

The objectives of the study were:

- To determine the factors affecting the adaptation of first and second years at a selected University in Durban.
- To explore the challenges encountered by first- and second-year students in transitioning from secondary school to university education.
- To describe the coping mechanisms used by the first- and second-year students during the transition phase.

### **1.6.2. Research questions**

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are factors affecting the adaptation of first and second years at a selected University in Durban?
- What are the challenges encountered by first- and second-year students in transitioning from secondary school to university setting?
- What are the coping mechanisms used by the first- and second-year students during the transition phase?

## **1.7 Operational Definitions**

The following operational definitions are used in this study:

### **1.7.1 Resilience**

“A stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event” (Bonanno, as cited in Southwick et al., 2014:01) and “Individuals who adapt to extraordinary circumstances, achieving positive and unexpected outcomes in the face of adversity” (Fraser, Richman & Galinsky, as cited by Van-Breda 2018:03).

### **1.7.2 Adaptation**

Falko et al. (2017) asserted that adaptation means acquiring a certain system of knowledge, norms, values that allow the student to function as a full member of society or university community.

### **1.7.3 Transition phase**

“Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal.” (Addison-Wesley, as cited by Magagula, 2016).

## **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

This section outlines and describes the theoretical framework chosen to guide the study. This study is carried on the lenses of resilience theory.

### **1.8.1 Resilience definition**

Magagula (2016) asserted that the supposition of resilience has been employed across different disciplines. The concept is used contrarily in different fields; however, it is universally defined as the capacity to recover from some form of disruption, pressure or change (Santos, 2012). Resilience is a conversant word in everyday English language, nonetheless it carries different meanings across different contexts (Osborne, 2007).

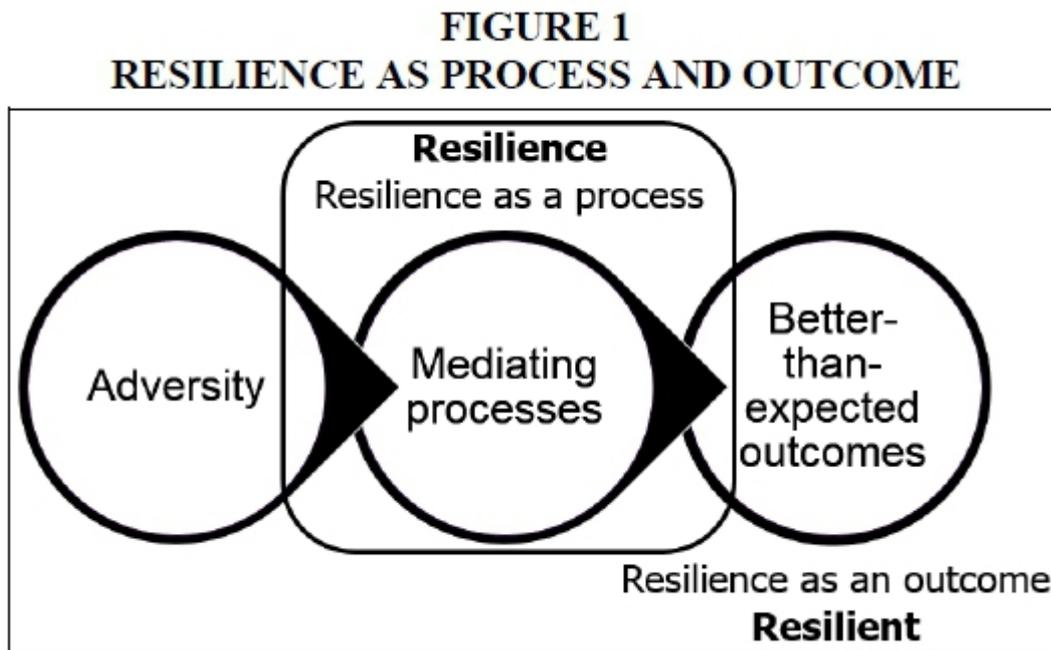
A vast body of research has been done on resilience theory, but there is still no agreement on a single definition of resilience among scholars. Santos (2012) understand resilience as a method of managing with unsettling, demanding, or puzzling life events in a manner that offers individuals with supplementary defensive and coping abilities. Correspondingly, Mastern (1994) defined resilience as the course of, capacity for or consequence of successful adaptation regardless of challenging or threatening statuses. According to Moleli (2005), resilience is the notion utilised to describe a set of abilities that foster a development of successful adaptation in spite of risk. Resilience has been operationalised in so many ways that it is difficult to compare studies and arrive at one definition (Muller & Louw; Ryff & Singer cited in Moleli, 2005).

Drawing from Beck (2016) resilience is an umbrella word brought into effective action to describe general procedures of efficacious stressor management, familiarisation, or a blend of individual or social features that permit an individual, association, or social group to take action with respect to grave stressors or unanticipated trials in a manageable approach. In short, resilience theory addresses the strengths that people and systems demonstrate that enable them to rise above adversity. Furthermore, Beck (2016) added that resilience is the progression of meaning-making into and out of daily messages and series of events that empower restoration from life problems.

The American Psychological Association (2014:04) defines resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress”. Studies suggest that resilience in the university environment is positively associated with greater mental health, as well as successful transition and adjustment to university life (Pidgeon et al, 2014).

## 1.8.2 Resilience model outline

“Resilience theory has its roots in the study of adversity and an interest in how adverse life experiences impact harmfully on people” (Van-Breda, 2018:02). It is key to share how resilience model works, therefore the following diagram demonstrates how the theory unfolds.



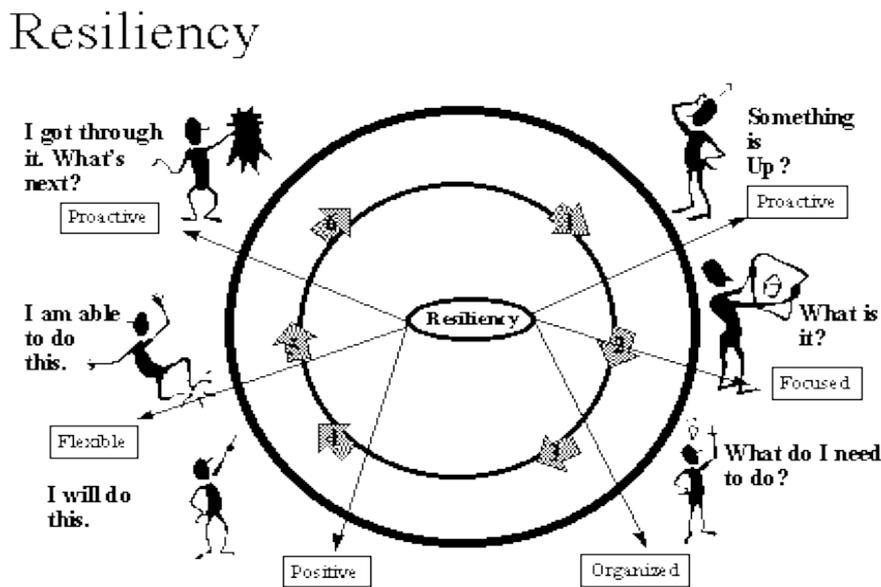
**Figure 1.1: Van-Breda (2018).**

The above diagram demonstrate that resilience is when one has the ability to recover from adversity strengthened and more resourceful (Walsh, as cited by Van-Breda 2018). In relation to the above diagram, Van-Breda (2018:04) asserted that resilience “involves a commitment to invest in one’s life situation, a perception of having control over one’s circumstances and a belief that change or challenge, rather than stability, is the normal mode of life”. Basically, the diagram communicates that “resilience is a process that leads to an outcome, and the central focus of resilience research is on the mediating processes” (Van-Breda, 2018:04).

In attempting to making sense of the diagram above (*figure 1.1*), Van-Breda (2018:09) proposed the following definition for resilience theory.

“The multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity’. ‘Multilevel’ means that the resilience processes occur across multiple domains or levels of the social ecology or person-in-environment, rather than only in the individual. ‘Systems’ is used so that the definition can be scaled across different-sized systems, such as cells, individuals, families, organisations and communities, and also non-human systems such as metals, the climate or the economy. ‘Better-than-expected outcomes’ will be discussed in the following section. ‘In the face of’ suggests that the adversity is on-going and that resilience processes are at work while the system is still facing the adversity, while in the wake of suggests that the adversity has passed, and the system is recovering from the impact of the adversity”.

**Figure 1.2: Resilience Theory Outline**



**Figure 1.2: Werner and Smith (2012).**

Drawing from both diagrams, the first step of resilience theory is acknowledging the presence of adversity, therefore this means resilience cannot be described if there are no difficult or threatening situations. The second step is contemplating how to move or function in the midst

of adversities. Despite the presence of difficulties, after contemplating and gotten ideas that will aid you to cope, you are expected to get better-than-expected outcomes (Van-Breda, 2018).

### **1.8.3 Justification for the theoretical framework**

As mentioned, to better understand the coping mechanisms used by first and second year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education, this study is carried out on the lenses of resilience theory. Explanations of resilience theory span from a set of qualities, a consequence or a dynamic process that encompasses the exposure to pressure or hardship followed by victory in adaptation (Pidgeon et al, 2014). “The central constructs of the theory include risk factors, vulnerable factors and protective factors” (Osborne, 2007:157). According to Osborne (2007) risk factors have been abstracted as the events or circumstances of adversity themselves for which there is empirical evidence of association with psychopathology, illness, or dysfunctional developmental outcomes. Drawing from Garnezy (1991) triadic model of resilience theory provides a widely accepted ecological framework for understanding the resilience process.

According to Moleli (2005) the triadic model described the dynamic interactions among risk and protective factors on three levels (individual, family, and environmental). The model also emphasized that resilience is a route that authorizes individuals to mould their environment and to be moulded by it in turn (Shilpa and Srimathi, 2015). Unpacking one of the constructs of this theory, Osborne (2007) described vulnerability factors as traits, genetic predispositions, or environmental and biological deficits for which there is empirical evidence of amplified response, sensitivity, or reaction to risk features. However, Osborne (2007) highlighted that the constructs of vulnerability factors and risk factors are occasionally used interchangeably in the literature.

“Protective mechanisms are characters, contextual characteristics, and involvements that operate to improve or promote resistance, or which may moderate the effect of risk features, and for which there is empirical evidence of relationship with health and functional developmental outcomes” (Osborne, 2007:157). Resilience theory is a multifaceted model and field of study that has been addressed by social workers, psychologists, sociologists, educators and many others over the past few decades (Van-Brenda, 2018). The emergence of resilience

theory is associated with a reduction in emphasis on pathology and an increase in emphasis on strengths (Van Brenda, 2001). The theory expounded guides this study. This theory is relevant for this study because the study is focusing on the positive aspects on how first and second year students adapt and cope in the face of adversities.

## **1.9 Significant of the Study**

As mentioned, the aim of the study is to explore and gain insights on the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education, at the selected university in Durban. Therefore, the following segments briefly outline the significance of this study.

### **1.9.1 Knowledge**

This study will provide essential information to both students and university as to which strategies first year students utilise to cope with university demands and lifestyle.

### **1.9.2 Awareness-raising**

The study will help future students to be aware of challenges that are encountered by first year students and how those challenges can be effectively managed.

### **1.9.3 Policy development**

The study will provide support for the university to develop strategies that promote resilience in university students to reduce the risk of students developing mental health problems and also to curb dropouts resulting from adjustment related challenges.

### **1.9.4 Empowerment**

This study will also encourage students to recognise factors that contribute to their resilience.

### **1.10 Structure of the Dissertation**

This study comprises of five chapters respectively. This introductory chapter has discussed the study objectives, key research question and theoretical framework on which the study is grounded on. In addition, it discussed the significant of the study. The second chapter presents the literature review. The core purpose of literature review is to put a project into a context by showing how it fits into a particular field. The third chapter will focus primarily on the research methodology, how data was collected, and methods used to analyse the data. The fourth chapter presents the detailed results coupled with in-depth discussion of the outcomes obtained from the research. The fifth chapter offers the abstract of the main findings, conclusion and recommendations for advance research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The following literature review outlines various definitions of coping mechanisms with an aim of providing unquestionable understanding about the subject matter of coping strategies. This chapter presents literature related to the study topic on transition of first- and second-year university students from secondary to tertiary education.

This chapter will review global findings and gaps in the current literature. This subdivision will also look at the debates on the influence of the student's family background with an intention of understanding its role on adjustment of a student to the university education.

### **2.2 Challenges Encountered by Students During the Transition Phase**

It has been extensively highlighted that there are various challenges that are encountered by university first-timers during the transition phase. This was validated by Brougham, Zail, Mendoza & Miller (2009) when they exposed that the transition from secondary school to tertiary education challenges young adults to live independently, handle finances, maintain academic standards and integrity, and adjust to a new social life. In a study conducted in this very institution (University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College) about barriers to academic achievement of first year students, Matlala (2005) revealed that barriers were financial difficulties, language difficulties, poor time management, problematic social relationships, personal and psychological problems, lack of accommodation and inability to communicate with lecturers.

#### **2.2.1 Financial difficulties**

Students at a university setting are coming from different backgrounds, some may be privileged to have affluent and affording families whereas some may come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, financial difficulty is a prevalent challenge for many students

especially for those who do not have financial assistance or bursaries (Mahali et al, 2018). Matlala (2005) identified financial problems as one of the crucial barriers to learning for students. The accessibility of funds, either from family income or from scholarships, is a decisive factor for academic achievement (Matlala, 2005). It is also key to highlight that tertiary education is open largely to those who can afford it (Mahali et al, 2018). Therefore, this implies that financial matters are guaranteed to affect every student. Gwacela (2013), asserted that financial issues are one of the major concerns for university students in South Africa especially in the midst of economic instability.

A recent study suggested that a significant number of South African tertiary students face financial problems as they live below the poverty line (Lloyd and Turale as cited in Mudhovozi, 2012). Gwacela (2013) explained that students from developed economies and some with secured funding sometimes face difficulties in securing food, and this mean that students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds face even greater challenges in making ends meet. Drawing from Gwacela (2013) the hiking food prices and low income restricts the purchasing power of students, thus paralyzing their ability to buy healthy and nutritious foods and thus affecting them academically. Students from low-income families must overcome many obstacles before they can enter higher education. Hannaway et al (2014) also identified financial problems as one of the main reasons of withdrawal amongst full time students. This therefore, suggests that financial challenge is one of the major contributing factors that also discourage university first-timers.

### **2.2.2 Adjustment challenges**

Students come from different places to the university and they have to adapt to the demands of the new environment, which they are unfamiliar with. According to Matlala (2005) factors that hinder smooth adjustment includes linguistic limitations, environmental factors, institutional limitations, family support as well as factors informed by the previous high school attended by the students. Psychosocial barriers may have negative impact on students' adjustment. Matlala (2005) defined psychosocial barriers as the inability to form good social relationship, and this can affect student's academic achievement. Peer groups have been found to be helpful since students help each other in group discussions and this results in a better understanding of academic work (Gizir & Aydin, 2009). Therefore, if a student is experiencing hurdles regarding

creating friendships for school work purposes they might find it had to easily adjust to the university environment.

Hannaway et al (2014) confirm that once admitted to the university, students must make the transition from their home communities to life as a university student. “Academic stressors cover the whole area of learning and achieving in and adjusting to a new environment in which a great deal of content must be assimilated in a seemingly inadequate period of time” (Kausar, 2009:33). In South Africa, Cherian & Cherian cited by Mudhovozi (2012), reported that 33% to 85% of first-year students drawn from the University of the North-West experienced various adjustment problems. Students experience a vast difference between the teaching and workload in high school, and the teaching and workload at the institution (Mudhovozi 2012; Sommer, 2013). This concurs with research findings by Vuuren (2014) who found that some students indicated that higher education was more demanding than they had anticipated. This could be partly influenced by inadequate high school preparation and a sense of feeling disconnected from their familiar relationships.

Language is a barrier to student academic achievement in many ways. “Despite numerous efforts to encourage bilingualism in South Africa’s educational system, language remains a problem in the academic arena” (Vuuren, 2014:119). English as an official mode of communication at the university is a challenge for students who come from disadvantaged schools and backgrounds (Magagula, 2016). These findings support previous South African study, where limitation in English was found to be a significant factor among the historically disadvantaged black students and impacted negatively on their learning (Mudhovozi, 2012). Hannaway et al (2014) mentions that language and the acquisition of knowledge go hand in hand which puts black students at a definite disadvantage when receiving instructions in English.

### **2.2.3 Depression, anxiety and stress**

Drawing from Brougham et al. (2009) tertiary education has been found to be stressful for many young adults especially for first year students. According to Brougham et al. (2009) depression, anxiety and stress is deemed a challenge for many first-year students because previous studies likewise reported that 75% to 80% of tertiary students are moderately stressed and 10% to 12% are severely stressed. It can be underlined that the prevalence of depression,

anxiety and stress may negatively affect the smooth adaptation of first year students. This in turn may influence their academic success. Bayram & Bilgel (2008) also stressed that the mental health of university students is an area of growing concern globally. Furthermore, Bayram & Bilgel (2008) pointed out that first year students reported higher depression, anxiety and stress scores than the other students. First year students are expected to cope with the academic and social demands that they meet in university studies and in their training for professional careers (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008).

#### **2.2.4 Lack of accommodation**

Lack of accommodation in the tertiary institutions in South Africa is amongst many challenges faced by university first-timers during transition. Drawing from The Sunday Independent (2016) the former Higher Education and Training Minister Dr. Blade Nzimande expressed that it was shocking to discover that only 5% of first year students were housed in university residences. The former Minister acknowledged that this was very concerning because these are the most vulnerable young people in our system, away from home for the first time and expected to perform in a post- secondary school environment, very different to the schools where most of them matriculated (The Sunday Independent, 2016). He further underlined that, it is difficult to understand the prevalence of this challenge because there is a mounting evidence from local and international academic research, which shows that students who live in university residences perform better academically and cope better socially, then their peers who do not live on campus, especially in the crucial first year of study (The Sunday Independent, 2016). The lack of accommodation within campus has led to the growth of off-campus residences.

A study conducted in South Africa by Mudau (2017) communicated that students who are staying off-campus are facing a number of challenges encompassing of high rentals, unsanitary surrounding, long distances from the university, inability to access library services and lack of security both in the hostels as well as on their way to university as they risk being attacked by criminals. Mudau (2017) asserted that the unpredicted increase in the number of university students has clearly created accommodation strain, resulting in many students resorting to staying off-campus. It is key to highlight that some university academic programmes are slotted for weekends, in the morning and late at night. Therefore, these arrangements are

disadvantageous to students and staff residing off-campus because they are expected to adjust their journeying schedules (Mudau. 2017). This then, can be classified as one the major challenges encountered by first year university students during transition phase.

## **2.3 Coping Mechanisms**

Gebreyosus (2018) described coping behaviour as progression by which people appraise and respond to social and environmental sources of stress in an effort to diminish the difficulties persuaded by those stressors so as to reduce or avert stress. According to Baqutayan (2015) coping mechanisms can be defined as the methods that individuals respond to and interact with problem situation. Gebreyosus (2018) highlighted the actuality that the level of stress faced, and the copying styles adopted by individuals differ based on the individual attitude appraisal of the situation as well as the convenience of resources.

Hence, it is worth mentioning that the following segments will outline and thoroughly discuss the relevant types of coping mechanisms for university students. It is also key to highlight that the following coping mechanisms were found to be related to the university setting, however they were taken from other studies done in Africa and outside.

### **2.3.1 Social networks**

The presence of unwavering social support is central during testing and threatening periods. Chiera, Ohana and Stallman (2017) allude that poor social support in university students is a grave concern. Drawing from Maundeni (2001) social networks can be defined as completely or some of the social units with whom a particular individual or group is in contact. Literature has acknowledged the actuality that first year university students encounter high stress levels. University first-timers often encounter high and chronic stress due to constant performance demands and evaluations in addition to standard life stressors (Stallman & Hurst, 2016). This qualifies the actuality that social support is important during the transitioning from secondary to tertiary education (Sommer, 2013).

Social network theory argues that students establish interpersonal ties that connect students, former students, and non-students in origin and university areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin (Weeks 2011). It can be argued that most students are either international or local migrants. Blumenstock & Tan (2016) asserted that the decision to migrate for educational purposes depends mostly on the degree to which the migrant is connected to communities at home and in the destination. This communicates that, current students and former students reach out for university first-timers (Weeks, 2011).

A number of studies (for example Blumenstock & Tan, 2013; Maundeni 2001) have focused on how strong ties to the destination community such as universities can facilitate migration of students by providing access to information about available resources and spaces. The outcomes of the study that was conducted by Maundeni (2001) communicated that African students studying abroad are struggling to adjust immediately since they have to adapt to a new cultural environment in addition to the usual stresses of university work. Maundeni's study utilised social network theory to analyse conclusions about perceptions of the role played by social network members in the adjustment of 29 African students to British community.

Maundeni (2001) acknowledges the feeling of loneliness, depression, isolation and homesickness as among the well documented challenges in the literature faced by both local and international first year students. The stability and strength of an individual's network has been found to be vital to their adjustment to stressful circumstances (Froland et al, cited by Maundeni, 2001). Drawing from Maundeni's study, most participants communicated that they survived through social support they were drawing from their family members through telephone, letters and sometimes e-mail, occasionally some of them had physical contact with them. Maundeni (2001) highlights that despite family support first year student's capitalised greatly on a strategy of constructing social groups in hosts countries.

Most students in the study reported that a majority of their social network members were other African students (Moundeni, 2001). This suggest that one of the important strategies used by first year African students in the adaptation process was to establish relationships with other people with a similar cultural background or nationality. Moundeni (2001) also noted that the relationships among African students were also characterised by the provision of various kinds of sustenance such information based on survival skills and tips in a foreign place or country; on where to get traditional food; advice on less luxurious accommodation; contributing

assistance when others are moving; and sharing cultural values and enhancing moods of cultural identity through performing cultural shows.

Moundeni (2001) also discovered that associations among first year students and African students in this study and others who originated from their countries and other parts of Africa were characterised by density or connectedness. It has been noted that friendship network plays a prominent role during transitioning phase. Brooks & Waters (2010) in their study uncovered that maintaining friendships is increasingly able to sustain important non-local relationships over both time and space. In their study on adaptability Brooks & Waters (2010) exposed that friendship networks were significant in influencing both educational mobility and adaptability, although this was rarely in a direct and explicit manner. They further highlighted the role of friendship networks to a wider youth culture by providing links to specific countries or institutions for study, and thus assisted to minimise young people's fears of the unknown (Brooks & Waters, 2010).

However, in contrast Moundeni (2001) discovered that a number of student's communicated dissatisfaction about the support they received from networks in the host country or university receiving communities. This was a challenge because the lack of intimate friendships during the period of change to a foreign country may adversely affect students' adaptation (Moundeni, 2001). According to Moundeni (2001) some students in his study of adaptation highlighted that religion also played a centre role during the adaptation phase. Although not all first years were members of religious groups but those who were active members of religious groups reported that the assemblies facilitated their adjustment because they provided them with spiritual, emotional and recreational livelihood (Moundeni, 2001).

On different perspective of social networks during the transition phase Cox & Taha (2016) uncovered that work orientation and learning motives indirectly spearheaded the foundation of students' networks. Work orientation and learning motives were deemed both helpful and crucial in building students' networks, particularly over time. Cox & Taha (2016) highlighted that co-national influences were discovered to be vital to the building of the relationship network and this resulted to the formation of the work network. The summary of the findings of the study conducted by Cox & Taha (2016) yielded that both first years and international students capitalised immensely on social networks in a fashion of co-nationality, similar cultures, and so forth.

### **2.3.2 Induction and orientation**

According to Appalasaamy (2004) orientation has come to mean supporting students to become accustomed to the new setting of tertiary education and to make the first few weeks as friendly and informative as possible so that the transition is successful. Studies report that a number of students tend to experience major failure and dropout in their first year at university (Moleli 2005). Transition from secondary school to tertiary education has been identified as a major cause of failure at universities (Moleli 2005). Barnes (2004) communicated that secondary schools do not prepare students adequately to handle university demands and the students are not clear on what to expect at university. Hence various universities or colleges across the world have opted to adopt the orientation culture in attempt to smoothen the transition phase.

Peer facilitators may not give first year students enough information about the university, but some students utilise the orientation service to their fullest and it aids them (Moleli 2005). Webster & Yang (2011) explained that by virtue of first years being active participants in first-year journey, it suggests that students should be empowered to develop a sense of agency in determining their undergraduate education by inspiring them to make informed decision about their learning paths. Hargraves, Prebble, Leach, Naidoo, Suddaby & Zepke (2004) reported that the impact of academic development programmes such as orientation and induction of first years has found to foster a positive relationship with students' academic success and programme completion.

Fyvie-Gauld, Wilcox, & Winn (2005) also argued that in order for student's retention to prevail, equal emphasis requires to be placed on successful integration into the social world of the university as into the academic world. It cannot be ignored that students are coming from diverse backgrounds therefore, it calls for universities to make means of helping students adjust to the new setting. Orientation and induction is essential because major reasons for drop outs are a lack of preparedness for tertiary education (Fyvie-Gauld et al, 2004). Appalasaamy (2004) unveiled found that the Problem Based Learning (PBL) designed specifically for first years in Medical School has been deemed useful in assisting university first-timers to adjust well. According to Appalasaamy (2004) problem-based learning was established to assist first year students through the transition phase from secondary to university life and prepare them for a new way of learning.

Orientation and induction may be helpful because it is an essential route whereby students get to know what the expectations of the departments they enrolled in are (Fyvie-Gauld et al, 2004). Appalasaamy (2004) communicated that good social integration to tertiary education impact attitude, motivation and therefore success. A number of individuals including the students, parents, the faculty and the institution as a whole benefit from an effective orientation programme (Appalasaamy, 2004). Orientation does not deal with subjects such as best ways to tackle examinations, tests and assignments; and dealing with increased workload and so forth, however when social integration matters have been carried out efficiently students do well academically and otherwise (Barnes, 2004).

Concurring with Barnes, Moleli (2005) asserted that what is central for university is to assist first year students to develop resilience traits suitable for their new environment and conditions. The orientation and induction culture are of importance simply because secondary education is failing to equip learners for tertiary education; especially reflecting on the African secondary education landscape where numerous flaws are most evident (Gcwaleni, 2013). Lamela (2017) communicated that orientation is also important because postgraduates have an upper hand on first years regarding issues such as plagiarism. Hence Lamela (2017) suggests initial familiarisation with the rules of academia and university for first years.

Lameli (2017:65) stressed that “first year undergraduate students are required to complete their assignments and assessments while having inadequate knowledge on ways of avoiding plagiarism”. This points out the need for thorough induction and orientation to ensure that first year students have adequate understanding of their expectations academically and otherwise. Webster & Yang (2012) confirmed that first-year students are extremely challenged in academic transition to university, having to shift from old learning habits and styles of learning to those demanded by university, hence orientation is a necessity. Moleli (2005) asserted that while the increasing use of technology helps to make procedures such as registration easier for students, it is likewise important that first years get assistance regarding all that.

### 2.3.3 Grit

Western surviving literature exposes that many students survive through their grit personality during adjustment and intimidating encounters, hence the existing literature also deems grit a coping mechanism. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly cited in Bashant (2014) asserted that grit as a coping mechanism is likely to be an element that sets highly successful individuals separately from everyone else. Bashant (2014) explained grit as the quality that permits individuals to work hard and stick to their long-term thirsts and goals. Therefore, this coping mechanism would be central for students, both in university and in life. It is also argued that grit personality as a coping mechanism may help first year university students to champion the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Based on Bashant (2014), grit encompasses working energetically toward trials, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, difficulty, and plateaus in progress.

Drawing from Angela Duckworth whom introduced and highlighted the power of grit Bashant (2014), underlines that when students are faced with demanding tasks, there is likelihood of believing that they lack the capacity to solve the challenge which might lead to them giving up. Therefore, Bashant (2014) stresses that it is important for students to understand that it is ok to feel intimidated and confused when learning something new, and actually, it is expected to happen. However, Bashant (2014) emphasises that students should be in possession of understanding the importance of perseverance and passion for a long-term goal. Drawing from Bashant (2014) grit has also been defined as the predictor of good grades for students. More topical logicians have suggested the importance of grit to outcomes such educational attainment (Strayhorn, 2014).

As maintained by Strayhorn (2014) grit personality as a coping mechanism is positively associated with academic outcomes for college students from first year until the attainment of their qualification. Bashant (2014) acknowledges that resilience is also directly associated to grit because part of what it means to be gritty is to be resilient when trials present themselves. Perkins-Gough cited in Bashant (2014) defined resilience in this context as the capability to appraise circumstances without distorting them, however thinking about positive changes that are conceivable in your life. Finamore & Hochanadel (2015) acknowledge the actuality that first university students face a wealth of trials in college for example, an absence of support which sometimes makes it difficult to persevere. Anyhow, they also hold the view that in

academic environment that this characterised by students who possess meaningful grit and thirst for growth, students can learn to persist despite their unfavourable or challenging encounters (Finamore & Hochanadel, 2015)

### **2.3.4 Self-kindness**

Literature has classified self-kindness as one the coping mechanisms used during unsettling situations. This was qualified by Chiera, Ohana & Stallman (2017) when they suggested that employing self-kindness as an attitude of accepting and benevolence in times of difficulty or failure can be crucial in enabling students to maintain comfort despite the pressures inherent to their adjustment and student role. Alberts, Neff, Peters & Smeets (2014) also highlighted that there is increasing evidence that self-compassion is a significant predictor of security and resilience. Drawing from Chiera, Ohana & Stallman (2017) self-kindness may be defined as being accepting and understanding towards oneself, especially in the face of adversity. On the same subject matter Alberts et al (2014) defined self-kindness as the tendency to be caring and thoughtful with oneself rather than being inhospitably critical.

Alberts et al (2014) communicated that a good number of students cling on self-kindness during both threatening and new experiences in attempt to maintain subjective well-being. Subjective well-being can be defined as consistent feelings of being well, satisfied or content, such that the individual feels productive and able to handle life stressors Chiera et al (2017:02). This basically communicates that well-being is not the absence of stressors and challenges, but it is the art of maintaining perseverance and fighting spirit. Maintaining well-being is deemed most central to coping at university, as it permits active learning, critical thought, best performance, social engagement and physical and mental health (Chiera et al, 2017).

Chiera et al (2017) underlined that first-year students employ self-kindness simply because they are also bound to transition to independent learning and bend to receiving performance feedback that often do not meet their anticipations academically and otherwise. In agreement with Chiera et al, Alberts et al (2014) highlighted that the self-kindness rather than attacking and criticizing oneself for personal shortcomings, the self is offered warmth and unconditional acceptance by being mindful and focused. The art of mindfulness and self-kindness compliments each other. Mindfulness is the capability to pay attention on purpose, in the

present moment, and non-judgmentally and the experience unfolds moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

In line with Albers et al (2014) mindfulness in the context of self-kindness implicates being aware of one's challenging experiences in a balanced way that neither ignores and avoids nor magnifies hurting thoughts and emotions. According to Maslow kind-heartedness towards the self, especially when faced with hostile situations, is necessary to develop optimistic self-views and well-being (Chiera et al, 2017). Basically, Maslow held a view that a caring and understanding attitude toward the self, regardless of victory or failure, is essential to achieving an overall sense of happiness (Chiera et al, 2017). Albers et al (2014) testified that self-compassionate students were more likely to report having more optimistic attitude despite the overwhelming challenges they encounter during adjustment phase.

As determined by Albers et al (2014) in their study, outcomes demonstrated that amplified self-compassion meaningfully predicted increased mindfulness during intimidating times. Therefore, reflecting on the above debate it is evident that some students capitalise momentarily on their grit personality and self-kindness during challenging times.

### **2.3.5 Degree of religiosity**

Ali, Buzdar, Nadeem & Nadeem (2015) acknowledges the actuality that depression, anxiety and stress are among main psychiatric circumstances being prevalent in university students and for the youth at large. According to Ali et al (2015) religion is a key component that has the potential to control mental and psychological activities of people. It cannot be dismissed that students are coming from different cultural and religious background. Therefore, religion can influence how students cope and adjust in the university setting. In a study done on African students studying in British institutions, Maundeni (2001) discovered that church membership and religious beliefs played a significant role in facilitating adjustment for students. This therefore, certifies religiosity as one of the coping mechanisms students cling on during the transition phase, and it may be employed throughout the university period for others.

Berry & York (2011) revealed that a mounting body of evidence has determined that religion buffers the stress and depression association. Drawing from Ali et al. (2015) there are two types of extrinsic religious orientation, namely: extrinsic personal and extrinsic social religious

orientations. Ali et al. (2015) asserted that students may follow religion under intrinsic or extrinsic religious orientations. According to Ali et al. (2015) the key objective of intrinsically religious-oriented students for following religion is to both gain and maintain inner satisfaction. Furthermore Ali et al. (2015) stated that persons who are intrinsic religious oriented favour to live religion. Primarily, "their religiousness grounds on the concept of faith for the sake of faith" (Ali et al. 2015:03).

According to Ali et al. (2014) students who possess extrinsic personal religious orientations effort to follow social acceptance and well-being through religiousness. Whilst, extrinsic social religiosity, on the other hand, formulates the students to utilise religion for securing social security and shielding their group interests. Berry & York (2011) asserted that religiosity appears to confer a constant and reasonable protective effect against depression. Maundeni (2001) communicated that students deemed religion helpful during adjustment because they were often invited for gatherings to discuss religion, to share the word of God, to advance their music skills and to socialise with other students. Students deemed these happenings as helpful in their adjustment, comparatively because they kept them eventful and therefore they were positively deprived to worry about their families left in their homes (Maundeni, 2001).

Students' association to religious assemblies also facilitated their adjustment because it helped them believe that they were part of a moving and helpful social unit (Maundeni. 2001). Jansen, Motley & Hovey (2010) communicated that students reported that their religious belief was a source of more comfort than strain or conflict in their lives. This highlights that, university students may use religion for comfort during threatening periods. Maundeni (2001) unveiled that students who maintained their religious obligation expressed satisfaction about their adjustment.

### **2.3.6 Academic buoyancy**

Academic buoyancy empowers students' capacity to successfully manage academic obstructions and encounters that are distinctive of the ordinary progress of tertiary training (Marsh & Martin, 2008). Fundamentally, academic buoyancy is possessing the art of dealing successfully with poor grades, competing deadlines, exam pressure, difficult schoolwork and so forth. According to Marsh & Martin (2008) academic buoyancy is different from the traditional resilience. Lamula (2017) has shown that secondary school students have little if

any experience in academic writing, rules and requirements suited for tertiary education, hence academic buoyancy is a needed coping mechanism. According to Lamula (2017) academic buoyancy can also be developed through early cultivation of critical thinking skills in academic writing. This is because academic buoyancy would therefore produce more well-rounded students (Lamula, 2017).

According to Finamore & Hochanadel (2015) students who value effort are said to have a progressive mind-set and this growth mind-set spearheads academic buoyancy. The idea of buoyancy may align more with a positive psychology angle that typically tries to better understand the health aspect of life as opposed to resilience that is often confined to extreme cases at the challenging end of the spectrum (Marsh & Martin, 2008). It is worth mentioning that academic buoyancy is appropriate more to threats to confidence as a result of a poor grade and academic buoyancy is also relevant more to low levels of stress and confidence (Marsh & Martin, 2008). According to Marsh & Martin (2008) stress under academic context, is experienced under circumstances of performance and evaluative threat such as in the face of tests and exams that arouse anxiety of failure, however whenever a student has a balanced academic buoyancy it is easy to overcome anxiety.

According to Marsh & Martin (2008) in order for academic buoyancy to prevail, it relies strongly on school community factors that include teacher–student relationships and so forth. Drawing from Marsh & Martin (2008:61) “self-efficacy, control, anxiety, academic engagement, and teacher–student relationships predict academic buoyancy”. Academic buoyance is the gift or rather a coping mechanism that enables one to be good with dealing with setbacks academically. Marsh & Martin (2008) also communicated that as much as there is a difference between academic buoyance and academic resilience, it is normal to have resilient students that are also buoyant. According to Marsh & Martin (2008) academic buoyancy on the other hand, is much centred on students’ response to their everyday challenges on campus and in life entirely. Buoyancy is more associated with problem-focused coping in that it relates to students' efforts to deal with the problem or adversity (Marsh & Martin, 2008, Kuasar, 2010).

## 2.4 Task-Oriented Versus Emotion-Oriented Mechanisms

The following section will debate the task-oriented against the emotion-oriented coping strategies, with an aim of providing clearness between the two categories.

Marsh & Martin (2008) communicated that coping responses may either be task or problem-focused wherein we are referring to an individual's efforts to address the problem or stressor and or emotion-focused coping wherein we are referring to an individual's efforts to address the emotions of the stressful situation. Kuasar (2010) also expressed that task-oriented strategy can be called problem-focused. It is arguable that during transition phase students either employ problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies. A study by Zulu (2010) has shown that some individuals employ both forms of coping to deal with certain events in life. Problem-focused coping (PFC) comprises of constructive and direct attempts towards minimizing, modifying, or eradicating a stressor whereas emotion-focused coping (EFC) targets at managing and enduring the emotional reactions to stress and includes the use of social support, positive reframing, avoidance, and distancing among others (Carver, cited by Zulu, 2010).

Problem-focused strategies are efforts focused at organizing and attending to constructive ways such as scheming, looking for information, and springing into action in the face of adversity, while emotion-focused strategies are troubled with regulating the emotions rising from the situation which includes emotional expression, emotional containment, self- or other-blame, and denial (Juniea, 2011). Zulu (2010) exposed that emotion-focused coping has found it to be a prevalent coping strategy, especially in the face of difficulties that cannot be resolved through problem-solving or reasoning. In agreement with the above logicians Kausar (2010:33) asserted that "Coping strategies are assumed to have two primary functions: managing the problem causing stress and governing emotions relating to those stressors". This plainly communicates that, in the face of adversity students may attempt to deal with problems directly or try to keep the emotions balanced.

In a study investigating the perception of stressful events of undergraduate students' Zulu (2010) got that problem-focused coping was found to be associated with higher levels of controllability. In contrast, emotion-focused conceptualisation of coping has concentrated on the maladaptive events (Frydenberg 2014). Kausar (2010) believes that task-oriented coping involves taking straight action to alter the condition itself to reduce the amount of stress it

arouses. In emotion-oriented strategy, efforts are directed at altering emotional responses to stressors. Emotion-focused coping also involves efforts to reframe the problem in such a way that it no longer suggests a negative emotional response and provokes less stress (Kausar 2010). All the above debated philosophers have shared almost similar sentiments on how students may capitalise on either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

Kausar (2010) further suggested that emotion-oriented strategies are favoured by people whose personality nature permits them to easily enter and sustain a state of emotional awakening in response to, or in anticipation of, emotionally-laden occasions. In attempting to distinguish between the two major coping strategies Dyson & Renk (2006) stipulated that problem-focused coping is much associated with reduced levels of despair whilst emotion-focused coping is much associated with maladaptive functioning and stress. "In general, it has been documented that men are more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies, whereas women are more likely to use emotion-focused coping strategies" (Dyson & Renk, 2006:1213). However, this will be discussed in great length on the following subsection. Kausar (2010) maintains that the two proactive tactics, namely the task-oriented and emotion-oriented methods, are associated with better adjustment, hence they are relevant for the transition of first year university students.

## **2.5 Gender Versus Adjustment**

Literature suggests that there is a gender significant imbalance when resilience is manifested. This was outlined by Chiera et al (2017) during their study on self-compassion in university students. They found that the self-kindness training was more likely to be beneficial for female undergraduates, given that they tend to have greater levels of self-compassion than male students. In addition, Chiera et al (2017) determined that undergraduate females are more likely than males to report depression and other failure-oriented warning signs. However, Fleming's study trailblazing suggested that Black men may struggle academically in campus atmospheres that are racially unfriendly, unfavourable, and unwelcoming to students lacking a critical mass upon whom black men may rely on for backing and advice (Strayhorn, 2014).

Women are generally seen as more obedient and dependent whereas males are aggressive and self-assured (Zulu 2010). Brougham et al (2009) indicated that university women reported a

greater overall level of stress and greater use of emotion-focused coping strategies than college men. “College men and women also reported different coping strategies for different stressors; however, the use of emotion-focused coping strategies dominated over problem-solving strategies for both men and women” (Brougham et al. 2009). Therefore, this communicates that the manner in which women deal with challenges differs significantly from that of men.

According to Zulu (2010) women on the other hand have greater access to protective features such as religion, motherhood, family and social support. Zulu (2010) further outlined that females are also socialized into accessing support more readily and successfully than males. Research exploring differences in how men and women cope revealed an association between the style of coping and vulnerability to psychological distress (Zulu 2010). A study conducted by Ali et al (2015) yielded that 44.2 % of the female university students are free from stress signs, whereas 17.1 % of them demonstrate mild stress. Whereas 60.3% of male university students demonstrate being occupied by stress (Ali et al, 2015). This speaks volumes about the imbalance of stress levels experienced by females compared to males.

Ali et al. (2015) communicated that female university students have a solid tendency toward extrinsic personal religious orientation that helps them deal better with both adjustment and academic demands. Extrinsic personal religious orientation emerged as major predictor of the occurrence of stress among female university students (Ali et al. 2015). In contrast Strayhorn (2014) asserted that males tend to capitalise immensely on their socialised grit personality. Strayhorn (2014) outlined that grittier Black males obtained higher grades in college, therefore this certifies that grit was positively correlated with Black male collegians grades. Strayhorn (2014) also exposed that grit personality for males predicted achievement in challenging domains over and beyond ordinary talent.

Drawing from Zulu (2010) females are socialised to talking to their friends and doctors about their personal challenges and are therefore more likely to get treatment for their problems, including their depression, whereas it is mostly the opposite for males. Zulu (2010) argued that women are well equipped with dealing with challenging encounters because they are more inclusive in their attempts to solve difficulties. Whereas, males are regarded as more impulsive and give less contemplation to other people in meting out a problem and taking action (Zulu, 2010). It is arguable, but the existing literature suggest that females are likely to adjust quicker than males. According to Brougham et al. (2009) the coping tactics used by female students

include, expressing feelings, seeking emotional support, denial, acceptance, and positive reframing when compared to college men.

## **2.6 Development of Coping**

Drawing from Moleli (2005) acquiring the art of bounciness does not happen in a day, it is a development that requires time and energy to develop because abilities and knowledge about dealing with difficulty are attained overtime. Ultimately, developing coping capabilities may manifest or grow through human development. It can be argued that, as people grow they attain various coping mechanisms resulting from both unfavourable and favourable life circumstances. This was also raised by Osborne (2007) when he asserted that rapid advances in the knowledge regarding stress management throughout the life span has helped students meaningfully with campus social integration and academic demands. Osborne (2007) also observed that the age group of women now entering midlife differs from earlier generations when it comes to maturity.

According to Moleli (2005:32) “Development itself denotes moving from a lower point to a higher or more advanced one”. From Moleli (2005) we understand that both resilience and student’s development are enabled by the interaction of students with their external environment. According to Osborne (2007) the presence of resilience is mostly visible in middle and later adulthood, this is because by that time many people have been exposed to different life stressors and in the process, they develop enduring personality traits. Appalasmay (2004) has noted that student’s retention and success have its foundation in the student's early experiences and motivation. The change from secondary school into the tertiary education for many students is about new expectations, new ways of learning, assessment and becoming an adult, however based on human development stages some students are very able to adapt and adjust well in the university setting (Appalasmay, 2004).

Furthermore Appalasmay (2004) stressed that the adjustment period can be utilised to discover personal and social issues as well as the academic and the intersection of these issues. According to Moleli (2005) human growth and development unfolds naturally in the occurrence of certain environmental attributes that relate to resilience. Moleli (2005) communicated that the growth of resilience is the process that connotes healthy human

development. Drawing from the Life span theory Appalasmay (2004) believes that many first-year students reach the time for college having developed interpersonal skills and ideas about responsibility and civic skills. Development of resilience is seen when first years adjust well to new responsibilities such being an individual on your own; finding a place to live and trying to deal with finances in a considerable manner (Appalasmay, 2004).

Appalasmay (2004) says that the students' personal evaluations of themselves are a leading influence on their academic success. Human development helps students to make informed judgements about their priorities and it requires a certain amount of skill that can also be introduced during the adjustment phase (Moleli, 2005).

## **2.7 Resilient Students**

Resilient students have a mix of social skills and they are able to control their behaviour and emotions in different situations at the university (Moleli, 2005). Resilient individuals in general have the capacity to bounce back from difficult and stressful experiences quickly and effectively (Ahern, 2007). Students have to be resilient in order to cope with both academic and environmental demands (Solomon, 2013). When students come to the university, they are mostly vulnerable because they are not used to the university structures, as they are new to the university environment. Solomon (2013) argues that resilient students have a strong sense of coherence, which makes them more likely to show readiness and willingness to exploit available resources at their disposal.

A resilient student possesses certain qualities such as a sense of humour, a sense of direction and mission, good verbal and communication skills, adaptive distancing, self-efficacy and a possession of talent or skill (Vuuren, 2014). A characteristic of academically resilient students is that they have higher levels of intrinsic motivation and an internal locus of control (Vuuren, 2014). Dweck & Yeager (2012) settled that challenges are omnipresent, resilience is essential for success in university and in life entirely. Dweck & Yeager (2012) asserted that students who are taught or who possess an idea that intellectual abilities are qualities that can be developed as opposed to qualities that are natural tend to demonstrate advanced achievement across challenging school transitions and greater course completion rates in challenging courses.

Moleli (2005), communicated that resilient students are said to possess good problem-solving skills, strong self-esteem and a sense of future. According to Moleli (2005), being resilient means to flourish surprisingly well in one's life pursuits and in academia, regardless of being exposed to a worrying environment. Arif & Mirza (2017) reported that resilient students tend to advance the capacity to fight with unfavourable circumstances. According Moleli (2005) held the view that resilient students demonstrates resilience principles in every extent that describes a person holistically, in the context of psychological, physical, social, economic and spiritual wellbeing.

Wilks & Spivey (2010) asserted that resilient students can be recognised through their outcomes despite the presence of adversities. Therefore, it can be argued that these outcomes are cultivated by the prevailing protective features during testing phases. Wilks & Spivey (2010) also explained that the benefit of first year students being resilient is that they will be able to function on their own in a challenging atmosphere and be able to get up and move on if they get knocked down as the state of bouncing back predicts academic success. The accessible protective factors for first year students are easily explored in accordance with the environments in which first year students operate including the university environment (Moleli, 2005).

Drawing from Moleli (2005) students' persisting to progress in the direction of the goals indicates the continuation of the invested goal-relevant means. Basically, resilient students remain focus to their goals especially those involving attaining their qualification (Wilks & Spivey, 2010). Arif & Mirza (2017) communicated that resilient students are those whom have consistently demonstrated the ability to survive and perform well in the existence of adverse life situations. In attempting to unpack or classify resilient students Arif & Mirza (2017) exposed that resilience theory attempts to enlighten why some students perform better in their academics and achieve victory in their lives regardless of having negative contextual or personality features. According to Arif & Mirza (2017) resilient students tend to capitalise greatly on available protective factors in attempt to develop academic resilience.

However, Arif & Mirza (2017) maintained that resilience can be taught and that everyone has a capacity to learn it. Bernard cited by Arif & Mirza (2017) outlined that once resilience is cultivated, these self-protective traits can be further boosted and strengthened over time. Resilient students are noted in scenarios whereby students are struggling with their university demands nevertheless they do not give up instead they opt to embrace the obstacle and

overcome it (Wilks & Spivey, 2010). This communicates that resilient students choose to rather respond positively to challenges. One of the key measures of resilient students is the mindset of students on their academic and social resilience (Arif & Marza, 2017).

Furthermore Arif & Marza (2017) asserted that mindset can contribute to both academic underachievement and academic excellence. Resilient students can be overallly defined as individuals whom are able to bounce back from difficult circumstances whilst attempting to adapt well in difficulty, trauma, tragedy and threats, stressors and health problems (Arif & Marza, 2017). Osborne (2007) asserted that dropping risk influence can occur not only by way of buffering events and social networks, but also by immunization due to successful coping with earlier, milder stressful events. Investigation on resilience among children, adolescents, and young adults has discovered a positive association between spirituality, social support, social capital, income, and personal/family traits (Osborne, 2007).

## **2.8 Risk Factors during Transition Phase**

Dweck & Yeager (2012) uncovered that for many students, the transition from secondary to tertiary education is rocky. Moreover, the years of attendance at university can be challenging and the university environment may put students in demanding social and academic circumstances (Dweck & Yeager 2012). Risk factors then can be labelled as those elements that are not conducive to the development of a resilient student (Moleli, 2005). Drawing from Terzi (2013) global literature suggests that European university students experience a higher amount of psychological stress in comparison to individuals not attending university. Solomon (2013) asserted that some of the stressors are issues that relate to finances, social events, getting used to university environment, absence of close friends and family and the load of academic work.

Risk factors refer to the presence of one or more factors that increase the probability of a negative outcome for an individual (Terzi, 2013). Terzi (2013) further listed the different categories of risk factors: individual risk factors such as premature birth, chronic illness; familial risk factors such as parental illness, parental divorce and environmental risk factors such as poverty, natural disasters and family adversity. However, Moleli (2005) asserted that risk factors do not always bring students down, but they sometimes assist in positive growth

and set a basis for new skills. This implies that whenever there is a challenge or difficult situation, there lies an opportunity for growth. According to Moleli (2005) risk factors may include mentally ill parents, war, poverty, death of a loved one, violence, socio-economic problems, divorce and so forth.

Solomon (2013) disclosed that in many occasions, first year students go through pressure for reasons such as not knowing where to find various crucial services and facilities on college grounds. “The top five sources of stress reported by students included: change in sleeping habits; vacations/breaks; change in eating habits; increased work load and new responsibilities” (Kausar, 2010:32). Fundamentally, failing to manage the highlighted factors is a risk. Risk factors concerns environmental threats to adaptation (Terzi, 2013). In another study, Kausar (2010) submitted that students perceived workload required in college, rivalry among students and straining of the curriculum very stressful.

Kausar (2010) prescribed that another category that arouses stress is social adjustment, particularly adjusting to university life and the actuality of being separated from family and friends whom are likely to help you escape risk factors. The experience of stress is likely to be a regular occurrence in the lives of new college students given the nature of the transition that they are making. According to Bogat et al. (2009) research has discovered that positive adaptation is connected with lower levels of risk, including less parental psychopathology, life anxiety, and poverty, as well as being an associate of a majority ethnic group.

Bogat et al. (2009) communicated that the term risk is used to label environmental characteristics that have been frequently associated with growths in students’ behavioural/emotional problems such as depression, stressful life events, minority status, and so forth. The existing literature suggests that risk factors can foster positive mind-set (Solomon, 2013). This was also certified by Moleli (2005) that affirmative growth can result from a range of difficulties including abuse, family disruption, delinquency, health complications, and natural tragedies. “The types of growth that follow crises are: perceiving oneself as a survivor rather than victim; increased self-reliance and self-efficacy; heightened awareness of one’s vulnerability and mortality; improvement in ties to others; renewed sense of priorities of life; and deeper sense of meaning and spirituality” (Moleli, 2005:15).

Osborne (2007), asserted that protective and risk mechanisms were discovered to differ in accordance with the kind of adversity, nature of resilient outcome, and stage of development under analysis. Osborne (2007) declared that risk factors may be protective in another context.

Werner & Smith cited in Magagula (2016) a study on students from high-risk backgrounds such as violent societies, and families with alcoholism, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and mental illness, are not expected to have desirable outcomes however some try to rise above circumstances.

It can be argued that some risk factors can construct desirable results, for instance lack of parental encouragement. This was certified by Moleli (2005) when he communicated that the lack of parental inspiration benefits students to become self-authors at an early stage. According to Pizzolato, self-authorship is possessing the art of understanding and orientating oneself to provoking circumstances in a way that recognises the contextual nature of knowledge, balance and understanding with the development (as cited in Kunene, 2017).

## **2.9 Protective Factors during Transition Phase**

As more research was done on the field of resilience, attention turned towards seeking an understanding of the mechanisms that protect individuals from risk and ways in which interventions could promote such protection (Ahern, 2007). In her study, Ahern, (2007) found that high expectations were the most important external protective factor in predicting academic resilience. According to Garmezy (1991) the existence of protective factors might permit an individual to ameliorate the negative impact of stressors and support positive development. Solomon (2013) also asserted that protective factors act as a buffer against problems and promote resilience. On the other hand, Moleli (2005) believed that the leading protective factors in the culture of university society normally pertain entirely to the presence of social networks.

Drawing from Osborne (2007) protective instruments may operate in one of four ways to allow overpowering odds in the face of adversity: by reducing risk power, by dropping negative chain reactions to risk features, by endorsing resiliency characters that are opposite of vulnerability factors, such as self-efficacy and optimism, and by setting up innovative prospects for success. Yeager & Dweck (2012) asserted that protective influences that stimulate resilience can be either extrinsic or intrinsic factors that promote good consequences. According to Yeager & Dweck (2016) extrinsic factors can be defined as a situation where an individual's thinking and behaviour are changed to suit the new environment. Fundamentally, this could be good

communication with parents, attendance of school where learning is emphasized, and students are stimulated to do their best.

In order to champion risk factors Moleli (2005) suggested that schools and universities should provide knowledge and equip students with problem solving talents and deliver settings where students connect with concerned and competent adults. “Intrinsic factors are the inner potential of a person to accept or develop skills for dealing with new emotional or psychological conditions” (Moleli, 2005:05). Intrinsic factors encourage resilience in students through individual use of constructs such as locus of control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, social competence, good problem-solving skills, cognition and metacognition processes (Moleli, 2005).

It is therefore demanding for research, as well as tertiary education to shift away focus from risk factors to protective factors in order to study the forces that move people to survival and successful adaptation. Solomon (2013) identified sporting, holding positions of responsibility in school, developing a relationship with a teacher or social success among classmates as protective factors contributing to student’s resilience. Torres and Garde (2014) hold the view that protection factors of bounciness seem to be universal throughout all cultures, races and socio-economic strata. An overarching theme among university students is that resistance is a protective factor associated with fewer mental problems and successful adjustment to university life (Ahern, 2007). Therefore, examining the attributes of resilient students may reveal important contributing factors of resilience that reduce psychological distress (Pidgeon et al, 2015).

According to Garmezy (1991) people who are at risk but remain resilient bear the visible indices that are hallmarks of competence such as good peer relations, academic achievement, commitment to education and purposive to life goals. Drawing from Moleli (2005) the availability of protective factors means the availability of a strong basis of value and cultural sustenance that relief’s students to overcome the most demoralizing conditions, without negative effects lasting into adulthood. According to Arif & Mirza (2017) protective factors do not only reduce risk but, in some scenarios,, it may even eliminate the consequences of risk factors in the life of a student. Likewise, Arif & Mirza (2017) also communicated that investigation on the role of protective elements has exposed that they can often lessen the possible destructive effects of risk factors.

## 2.10 Family Background of Students

It can be argued that family background of students can influence their coping and whether they stay or leave university. Gizir and Aydin (2009) in their study mentioned that the social and economic environment in which children and adolescents develop, appears to be the most important predictor of their overall well-being. Although the understanding of resilience has grown substantially over the past three decades, resilience of students in poverty is quite limited (Gizir and Aydin, 2009). According to the university reports, black students mostly dominate the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where the majority come from rural areas and in townships. According to Appalasaamy (2004) barricades to high academic achievement as indicated by previous studies could be language, culture, parental education and finances.

Appalasaamy (2004) reported that in South Africa, family income determines academic performance, access to resources and basic essentials of education, food, transport and shelter. Therefore, this implies that family background of students has an indirect impact on both academic excellence and adjustment. Gwacela (2013) exposed that there are abundant inter-linked socio-economic features, which disturb students' academic performance. Relating to background of students Bogat et al. (2009) also communicated that students exposed to domestic violence back at home are at risk to develop both internalizing and externalizing difficulties.

Bogat et al. (2009) further asserted that students in underprivileged families are more likely to develop behavioural and emotional complications. Low income is supplementary with a relatively high prevalence of other risk factors, such as life stress, poor academic performance and adjustment problems (Bogat et al. 2009). This was also confirmed by Wößmann (2016) when he agreed that both social and family background is a strong predictor of student performance. According to Okioga (2013) families with lower income are deprived to participate in the movement of ensuring that their children get proper education, causing their children to have a sense of constraint. Gwacela (2013) stated that poor family background is bound to inflame pressure to universities students because university costs are steep, especially for the unfortunate who have limited or no financial support structures in place.

Drawing from Okioga (2013:40) "families with low socioeconomic status often lack the financial, social, and educational supports that characterize families with high socioeconomic status". Therefore, this communicates that when students are coming from unfortunate

families, they are likely to not cope well academically and otherwise. Okioga (2013) also argued that underprivileged families also may have inadequate or limited access to many useful student-based resources that promote and support students' development and academic excellence. Most tertiary quitters and underachievers were first generation students, who originated from households with low monetary terms and low literateness grades (Gwacela, 2013).

Gwacela (2013) also communicated that numerous existing literatures have established that the financial burden experienced by students inflames the ever-growing degree of university failures. In their study Bayram & Bilgel (2008) found that students from families with poor economic situations had higher depression and stress scores than students from families with reasonable or good economic circumstances. Hence the stressors resulting from family background related matters are likely to perpetrate both poor academic performance and concentration.

## **2.11 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has holistically presented the literature review that has been employed in understanding the subject matter from previous studies done in the topic. The following chapter will provide the exact research methodology coordinates employed in carrying out this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section presents the methodology employed to carry out this study. This branch in this research furnishes with an outline of research processes followed in order to understanding coping methods employed by university first-timers in transition from secondary to tertiary education.

According to Babbie & Mouton (2001) research methodology is a systematic way of collecting, analysing and interpreting data. This chapter presents the rationale for the research design and methodology employed, and describes how data was collected, analysed and presented for the research. It further discusses the ethical considerations, trustworthiness and the data management.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study is rooted in qualitative research approach. Qualitative approach targets not to generalise but discover new ideas and describe the subjective reasons and meanings that inspire social behaviour (Mouton et al. 2006). Qualitative research is multi-faceted, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field (Stake, Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative approach has been deemed relevant in fields such as humanities, social and physical science (Stake, Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative approach offers boundless freedom on what to study. Qualitative approach was employed in this study because this approach was able to elicits subjective experiences of first and second year students about their transition from secondary to tertiary education.

In qualitative research data analysis includes the coding of data and production of verbal synthesis. The study undertook a qualitative research approach because it attempted to look into the lived personal narratives and to advance rich knowledge whilst searching the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus in particular.

The qualitative approach is steeped in depth approaches and there is a common belief among researchers that human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws (Cohen et al, 2002; Sheppard, 2004) and characterized by underlying regularities. The social world can only be comprehended from the viewpoint of the persons who are components that are in full swing on the notion being investigated (Babbie & Mouton, 2015). Thus, it has been decided to use only the qualitative approaches of in-depth interviews to achieve the objectives of this research.

### **3.3.1 Advantages of qualitative research**

Denzin cited by Rahman (2016:105) asserted that “qualitative research approach produces the thick (detailed) description of partakers’ emotions, views, and encounters; and reads the meanings of their actions”. It is undoubtedly that qualitative method is appropriate when one wishes to understand phenomena deeply and in detail. “Qualitative research is good at simplifying and managing data without destroying complexity and context” (Atieno 2009:04). Rahman (2016) maintained that qualitative methods are employed to realize deeper insights into issues associated to designing, administering, and interpreting language assessment. Qualitative research yields “more in-depth and comprehensive information; uses subjective information and participant observation to give a description of the context being studied and provides various ways in which data can be analysed” (Nghaamwa, 2017:48)

### **3.3.2 Disadvantages of qualitative research**

Nghaamwa (2017) communicated that despite its advantages qualitative research is not without shortcomings. “One of the major disadvantages of the qualitative research method is that large samples representatives of the targeted population cannot be used to collect the relevant data” (Nghaamwa, 2017:49). This is a major challenge because in most cases the research findings cannot be attributed to the whole population. This was also certified by Atieno (2017) when the author communicated that the central shortcoming of qualitative approaches to quantity analysis is that their conclusions cannot be stretched to broader populations with the similar degree of confidence that quantitative approach can. According to Rahman (2016) qualitative

research methods tends to ignore contextual sensitivities and concentrate more on meanings and experiences.

Similarly, Rahman (2016) highlighted same sentiments when the author contended that qualitative methods tend to focus on the participants' experience rather than any other imperative issues in the context. Furthermore, Atieno (2009) holds the view that ambiguities, which are inherent in human language, can be both acknowledged and documented in the analysis. In qualitative research, according to Harland cited in Nghaamwa (2017:49) "the researcher's induced bias may be difficult to avoid or detect and the research findings are likely to be interpreted according to their biased view". Nghaamwa (2017) further highlighted that another disadvantage of qualitative research is the feature of being too time consuming and may require steep funding.

### **3.4 Research Design**

Burns & Grove (2005) a research design is the clearly well-defined frames wherein the study is executed. (Babbie & Mouton (2001:74), communicated that "research design is a blue print of how one intends conducting the research". It is a logical plan that guides the investigator in the various stages of research because it enables the investigator to come out with solutions to the problems. One of the major purposes of a research design as outlined by Sarantakos (2012:106) is that "it offers order and clarity in the process of study". Sarantakos (2012) further highlighted that it entails openness and accountability for research purposes and enables accurate assessment of the validity and reliability of the study.

Drawing from Babbie and Mouton (2001:80), "a major purpose of many studies in the social sciences is to describe and explore situations and events." The research utilized both exploratory and descriptive approach in order to explore and describe the coping mechanisms used by first and second year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education at the selected university campus. Exploratory research design is performed when an investigator studies a new interest or an untried subject, alternatively; when the researcher pursues to advance unknown insights into a late but differently researched phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). It is worth highlighting that the primary goal of employing exploratory and descriptive research was to help the researcher to have a basic familiarity with

the subject matter and also help the study to discover new thick described information about the phenomena under question.

### **3.5 Research Setting**

This study transpired at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus. The abovementioned, selected campus is an institution of higher learning situated at Glenwood, Durban in South Africa. UKZN, HC campus currently offers a whole series of degree choices in the fields of Science (including Geography and Environmental disciplines), Engineering, Law, Management Studies, Humanities (including Music) and Social Sciences (UKZN website, 2018). The institution is characterized by diversity in every sense of the word through physical ability, gender, race, class, religion and the campus accommodate about 15 000 students hailing from different backgrounds locally, and across many countries (UKZN website, 2018).

The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College is diverse since it welcomes students with various disabilities. The campus has sufficient resources and support systems put in place to cater for students with disabilities. Equally, the campus is also diverse racially since it welcomes students from all different racial backgrounds. UKZN also does not discriminate based on economic class nor religion affiliation. Hence the campus is characterised by both categories of students coming from low income family background and those coming from affluent families. Lastly the campus and the university at large embrace and respects all students despite their varying cultural beliefs and religion.

### **3.6 Study Population**

Neuman (2013) defines target population as the in detail specified large group of numerous cases from where an investigator extricates a sample, and wherein results from the sample are generalized. A study population is labelled as “that aggregation of elements from which the sample is actually selected” (Babbie & Mouton 2015:174). The institution is characterized by diversity in every sense of the word through physical ability, gender, race, class, religion and

the campus accommodate about 15 000 students hailing from different backgrounds locally, and across many countries. However, the study targeted first- and second-year students only.

### **3.7 Sampling and Sample Size**

Neuman (2013), asserted that sampling is the portion of population selected for the study. Drawing from Chipangura (2013:24) sampling refers to “a process of selecting a portion of the population in your research area which will be a representation of the whole population”. Determining the exact population from which the researcher wishes to sample is essential. Thus Gilbert (2008) emphasizes that having an explicit and detailed description of the population is critical in order to identify the most appropriate sampling strategy. The two categories of sampling are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. According to Latham & Locke (2007) probability sampling is demarcated as having the unique characteristic that all component in the population has a well-known, nonzero probability of being incorporated in the sample (Latham & Locke, 2007). In non-probability sampling, the probability of any particular member of the population being chosen is not known (Neuman, 2013).

The overall study was framed and carried out using qualitative method, and the researcher employed non-probability, purposive sampling also known as judgemental sampling. According to Terre-Blanche, Durrheim & Painter (2006) in purposive sampling the researcher chooses cases that can be able to give an explanation on the objectives of study. Hence, sampling was grounded on judgement and purpose rather than statistical probability of selection. Purposive sampling comes about when the investigator stipulates the features of the populace of concentration and then finds persons who match the grade needed characteristics (Christensen et al, 2011:159). The reason for choosing purposive sampling was based on the actuality that the research participants are selected for their ability to provide rich information, which were first and second years in this case. Equally the researcher is a postgrad student from the selected campus therefore there were no financial woes in carrying out the study.

The sample size consisted of fifteen (15) participants in total; seven first years and eight second years from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus. As mentioned, the main reason why the study recruited from both first and second years was based on the actuality that second years have officially passed the first-year phase. First year students were still doing

their first year when the study was conducted. Second years are more likely to recall and offer coping mechanisms they used on their first year.

### **3.7.1 Inclusion and exclusion conditions**

According to Polit and Beck as cited by (Harerimana, 2013:67) “eligibility criteria are those that determine who may participate in the study and who would be excluded”.

#### **The inclusion criteria**

The inclusion conditions form the list of features that each participant must possess to be eligible to take part in the study (Heavy, Polit & Beck, 2008; Harerimana, 2013). Equally, within purposive sampling, the researcher finds all possible subjects that meet a specific criterion (Neuman, 2013). Furthermore, for purposive sampling, participants are selected because of their defining characteristics, required for the study (Neuman, 2013). The following inclusion demands were used in this study:

- Enrolled first year students at a selected university.
- Registered second year students from the selected university.

#### **The exclusion criteria**

The exclusion criteria are features that disregard a subject from being qualified to partake in a study (Heavey; Polit & Beck cited by Harerimana, 2013). In this research, the rejection standards consisted of:

- Those first and second year students reluctant to contribute in the study.
- Third year students onwards.

### **3.8 Method of Data Collection**

The following segments aim to deliver the data collection instrument and data collection process.

#### **3.8.1 Data collection instrument**

Terre Blanche & Durrheim (2006:05) asserted that data are uncomplicated material whereby researchers work, and it emerges from observances as it likely to take the form of statistics (quantitative data) or linguistic (qualitative data). On this study, data was collected using semi structured interview guide. Corbin and Morse (2003:338) states that “semi-structured interviews are shared encounters wherein the investigators and interviewees assemble to craft a frame of conversational understanding wherein subjects feel relaxed expressing their story”. Hence, a successful in-depth interview comprised the use of semi- structured interview schedule to elicit responses from the research participants.

#### **3.8.2 Data collection process**

The data collection was done over a period of three weeks due to the actuality that the target population (both first and second years) within the campus were taken from all four applicable colleges respectively. This prolonged the data collection process because the participants had different academic commitments in different slots. However, during the data collection process, lecture rooms within the selected campus were utilised as the settings for data collection, this mostly happened in the course of breaks, forum period and lunch period. Informed consent was sought and permission to use the tape recorder was requested from all participants. Participants were informed about the availability of free psychosocial support during and after the study should they need such service.

The purpose of the interviews was made known and their right to participate was explained before the interview. Each interview lasted for about 25-30 minutes. In-depth interviews were used to obtain thick and descriptive data. This is because the study required a lot of in-depth

information. Therefore, it was demanding for the researcher to listen and observe what participants said and evaluate how they say it.

It was also imperative to establish rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee in order to create a trusting relationship. Corbin and Strauss (2008) in their assertion pointed out that the researcher should not make the interview too long but should keep the number of questions to a minimal and use probing to give clear understanding of the participants' point of view. Hence, it is worth mentioning that the researcher strived by all means to be a good listener who opted not to dominate but allowed the interviewees to share their experiences.

### **3.9 Method of Data Analysis**

Drawing from Ngaamwa (2017) qualitative data analysis is the categorization and explanation of verbal material to make statements about unsaid and explicit dimensions and structures of phenomenology in the material and what is illustrated in it. Marshall & Rossman (2014) understand analysis of data as the method of conveying order format and sense to the mass of gathered data. In breaking down the data obtained from the subjects of the research, the study used themes as a way of analysing data. Thematic analysis is a process of categorizing, analysing whilst also recording patterns within data (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Equally content or thematic analysis identifies analyses and informs patterns in the ranks of data. This method minimally arranges and labels your body of data in abundant detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Theme-based analyses apply a variation of procedures to identify interesting sections in the data. Coding is one of the best-known techniques as it allows you to code expressions, lines, set of words and passages, recognizing these written bits on the basis of their including material that relates to the subjects under consideration (Terre- blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Coding involves identifying sections of the data, marking them (coding) and then sorting these sections in groups of like and unlike (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). All interviews conducted were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Henning at al. (2004:104) states that "a researcher starts with a set of data such as a transcribed interview". Equally, the data was transcribed and analysed manually by assembling the transcript from the interviews. The data was transcribed manually, analysed according to themes and sub-themes. Verbatim transcription was done. Strydom (2005) contended that

finding themes, recurring concepts and forms of assuredness that link individuals and surroundings simultaneously is the most logically thought-provoking phase of analysing data.

There are five important steps that were followed as prescribed by thematic analysis model. The first step was familiarization and immersion, the researcher familiarized and immersed himself to the study. This was achieved by adopting what Braun and Clarke (2006) deemed utmost importance during this stage. Braun and Clarke (2006) communicated that it turns out to be vital that you saturate thyself in the evidence to the extent that you are accustomed with the profundity and extensiveness of the content. One of the characteristics of immersion frequently encompasses repeated interpretation of the data as well as understanding the data in a lively and engaging way whereas seeking for meanings and patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Step one was achieved by thoroughly re-reading the raw data that was collected.

The second step was inducing themes, this is where the researcher induced themes on the data amassed out of conversations with study subjects. Drawing from Braun and Clarke (2006) this step begins when the researcher has studied and familiarised oneself with the outcomes as well as generating a preliminary list of ideas with regard to what may prevail in the data plus what is thought-provoking concerning them. This point then includes the production of initial codes from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was achieved by organizing and simplifying data which eased the induction of themes. The third step was coding or clearing themes, the investigator codified data towards a coding frame, by assigning imaginary brands to fractions of data, and furthermore themes were identified within and over subjects' stories (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Drawing from Nghaamwa (2017) coding can be executed either manually or through a software programme. It is key to highlight the actuality that in this study, the researcher performed coding manually. This encompasses originating pithy labels for imperative features of the data of significance to the extensive study question administering the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006:04). The coding process involves identifying sections of the data, marking them (coding) and then sorting these sections in groups of like and unlike (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The fourth step was elaboration, the goal of elaboration is to obtain the finer nuances of interpretation not acquired by your primary, perhaps quite unrefined and coding order. According to Braun & Clarke (2006) this step begins when one has developed a group of candidate themes, equally this process embraces the modification of those particular themes.

This stage also includes inspecting that the content supports both the coded extracts and the data-set at large. This was accomplished by providing more details about the themes that were collected. Interpreting and checking was the latest step, in translating qualitative discoveries, the research worker painstakingly investigated the believability, steadfastness, confirmability and transferability of the investigation under question. This phase also included writing down everything formally. Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that writing-up and interpreting encompasses weaving together the analytic narrative and vivid data extracts to tell the reader a comprehensible and convincing story about the data and contextualising it in relation to existing literature. Thusly, the gathered information was deciphered against literature review, setting and subject positions whilst emerging it with theoretical framework (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is an issue that positivists question, especially concerning the concept of validity and reliability in a naturalistic setting (Shenton, 2004). Reliability refers to any significant result being more than a once-off finding and instead be inherently repeatable whereas validity refers to whether or not what one is measuring is what one is intending (Shuttleworth, 2008). To respond directly to these issues, the following measures were developed to address validity and reliability in this study.

#### **3.10.1 Credibility**

Credibility is characterized as the certainty that can be put in reality of the research discoveries (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). This principle sets up if the exploration discoveries speak to conceivable data drawn from the members' unique information and is a right elucidation of the members' unique perspectives (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985). The research was conducted by a UKZN postgraduate student, currently enrolled at Howard College campus and the research took place in the same campus. Therefore, this was ensured by employing prolonged engagement in field or research site strategy. According to Bitsch (2005) qualitative research data collection requires the researcher's self to immerse him or

herself in the participants' world. This helped the research worker to pick up a knowledge into the setting of the study, which limited the twists of data that may emerge because of the nearness of the researcher in the field. In this investigation, credibility was also ensured by audiotaping the findings.

### **3.10.2 Dependability**

According to Anney (2014), dependability includes members assessing the discoveries and the understanding and suggestions of the study to ensure that they are altogether bolstered by the information gotten from the informants of the research. This was attained by employing supervision audit trail. According to Bowen (2009), an audit trail involves an examination of the inquiry process and product to validate the data, whereby a research worker represents all the research choices and exercises to indicate how the information was gathered, recorded and broke down. In attempting to ensure that this strategy was used appropriately the researcher provided the raw data, interview transcripts and observation notes, documents and records collected from the field. Equally, the research report contains sections detailing the research design and its implementations, the operational detail of data gathering and an intelligent evaluation of the venture to empower comprehension of the techniques and adequacy of the research.

### **3.10.3 Transferability**

Transferability is concerned about the degree to which the discoveries of one investigation can be connected to different circumstances (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004), further attested that in positivist work, the worry frequently lies in exhibiting that the results of the current work can be connected to a more extensive populace. As per Bitsch (2005), the research worker encourages the transferability judgment by a possible user through thick portrayal and deliberate sampling. This was achieved through utilising purposive sampling for the study. Since it helped the researcher to focus on key informants, who are particularly knowledgeable of the issue under investigation.

### **3.10.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability signifies how much the discoveries of the study are the result of its concentration and not of the biases of the research worker (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin & Begley, 2004:392). The research underwent the peer debriefing process, where the research was given to an experienced research expert for constructive criticism. There was a use of a supervisor audit trail to assure quality and to establish trustworthiness by auditing events, influences and actions of the researcher.

### **3.11 Ethical Consideration**

Ethics are an arrangement of good standards which are recommended by an individual or group, they are broadly acknowledged, and they offer rules and social assumptions regarding the rightest conduct towards study members (Neuman, 2013). According to Babbie and Mouton, (2015) ethics is connected with morality, as both deal with right and wrong and the basis of distinction. Basically, it is about issues relating to the welfare of participants and the obligation in conducting the research. This is a general agreement, among registered and well-recognized researchers about what is proper and acceptable as code of conduct in the scientific study (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

The study begun after obtaining the gate keeper’s permissions and ethical clearance. The gatekeeper’s permissions were obtained from the registrar at UKZN. The permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Higher Degrees Committee. The researcher was at that point allowed the moral freedom to seek after the investigation. The permission was acquired in UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Board, based in Westville campus. For the duration of the study participants were also given informed consent forms to consent to their participation in the study.

It is therefore critical when participants are exposed to substantial risks that their personal rights are not compromised. Hence, informants were made aware that if for whatever reason they wish to withdraw at any given point, they were free to do so, and their names would be kept

confidential, only pseudonyms would be used. Permission to use the tape recorder was asked before conducting the research, and participants were assured that the valuable audio information captured would be kept in a safe place. Participants were safeguarded against doing anything that was bound to harm them during the study.

### **3.11.1 Anonymity and respect**

To guarantee anonymity steps are taken to ensure the personality of the person by barring recognizing subtle elements which may describe their personality, for example, individual attributes or place of work (Brink et al. 2006). The participants were afforded with the voluntary informed consent forms.

### **3.11.2 Beneficence**

This rule obliges the research worker to endeavour to expand the advantages that the research will afford to the members in the study (Wassenaar referred to by Kunene, 2017). The study meant to find better learning about the topic. This will be beneficial to participants since the researcher will give them the findings after the study.

### **3.11.3 Informed consent**

This is the point at which the member consents to participate in the study considering the wake of being educated about the study. This is vital in light of the fact that occasionally individuals may give assent when they are not educated or misled (Neuman, 2013). The researcher ensured that participants are well informed of the goal, advantages and disadvantages of the study and have the right to withdraw from it without negative sanctions.

### **3.12 Data Management**

All the data is stored on a safely secured hard drive that is only used for this research project solitary. The hard drive was kept in a locker throughout the research project to ensure that confidentiality principle is maintained. The hard drive has a code for both confidential and security reasons. The data is also stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years. The hard copy information will also be demolished after the thesis is done.

The data was also stored electronically in the School of Built and Development Studies department for 5 years and the person who has access to the data is the researcher and the study supervisor. The electronic storage also has a security code that is known by the researcher and supervisor. After 5 years the data will then be destroyed.

### **3.13 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presented the methods that were used to carry out this study, as means of data collection for the qualitative research method. An exploratory and descriptive research was conducted. Fifteen participants were interviewed using in-depth interviews. Semi structured interviews were used as an instrument of collecting data. Ethical concerns were additionally talked about, regarding how it was kept up throughout the study. The following chapter presents and evaluates the discoveries of the research.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this section, the findings of the study are presented, and the perspectives of all participants are featured. The chapter mainly focuses on the findings of the study on understanding coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. The study sought to establish the coping mechanisms employed by university first-timers during their transition from high school to tertiary education in case of UKZN, HC campus exclusively.

The presentation of findings is done on the basis of the data collected in this study as explained in the introduction and research methodology chapters. Themes that developed from the data collected were branded on the lenses of thematic analysis. During the course of the research all participants were briefed meaningfully about the study.

This chapter begins with a brief demographic profile of each participant. This is essential because it provides the reader with a brief background of the participants. Pseudonyms have been attached to participants, to protect their identity as required by ethical rule books in research with human subjects (Farrell, 2005).

### **4.2 Socio Demographics of Study Participants**

The study was conducted with fifteen first and second university students based at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus, with ages ranging from 18 to 22 years old. To explore and describe the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education holistically, participants were recruited from all four colleges at Howard College campus; school of agriculture, engineering and science, school of health science and also school of law and management studies (UKZN website, 2018). In attempt of attaining both diverse plus broad information the researcher recruited at least three to four participants per college, from different racial backgrounds. Some participants come from deep rural areas, some from semiformal settlements and some were born and bred in suburbs.

**Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Participants**

NAME	GENDER	AGE	COLLEGE
Participant 1	Male	18	CHS
Participant 2	Male	20	CH
Participant 3	Male	19	CAES
Participant 4	Male	19	CAES
Participant 5	Male	20	CAES
Participant 6	Male	19	CAES
Participant 7	Female	20	CHS
Participant 8	Male	20	CH
Participant 9	Female	19	CAES
Participant 10	Female	19	CAES
Participant 11	Male	22	CLMS
Participant 12	Female	19	CLMS
Participant 13	Female	20	CLMS
Participant 14	Female	22	CH
Participant 15	Female	18	CHS

*SOURCE: Author.*

### **4.3 Presentation of Themes**

This section presents the thematic analysis obtained from the in-depth individual interviews. The research questions were utilised to inform the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants. They are as follows:

**Table 4.2: Themes**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>
<b>Hindrances to student’s adaptation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Inability to adjust to the academic environment</i></li> <li>- <i>Financial difficulties</i></li> <li>- <i>Stress, anxiety or depression</i></li> <li>- <i>Accommodation issues</i></li> <li>- <i>Academic workload</i></li> <li>- <i>Lack of supervision</i></li> <li>- <i>Lack of key resources</i></li> <li>- <i>Language barrier</i></li> </ul>
<b>Facilitative conditions to student’s adaptation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Motivation to study in higher education</i></li> <li>- <i>Self-awareness and positivism</i></li> <li>- <i>Family support</i></li> <li>- <i>Academic support systems</i></li> </ul>
<b>Coping mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Resilience</i></li> <li>- <i>Social networks</i></li> <li>- <i>Degree of Religiosity</i></li> <li>- <i>Campus connectedness/friends</i></li> </ul>

#### **4.4 Hindrances to Student’s Adaptation**

Eight major hindrances to student’s adaptation emerged from participant’s conversations about challenges they encountered during the transition from secondary to tertiary education at the selected campus.

##### **4.4.1 Inability to adjust to the academic environment**

Students come from different places to the university and they have to adapt to the demands of the new environment, which they are unfamiliar with. Most participants mentioned that making changes and adapting to the university environment is not easy. The study outcomes revealed

that the university environment is a hindrance to some student's adaptation. This is supported by the following assertions.

*"The major challenge for me was the structure of the buildings in this university and I feel this can be a challenge for any person coming from deep rural area like me. It was very challenging to know the buildings and sequentially my lecture rooms, I had a challenge to get to my lecture rooms everyday sometimes I would end up not attending even" (P4).*

*"I am a family person so moving away from home was very stressing, I mean I couldn't really cope after leaving my grandma, my son, and my siblings you know. It was very challenging to be away from them to a new environment whereby I know no one" (P15).*

One of the study participant is originally from Zimbabwe so he needed to adjust to both the university setting and the country at large.

*"Aadapting to South Africa is very difficult because unlike Zimbabwe, Durban is quite big, like; my home town is small I know like every ins and outs. When I am in my hometown I know every shop, but Durban is huge, this is my first time leaving alone so it's quite different because my family is back home, and I am this side alone" (P8).*

The study outcomes suggest that first year students experience different adjustment challenges especially pertaining to the university environment. As put by participant four:

*"Well where I come from it's a bit warmer than Durban, so I think I struggled a bit to adapt to the Durban weather, so this also affected me when I wanted to study especially in the evenings" (P4).*

The University of KwaZulu-Natal has an orientation week for first year students to make them familiar with the environment but some of the participants feel it is not helpful enough. One participant made the following comment:

*"For me I didn't attend orientation because I still wanted a space that time, I didn't care about orientation, I just wanted to be accepted in this course. Hence, I didn't attend orientation. I had to find most of the things by myself that this is for this" (P14).*

This suggests the reality that during orientation week, most students are busy with financial issues, looking for residences as well as spaces and therefore, they are not benefiting from the orientation programme.

The study participants were also probed about what they have observed about the university life. The study participants shared different attitudes about this subject matter. The study yielded comments on competition among students which eventually exposes and inflames inequality among students. Drawing from the study outcomes, university lifestyle is challenging on its own and some participant stated that it is cause of many social ills within institutions.

*“You find that the money is not there, that’s why some even go to the extent of having “blessers”. That is why you find reports that students are sex workers because of all the pressure” (P1).*

*“Well what I can say is that the lifestyle at varsity is difficult especially amongst us as males because our clothing brands are very expensive whereas we come from different family backgrounds because you find out that due to pressure, with the little money I am getting I therefore try buy these expensive clothes with what is nothing” (P4).*

Although the participants of the study communicated different perspectives about university lifestyle, but the majority of participants stated that they are threatened by it. The study also uncovered that some first year students, especially those hailing from rural areas feel intimidated by the structural buildings of the university setting exclusively.

#### **4.4.2 Financial difficulties**

Financial issues are one of the major concerns of university students in the whole country, especially in the midst of economic instability. Most of the participants pointed out that funding issue was one of the difficult situations they encountered when they came to the university. Most study participants also confirmed the existing literature which points out that most first year students experience lack of funding. When asked if they encountered any financial related difficulties, participants expressed differing experiences.

*“Yeah, I have, as I have said that NSFAS took time to approve me, so I was dependent on the small amount of money they used to give me at home. However, during the first month they gave me grocery from home and they gave me R150 so to be able to buy bread and other things” (P5).*

*“When I came here, I had no residence, no financial aid so I had to travel every day. So, I couldn’t attend morning classes because taxis to Howard start operating from 7AM. So, when it is dark in winter, I couldn’t just go out alone from home. The whole of first year I was staying at home and that was a challenge. I didn’t have financial aid, so by the end of first year I was owing a huge sum of money” (P14).*

When asked how he felt when he got accepted at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, participant 6 communicated that:

*“Well I had mixed emotions because as I have said I am coming from a disadvantaged family, but I got good results, so I was happy about my achievement. However, I was stressed because there was no money for me to come here, NSFAS also took time to approve my application so I was very stressed and sad at the same time. My parents are not working back home so I didn’t know how I will afford to buy food at university, but I never gave up” (P6).*

In summary most of the participants who participated in the study pointed out that financial difficulties led to many hurdles during their transition. Equally the study outcomes unveil that individuals from low-income families must overcome many obstacles during their transition to the higher education.

#### **4.4.3 Stress, anxiety or depression**

The outcomes of the study pointed out that first year students seemed to be always preoccupied by stress, anxieties or depression. This may result from the actuality that they are still transiting, they are still testing how safe is the environment and the anxieties may result from the worries of performing poor academically. However, the study participants confirmed that their emotional distresses, anxieties or depression supervene from different circumstances.

*“I believe I was disadvantaged because even though I spent the first semester at home when I got the accommodation, I was placed in a residence which was occupied by engineering students. Therefore, I used to be very stressed because I could not ask anything from anyone who did the same degree as me since I was the only one” (P2).*

*“I was stressed mostly, stress because in high school you are most really relaxed you play around so much so that’s why it has sink that here it’s more of you taking charge because in high school your parents would be the ones forcing you to study but this side you are more an adult you have to do things at your own time, own pace and you have to be organised so now that for me was hard” (P8).*

The study outputs communicate that first-year university students experience stress and nervousness during their transition phase. The assertions by study participants demonstrate that the responsibilities of secondary school differ from that of university, which made the transition challenging for the participants. The findings outline that this phase commands university first-timers to be resilient throughout in order to cope.

#### **4.4.4 Accommodation issues**

Education is becoming more and more fashionable. It can be argued that the mountainous number of university applicants has indirectly reshaped the traditional university intakes. The study results have shown that the ever-growing interest to enrol at varsity, has led to insufficient accommodation for many first years across the country. Some study participants have reported experiencing hurdles securing accommodation. The study participants reported that the implications of not securing accommodation includes being deprived enough time to execute school work.

*“The first big challenge was accommodation brother. I got an offer in this institution, but my package had no financial aid nor accommodation. So, I had to go back at home around 4PM when most my classes were ending, and my home is at Hammarsdale, which is 45 minutes from Durban CBD. I would always arrive at home tired to such an extent that I could not do my school work” (P2).*

*“Arh, initially last year, during my first year I did because the whole month of February and a bit of March I was travelling from Pietermaritzburg to Durban on a daily basis, so it was hard to find nearby accommodation but from mid-March onwards it was fine. But initially it was actually costly” (P9).*

The study also learnt that most of those who were lucky to get accommodation instantly were allocated off-campus, which was a challenge for a first-year student. The study discovered that

residing off-campus puts one in a vulnerable position because they are deprived to access the university resources day-and-night. The prevalent complaints specified by study participants included being disadvantaged of WI-FI, library services, computer LANS and enough time to complete schoolwork. When study participants where asked about situations where they felt not at same level with other fellow students, this is what they reported:

*“Uhm, for me it would be travelling and transportation to campus every day, I have to leave at 6AM and I am getting at home at 8PM every night so it’s kind of tiring while you still have to do work when you get home” (P7).*

*“I think not being able to actually be here till like late at the library to study at the university till late was yeah ...kind of felt as disprivileged because a lot of my friends would gather in the library to study and revise material especially when tests were approaching and because I was travelling to Pietermaritzburg I could not be part of them because of time and obviously transport” (P9).*

*“My off-campus residence didn’t have a study room and the Wi-Fi was quite crappy so if you had work to do that evening and you needed to use the internet, you had no choice but to come to school. And sometimes you would have to wait for long ques in Library for computers because there are people occupying them then you have little time to finish your work and you end up not finishing” (P12).*

The findings of the study have classified lack of accommodation as one of the hindrances to student’s adaptation. Equally the research findings have qualified residing off-campus as one key vulnerable factor for university first years.

#### **4.4.5 Academic workload**

It is clear that students experienced a vast difference between the teaching and workload in high school, and the teaching and workload at the institution. A majority of study participants voiced that it is difficult to adjust to what they deem “tremendous” university workload. When participants were asked about the challenges they encountered as first years, they reported the following statements.

*“The transition is very challenging basically from being spoon-feed everything because teachers stand upfront and they teach you and they go over the material with step by step but here they just stand there and read notes then send notes so you have to basically study on your own so I think the workload, the studying, the transition and the freedom is affecting us” (P9).*

*“It was a new environment like in high school we always watched the time slots for classes and they traditionally ended mid-day but in university there are classes throughout the day so, it was different” (P7).*

*“Yeah due to workload I have felt that we having so much to do but less time to execute so it’s very stressing because you find out that you have a deadline but due to things that you must cover, things you do in a day, in a week you end up sleeping late, having less time for yourself generally as a person” (P15).*

The findings of the study suggest that the university first years were not anticipating the workload they endured (and still enduring). Hence some highlighted the workload as one of the major challenges during the transition from secondary to tertiary education. This could be partly influenced by inadequate high school preparation and a sense of feeling disconnected from their familiar relationships.

#### **4.4.6 Lack of supervision/parental guidance**

The study participants have exposed that the lack of supervision or parental guidance at university is a hindrance to their adaptation. When study participants were asked about what they think are the main challenges or factors affecting university first years negatively, they reported the following.

*“Urmmm, Freedom. I feel like first years, well all of us as first years, you feel free, you feel like there is nobody who is annoying you, no one tells you to attend so if you stay in a commune or in university residence you have a complete freedom. It’s very freeing when you actually know that you can go out at 9 o’clock at night and come back at whatever time you like, so a lot of first years get taken by that” (P9).*

*“I think me, and my friends were just happy to be away from home, so we were like basically ‘our own people’, living away from home, drinking and partying and sometimes party on Sundays when you have class on Mondays so maybe partying was a bad thing to do. Basically, it was a risk factor because we were taking risk going out on Sunday knowing we have lectures on Monday” (P13).*

*“It’s characterised by endless freedom which may be poisonous if you don’t know yourself” (P14).*

The study outcomes simply communicate that being a first year university student calls for you to be self-aware in order to attain your goals quickly. As highlighted by the participants, the implication caused by the absence of parental guidance is that some students fail to accomplish responsibilities on their own because they are accustomed to being supervised by their parents or guardians.

#### **4.4.7 Lack of key resources**

The findings of the study also revealed that some first-year university students attributed the lack of key university resources such as books and laptops as one of the major hindrances to their adaptation during the transition phase from secondary to tertiary education. This was echoed by the following statements.

*“I lacked too many resources that every first-year student must possess. The fact that I had no books alone was risky on its own. This may have led to me failing because sometimes I had no money to print so I would make use of slides alone which was very dangerous because slides are very brief” (P1).*

*“I had no laptop, so I was expected to go to school every day. The time was also limited because the buses are coming back at 11PM so I couldn’t cover as I wished basically” (P6).*

*“I had no laptop, so I was expected to go to school every day. The time was also limited because the buses are coming back at 11PM so I can’t cover as I wish basically. People with laptops used to go to school and watch videos on YouTube because they knew they had laptops, so they can still study at their residences, however my case was different*

*because I knew I had to use the computer at the LAN for school purposes alone due to limited time I had” (P4).*

The findings of the study revealed that lacking key resources has a negative implication on student’s adaptation. The assertions by the study participants proves that it is really challenging to cope without key university resources. The implication of lacking key university-based equipment’s such as books and laptop include the inability to study and complete assignments in good time.

#### **4.4.8 Language barrier**

The findings of the study point out that the local first year university students especially those coming from underprivileged schools and backgrounds are challenged by English as mode of communication. Drawing from some study participants, the English language expectations of the university poses a significant challenge to them.

*“I mean Maths was taught in Zulu, English was taught in Zulu everything you know was taught in Zulu. And when I came here it’s all in English, the lecturers would conduct a lesson in English and it was not easy to participate because you were afraid, due to stigma you know; you had to think what people will say, so I thought they may discriminate me because my English was not really good” (P15).*

*“For the first two weeks it is difficult to capture the concept because of the accent and how fast they talk, after adapting to the accent you then get afraid to ask questions, due to the fact that your English is not good” (P6).*

In contrast the foreign or the non-Zulu speaking students communicated that it was difficult to adjust at University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College since it is dominated by Zulu speaking students. Moreover, the university has adopted a bilingual teaching and learning policy. Hence some students felt they were disadvantaged during their transition from secondary to tertiary education because they were unfamiliar with the local language. The following assertions were taken directly from participants when they were probed about what they can highlight as vulnerable factors during their debut at university.

*“Topping it all mostly it’s the language because being black and not knowing Zulu is a problem because first thing when they see that you are black they assume you know Zulu” (P8).*

*“I think it would be the language factor because most people in this university are Zulu speaking so having to communicate with members in class to find out what’s happening is kind of complicated” (P7).*

*“The only thing that made it a difficult barrier for me to adjust is the language difference because I am Sotho and everybody here is mostly Zulu. And when you come across people speaking English they would somehow view you as a person trying to make themselves better or more intelligent than them sometimes they don’t even know that there is a language barrier and last year I didn’t know Zulu” (P12).*

The study findings have verified that language and acquisition of knowledge go hand in hand, therefore this puts black students at a definite disadvantage when receiving instructions in English. Most study participants reported that English is not their mother tongue: therefore, they have to try to overcome this barrier.

#### **4.5 Facilitative Conditions to Student’s Adaptation**

Students were asked to identify conditions that facilitated their adaptation. The following findings emerged as participants shared what they felt contributed positively to their adjustment at the university setting.

##### **4.5.1 Motivation to study in higher education**

People are influenced by different motives when choosing to enrol for tertiary education and equally their career choices. The findings of the study suggest that the motives to enrol at varsity differ significantly from person to person. The results from this study indicate that people may be influenced by certain life circumstances including parental pressure, job market and prospects of a better paying job in the future. Most participants reported that they were not

certain what they want to do after graduating from high school. However, the study participants reported that the motivation to study at university presented itself as an enabler to their adjustment. The following statements were articulated by the study participants when they were asked, what inspired them to come study at university.

*“Well I am the last born in my family however my older siblings never got the opportunity to enrol at varsity. Some studied in Colleges and obtained qualifications through certificates, so it was my dream to do well in my matric and enrol at university. Over and above that I also wanted a better life for myself and my family” (P1).*

*“Well in Grade 10, I and my friends decided that we don’t want to go to varsity, we want to ‘uapair’, you know ‘uapair’ going to babysit overseas basically. So, Cathy moms got us the forms and everything that we needed because I didn’t feel like doing the after-school studying. I was interested because I am not that smart then I went home with all of that but my dad said NO, no child of his is going to babysit kids after he spent so much on our education so I think after being told I will not go uapair varsity was the next logical step instead of sitting at home and do nothing. The happiness helped me to strive and adjust well because I was now in varsity” (P13).*

Some participants mentioned that their choice to further their studies was driven by the unyielding love to be become professionals. This is echoed by the following assertions.

*“Well I don’t know really but reality is that I felt like it’s a must to enrol at varsity. During my joiner grades I have always pictured myself in varsity, basically I have always dreamt of being a professional although I wasn’t clear what I wanted to do” (P14).*

*“It was quite simple because after high school I had a lot of options either to go to college get a diploma, but I was more on the side of getting a degree going forward” (P8).*

The study also revealed that despite the actuality some students are coming from poor family background they tend to be resilient rather. When probed about the role of their family in their transition from high school to tertiary education, participant 6 reported that:

*“My brother I won’t lie I am coming from a poor family background, but this motivated me a lot because I would reflect on the situation back home and also reflect on where I*

*am now, and this empowers me to work hard so that I will change the situation at home” (P6).*

Other study participants also shared similar sentiments when asked about the influence of family background during their transition to tertiary education.

*“I would say were my parents came from and the situation we are in as kids like taught me to be someone who is goal-directed and who wants to be at a certain position in life” (P8).*

*“Well you are remaindered where you come from so that you work harder even though things are hard you would always remember your background that you need to push so that you can make a difference. I think that’s how it has contributed” (P11).*

The findings of this study suggest that people are motivated by different push or pull factors to further their studies. Some are pressurised by their loved ones, some are encouraged by the state of being poor, whilst to some it is an individual choice or desire. The study revealed that motivation and hunger for success is one of the facilitative conditions to student’s adaptation.

#### **4.5.2 Self-awareness and positivism**

The findings of the research uncovered some of the known internal protective factors which include communication, problem solving skills, high self-efficacy and self-awareness and academic achievement. The findings point out that being self-aware facilitates student’s adaptation. In this study, most participants were asked if they consider themselves resilient and the results shows that, they consider themselves resilient. This shows high level of self-efficacy. Participant one when asked if he consider himself resilient said:

*“Yes, I do, what I can say is that during my first year, as I have earlier highlighted that I didn’t have funding and I depended on money coming from home. However, I didn’t allow that situation to declare my dreams impossible to achieve” (P1).*

*“Yes, I am resilient because I have reached the 2rd year phase. Imagine the difficulty of coming here not knowing anyone and anything but I have never failed a module. So, I was resilient, I fought” (P14).*

Equally all the participants were asked what they can highlight as defensive influences during their transition from high school to tertiary education. Participants reported much that showed they employed their internal protective factors such as self-awareness to survive the transition phase. This is expressed by the following statements.

*“I ended up adjusting and I am also person who likes taking responsibility, I am self-motivated, I plan so I know what to do at what time. So that has helped me to adapt well in everything or in meeting new challenges” (P4).*

*“What helped me is to focus. I saw many people dropping out and I was nervous but at the same time this motivated me to work hard” (P6).*

*“You know when you get to know the wrong crowd and a lot of people. They go out even during periods where you know you should be doing assignments and everything. Yeah, self-control I guess because I was able to prioritise my school work more than fun” (P9).*

The study results show that as student’s belief about their ability to control their life increase, they become resilient.

#### **4.5.3 Family support**

Despite mountainous challenges experienced by university students, most participants disclosed that their families were supportive both financially and emotionally during their first year of higher education. The study participants at UKZN Howard college campus have qualified the availability of family support as one of the facilitative conditions to student’s adaptation. Some participants reported that they had no funding when they came to university. Participant 1 reported that even though he did not have any form of financial aid from NSFAS or other funding for his first year, his family assisted him financially. The following statements support the findings.

*“So, I had to get money for food, books and stuff from home. At home they were affording money for food” (P1).*

*“At home they had to gather money for my registration even though they did not know how I was going to pay for my tuition fees” (P2).*

Some study participants applauded both the social and emotional support they were receiving from their families.

*“My family supported me very much and they still do, like they call everyday of which that is something that I need; you know, just to know that there is someone out there that is looking on me and everything” (P15).*

*“I usually call my sister because she is an accountant basically, they all did Accounting, and I am also doing Accounting so whenever I tell them that perhaps I have failed, they always advise me well as to how to study appropriately. They are very supportive” (P10).*

*“My father is not much of an emotional person but he’s more of an encourager like there were times where I feel down, without even talking to him he’d happen to call me or send me encouraging messages” (P12).*

The findings of the research show that the family is a major source of support to many first-year university students. The findings also confirm the surviving literature which declares that family support is a primary source of support for most students.

#### **4.5.4 Academic support systems**

When probed about the facilitative conditions to their adaptation, the study participants also acknowledge the availability of academic support systems. The findings of the study suggested that most university first-timers at Howard College rely on tutors, library services, academic workshops, ADO’s and consulting lecturers. The findings of the study also indicate that a majority of first year university students begin their academic year deprived of key resources such as laptops and books. However, the availability of institution-based resources helps a lot especially in the case of those short of these crucial possessions. The following quotes indicate this.

*“Well what I liked a lot is consulting, I would study a module intensely and then when we are drawing towards the exams I would go and consult the lecturer simply because I knew when I consult the lecturer he/she would give the correct information, which is also high likely to come out of the exams” (P4).*

*“I used the library and its services, I also made sure that I attended tutorials. I also made use of the LANS during the time I had no laptop” (P14).*

Equally the study has gotten that the emotional and psychosocial measures put in place for students are convenient for most first and second year students within the institution. As put by participant 12:

*“Even with the law school psychologist, I have appointments with her, I also consulted the academic officer so that she could help me plan out my study schedule” (P12).*

However, there seems to be support systems and resources available within the university that students do not capitalize on. This is according to Participant one who said:

*“Students don’t utilize the available resources, there are many resources to help students like for referencing, there are sessions at the ground LAN at the library” (P1).*

Participant fourteen said,

*“As a result, my first-year assignments were bad because I didn’t know it much but what helped me is that some lecturers used to explain to me” (P14).*

Although participants admitted that they are not utilizing some of the resource, it is evident that support systems are available within the university to assist students. The findings of the study have uncovered that despite the actuality that university of Kwa-Zulu Natal has well-developed systems to support students, but there is lack of communication and advertisement.

#### **4.6 Coping Mechanisms**

Drawing from the conversations with study participants, the study was able reveal four major coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students during the transition from second to higher education at the selected campus.

#### **4.6.1 Resilience**

The study shows that resilience is one of major coping mechanisms employed by university students when transitioning from high school to tertiary education. This is qualified by the following statements shared by the study participants.

*“You should never allow those challenges to influence you in a bad way, but it must affect you in a positive way. You must rather change the way you do things or your skills, even if you fail you must never allow failure to demotivate you” (P3).*

*“As engineering students we have much workload. We always have situations where we write two consecutive days, but I always work hard so to not fail, I always plan ahead. So, I can safely say as a student you are called to be resilient throughout your academic life” (P4).*

*“In my first semester I had two exams in one day and that for me was top of everything because you are getting into an exam and my DP marks we not great for those modules, but I pulled through and it all looked good at the end” (P8).*

Participants who indicated personal resilience; were academically successful in all their modules. This is demonstrated in the following statements.

*“Imagine the difficulty of coming here not knowing anyone and anything but I have never failed a module. So, I was resilient, I fought” (P14).*

*“I was able to meet the academic demands despite my situation”. He added, “I have never written a supplementary exam; I studied and tried my best, so I never got a supplementary exam”. (P1).*

The findings indicate that students whom are resilient are most likely to demonstrate academic achievement.

#### **4.6.2 Social networks**

The findings of the study supported the surviving literature on the impact played by social networks during the transition phase of first year university students. The study reveals that

this unfolds through ties of kinship, friendship, and through communal origins. The study outcomes outline that social networks also play a pivotal role in helping international students to adjust well in the university and the country at large.

*“As I have said before I was privileged to know the guy from my home town, so he helped me a lot. He helped me regarding assignments, when he was around he would also take a tour with me showing me the campus without rush” (P1).*

*“I knew some guy from my hood who has been very helpful during my first year” (P3).*

*“It would be having people from back home, the commune I stay in, I have people from my country, so you don’t feel much as foreigner everywhere you are, you may feel as a foreigner at campus but when you go back home, and you feel that comfort. So, no language barrier and all because we express ourselves in our own language” (P8).*

The study outcomes acknowledge that university students create interpersonal ties that connect students, former students, and non-students in university in order for them to cope and adjust well during the transition phase from secondary to tertiary education from the selected university.

#### **4.6.3 Religiosity**

The study reveals that some participants strongly believe that a strong faith in their gods provides some comfort and direction. Equally the study uncovered that sometimes it is the influence of family traditions and rituals that eases your burden. Some participants reported that religion especially Christianity played an important role in their transition to university.

*“I am also Christian, so the bible and Church influence helped me so much, whenever I encountered challenges I would pray and go study” (P1).*

*“Well firstly as I have said I am Christian, so I rest all my worries to God through prayer” (P6).*

*“I am also a spiritual person, so it also helped me to cope as a first year. I mean I have a family, people I know I can ask help from and people who pray with me, like I strongly believe in prayer, so it helped a lot” (P9).*

*“I think the fact that I am also a religious person helped a lot, I mean rely on God mostly” (P15).*

It is important to highlight that some study participants believe that spirituality/religion is of central importance to people during stressful or disruptive events.

#### **4.6.4 Campus connectedness/friends**

The study findings emphasise that campus connectedness examines an individual’s perception of fitting in and belonging with others within the university environment. The study also discovered that students cope through external coping mechanisms such as peer caring relationships and school caring relationships during the transition from secondary to tertiary education. When asked about what helped them to adjust to the university setting, the participants said:

*“It was better for me because when I arrived, I became close to some of the people I was staying at res with and I also attended orientation” (P1).*

*“My residence is also occupied by quite a good number of engineering students, so we have become a family because we help each other with everything” (P3).*

*“I met a guy who was doing his second year, he is from Swaziland and his background is the same as mine. He was very supportive academically, he would go to an extent of shouting at me if I slept too much because he understood our workload so, we worked together very well” (P6).*

*“I had a group WhatsApp group with my classmates, so I knew what was going on from time to time” (P10).*

These findings show that university students especially the first years need to have the ability to develop quality relationships with peers, fitting in, belonging and feeling connected to campus life. It emerged from the study that peer support was critical in the participants’ adjustment into university life.

#### **4.7 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has attempted to shed light on the factors affecting the university first-timers during the transition from high school to tertiary education. The findings of the research indicate that challenges faced by university first years mostly include the monetary challenges, environmental adaptation, securing accommodation and adjusting to the university workload. Likewise, in this chapter a detailed review of the research results was presented revealing the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year students during their transition from secondary to tertiary education at the UKZN Howard college campus. The study revealed that university first-timers at UKZN Howard College campus capitalise on coping mechanisms such a religion, social networks, resilience and campus connectedness/friends.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study sought to explore and better understand the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from high school to tertiary education. The outcomes of this study were presented using a number of themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. Drawing from Sommer (2013) the transition from high school to university can be a stressful experience and a challenging time for students as it involves separation from a previously familiar environment with accustomed daily life routines to a very new environment with new rules, demands, expectations and responsibilities. Therefore, this section seeks to expand knowledge and contribute to the growing body of literature on coping mechanisms used by university first-timers when transiting from secondary to tertiary education. Equally this chapter explores the degree to which the objectives of the study have been met. This section will also present challenges that confronted the study.

The overall aim of this research was to explore and better understand the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education, in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus. The surviving literature has both investigated and established the main challenges affecting first year students during their transition from high school to tertiary. However, the gap was understanding what coping methods are employed by first year students to cope despite the confirmed existing challenges. Based on in-depth interviews with first- and second-year university students, the study was able to identify some coping mechanisms used by students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education at UKZN, Howard College campus.

### **5.2 Discussion of Findings**

This segment aims to discuss the findings of the study paired with literature review used to give meaning to the study. This section will also draw from the theoretical framework employed to guide study.

### **5.2.1 Hindrances to student's adaptation**

As mentioned in Chapter two, it has been extensively highlighted that there are various challenges that are encountered by university first-timers during the transition from high school to tertiary education. Determining these various challenges that are encountered by first year students in transitioning from high school to university was the first objective. The study indicates that most first year students at UKZN Howard College undergo financial difficulties, inability to adapt to the environment, whilst enduring stress, anxieties and depression rooting from university workload. "A recent study suggested that a significant number of South African tertiary students face financial problems as they live below the poverty line" (Mudhovozi, 2012:252). This was in line with study outcomes since this research also determined that monetary challenges are more prevalent to students coming from poor backgrounds.

The study also unveiled that financial difficulties pose more challenge as it affects students even academically. Some study participants communicated that they were unable to attend morning classes due to the actuality that they were residing at home. Some also expressed that this affected them majorly on their academic results. As highlighted in chapter two, Matlala (2005) also identified financial problems as one of the crucial barriers to learning for students. The resilience theory means containing the art of maintaining the ability to function in the midst of difficulties or new challenges (Magagula, 2016). A majority of participants felt that they were able to pass all their modules despite the challenges and difficulties they went through. This shows high levels of self-efficacy as they demonstrated academic resilience.

Students reported that adapting to the university environment is very challenging, especially since most of them are from smaller places and they are not used to such big and busy environment. According to Matlala (2005) factors that disrupt smooth adjustment includes linguistic limitations, environmental factors, institutional limitations, family support as well as factors informed by the previous high school attended by the students. Similarly, some study participants highlighted the challenge of language barrier as part of factors that affected them in adjusting to the university environment. The study also discovered that first year students experience a vast difference between the teaching and workload in high school, and the teaching and workload at the institution. This concurs with research done by Vuuren (2014) who found that some students find higher education is more demanding than they had

anticipated. This could be partly influenced by inadequate high school preparation and a sense of feeling disconnected from their familiar relationships.

The study participants also revealed that eventually the pressure rooting from the university workload leads to stress. This was also in accordance with what Brougham et al. (2009) communicated when they asserted that depression, anxiety and stress are main challenges for many first-year students since previous studies likewise reported that 75% to 80% of tertiary students are moderately stressed and 10% to 12% are severely stressed. The findings point out that students believe it was even more difficult to keep the stress levels minimal since they some were allocated with students from other disciplines in their residences and they could not ask nor study anything with them. Students also pointed out that due to workload it was even more challenging to execute assignments properly and in good time. However, most study participant were able to pull through academically and other-wise. This indicated resilience since study participants showed an arrangement of characteristics that encouraged a procedure of effective adjustment and change in spite of hazards (Moleli, 2005).

The study also discovered that some first year students are not given first preference regarding accommodation within the institution. This therefore, highlights securing an accommodation as one of the main findings as far as challenges encountered by university first-timers are concern. However, students acknowledged that this problem is deep-rooted on the reality that the university is lacking residences especially on-campus accommodation. Participants revealed that the university has opted to outsource a number of accommodations off-campus. A study conducted in South Africa by Mudau (2017) communicated that students who are staying off-campus are facing a number of challenges encompassing of high rentals, unsanitary surrounding, long distances from the university, inability to access library services and lack of security both in the hostels as well as on their way to university as they risk being attacked by criminals. This concurs with the study findings that have pointed out that students especially the first-year students are not happy about being placed off-campus due to it challenges.

The findings of this research also exposed that university first-timers acknowledged lack of supervision or parental guidance as a hindrance to their adaptation. Most study participants especially those residing within campus accommodation reported that freedom or the non-existence of parental supervision is one of the risk features that adversely affected their transition from high school to tertiary education. Some participants stated that the lack of supervision affected when they had to learn to do the chores and school work without being

pushed. Equally, some students reported that the freedom affected them negatively academically because in the university setting no one pushes you to attend classes or to study. Some study participants communicated that the lack of university-based key resources is one of the hindrances to student's adaptation.

Moleli (2005) asserted that challenges do not always bring students down, but they sometimes assist in positive growth and set a basis for new skills. This implies that whenever there is a challenge or difficult situation, there lies an opportunity for growth. This was evident in this study because some study participants reported that they were not in possession of vital resources such as laptops and books, but they capitalised greatly on the resources provided by the university. Some participants acknowledged that the situation of lacking pivotal resources to cope at varsity indirectly taught them to prioritise their academic work and time management. This was in line with Beck (2016) who reported that resilience theory is described by general procedures of effective stressor management, adjustment, or a mix of individual or social qualities that permit an individual, relationship, or social group to manage genuine stressors as well as unforeseen occasions sensibly.

Some students communicated that they felt to be in a vulnerable position because they were residing off-campus. As mentioned in Chapter two, this was in line with Mudau (2017) who asserted that the unpredicted evolution in the number of university students has clearly created accommodation strain, resulting in many students resorting to staying off-campus. It is key to highlight that some university academic programmes are slotted for weekends, in the early mornings and sometimes in late nights. Such occasions are disadvantageous to off-campus students and staff who may need to alter their voyaging plans (Mudau, 2017).

Some members communicated that they felt deprived to access university resources adequately. This is rooted on the basis that when you stay off-campus your study time is more structured according to the buses schedule. Some study participants complained about the incapacitated WI-FI in most off-campus residences, which leads them to come to campus and compete for resources such as computer LANs and libraries with on-campus residents. Students at UKZN Howard College reported that the language barrier also made them feel vulnerable. The study outcomes unveiled that university first-timers coming from rural areas struggle to adjust at university because of English as a means of teaching and learning. This is because students who are coming from lower quantiles reported that they were mostly taught everything in Zulu back in high schools.

Likewise, it was contrary for foreign students and those who are non-Zulu speakers because UKZN Howard College campus is dominated by Zulu speaking students. Hence, some foreign and non-Zulu speaking students communicated that it was difficult to build friendships and also to work in groups.

### **5.2.2 Facilitative conditions to student's adaptation**

One of the objectives of the study was to determine the factors that facilitated the adaptation of first and second years at a selected University in Durban. Despite the presence of factors that hindered adaptation of students during the transition phase, participants were able spot facilitative factors that favoured them. According to Garmezy (1991) the existence of protective factors might permit an individual to ameliorate the negative impact of stressors and support positive development. Students reported that they employed both the internal protective factors which include (communication, problem solving skills, high self-efficacy and self-awareness and academic achievement) and the external protective factors which include (peer caring relationships, school caring relationships and high expectations and home caring relationships), (Gizir & Aydin, 2009). The study revealed that self-awareness and positivism was one of the facilitative factors to their adaptation. Participants verbalised that they were self-motivated and goal-directed hence they were able to adjust against all odds. This associated with grit personality. Bashant (2014) explained grit as the quality that permits individuals to work hard and stick to their long-term thirsts and goals.

According to Okioga (2013) families with lower income are deprived to participate in the movement of ensuring that their children get proper education, causing their children to have a sense of constraint. Even though some study participants communicated that they are not coming from affording nor fortunate families, but they reported that they are motivated by the situations back in their homes. Therefore, the study uncovered that the family background of students contributed positively to their well-being and resilience. The presence of academic role models at home and values instilled contributed to their level of coping. Equally the family support system was found to be a major facilitative condition to student's adaptation for university first-timers. A majority of study participants reported to having gathered resistance to challenges from their domestic backing. This was in agreement with a study conducted by

Sigelman & Rider's study cited in Vuuren (2014) which deems the family as the primary source of support and encouragement for students.

The study also uncovered that most university first-timers survive through academic support systems as discussed. Academic support systems such as tutors, library services, academic workshops, ADO's and consulting lecturers. It is also evident that the university is trying to help students to adapt to the university through support systems, which are in place at the university. The findings show that the University of KwaZulu-Natal has resources and support systems within the institution such as orientation programs and counselling services, meant to assist students to adjust and strengthen their resilience. However, study outcomes suggest that some students seem not to be utilizing some of these resources. Some are not aware of the existence of such resources. This was validated when a number of study participants admitted that they are not utilizing some of the resources.

However, the justification from the participants was that they did not know about some of the available services on campus. The study of Vuuren (2014) also indicated that some students were not always aware of the different support systems that were available on campus. Students reported that there is a lack of communication and advertisement for some of the crucial academic support systems available within the campus. These findings supported research reporting that many institutions, despite having well-developed systems for student support, do not make students adequately aware of the different support systems available to them on campus (Engle and O'Brien cited in Vuuren, 2014).

### **5.2.3 Coping mechanisms**

One of the major main objectives of this study was to explore and better understand a set of coping mechanisms that university first and second years at UKZN Howard College campus employ during the transition phase from secondary to tertiary education. The study outcomes demonstrate that students use different types of coping mechanisms to adjust at university. This was in congruent with what Gebreyosus (2018) stipulated when highlighting that the level of stress faced, and the copying styles adopted by individuals differ based on the individual attitude appraisal of the situation as well as the convenience of resources. In pursuit of exposing the coping mechanisms used by university first-timers, the findings of the study point

out that students capitalise on religion, resilience, social networks and campus connectedness/friends.

Drawing from Baqutayan (2015) coping mechanisms can be defined as the methods that individuals respond to and interact with problem situation. It is evidential that the coping mechanisms discovered in this study includes both problem focused and emotion focused coping (Baqutayan 2015). The study recognised that a number of participants reported to cling on religion during trying times. Some study participants testified that they depend a lot in prayer. Some further stated that faith in their gods is what help them to reach this far. This is conforming to a study that was conducted by Galambos et al (2004), who uncovered that over half of the participants that were examined about resilience stated that spirituality/religion is of central importance to people during stressful or disruptive events. Therefore, this certifies the outcomes of the study.

Some study participants capitalised on social networks or people they know from back home. It can be argued that most students are either international or local migrants. In this study some participants communicated that they survived through the help of those they know from their communities. Some testified that social networks can be suggested by those who have been in the destination or university in this context. Blumenstock & Tan (2016) asserted that the conclusion to migrate for educational purposes depends mostly on the degree to which the migrant is connected to communities at home and the destination. This is agreeing with study outcomes especially in case of international students.

The study also discovered that some students are resilient in nature whilst some have developed the coping mechanism of resilience. A majority of participants shared scenarios that adversely affected them in their transition phase, but no one claimed or opted to give up. This demonstrates resiliency. This was also incongruence with what Vuuren (2014) shared when the author asserted that a characteristic of academically resilient students is that they have higher levels of intrinsic motivation and an internal locus of control. As has been discussed, building friendship is among some of the coping mechanisms used by university first-timers at UKZN Howard College. Some study participants admitted that it is challenging to work in isolation in university. Even the study outcomes point out that first year students need to have the capacity to develop quality relationships with classmates and students who have passed the first-year phase, for the purposes of sharing knowledge and study methods.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Further Research**

In consideration of study's findings and limitations, the sample was quite small and might not include persons with other opinions and perception. Therefore, the researcher proposes the following recommendations for further research:

- It is recommended that in future studies, attempts should be made to collect samples that are more representative of all campuses using quantitative approach.
- Investigating the effectiveness of orientation and induction of first years.
- There is a need to investigate if strengthening partnership between secondary schools and tertiary education can smoothen the transition phase of first years.
- A similar research through quantitative approach, which focuses on protective factors and generalising the findings to the greater population of South African University students, is recommended.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

As highlighted above research has found that many institutions, regardless of having well-developed systems for student support, there is a lack of communication, they do not make students adequately aware of the different support systems available to them on campus (Vuuren, 2014). This was incongruence with the study findings since a majority of participants said that they were not aware of important university supportive resources. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has an orientation program, which was designed to help first year students to be familiar with the campus surroundings and help them with their adjustment at the university. However, participants suggested the need for the orientation to be revised and perhaps be modified to some sort of a workshop, which can help students to be aware of the challenges they might face and how they can mitigate those challenges.

The support and resources for students at the university proved to be vital for the adaptation for university first-timers. This research highlighted some of the support systems that are provided for students at this campus such as referencing workshops, student counsellors, academic development officers, tutorials, SRC, orientation programme and as well as tutorials were not advertised satisfactorily. These support systems need to be strengthened to ensure that

they mitigate the challenges usually encountered by first year students at university. Students would benefit if they are made aware of the strategies and risk factors of students and how to apply the available resources available to them to promote their resilience.

It is suggested that the university publicize all these programs meaningfully. Student should know from day one about writing place for essay writing, they need to be empowered with information as to who to contact when facing challenges. UKZN especially Howard College is dominated by Blacks (Zulu speaking in particular). However, some foreign and non-Zulu speaking students reported that they are worried about the bilingual teaching and learning policy which is a combination of Zulu and English. Therefore, this means the university should examine if this bilingual teaching and learning policy will not disadvantage the minority, which are foreign and non-Zulu speaking students.

### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

The primary impediment of qualitative approaches compared to corpus investigations is that their discoveries can't be stretched out to more extensive populaces with a similar level of conviction that quantitative studies can. This is on the grounds that the discoveries of the study are not tried to find whether they are factually noteworthy (Atieno, 2009). The sample was quite small and might not include persons with other opinions and perception. Furthermore, other related limitation of the study is that the research was conducted solely with students signed up UKZN, HC Campus. Therefore, the research might not describe the degree to which the conclusions are true to other universities within the country. The findings of the study, however, provide insights to experiences of how students cope with transition from secondary school systems to tertiary education.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

The study has attempted to shed light on the coping mechanisms used by first- and second-year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education at UKZN, HC grounds. The research revealed that students face adjustment problems that hinder their adaptation at the university but through the support from their families, peers and the

university, they are able to mitigate the impact of the hindrances to their adaptation. The study also unveiled the main coping mechanisms used by university first-timers at UKZN Howard College campus.

The study was able to discover all this information on the lenses of resilience theory as a guide. Therefore, the study has also contributed to the body of literature on understanding resilience among university students and to the limited research on facilitative conditions to student's adaptation within the university context. Additionally, the current study is among the few to explore and better understand a set of tactics that first years employ during the transition phase. As such, the current study's findings have made a significant contribution to the knowledge surrounding coping mechanisms in the university environment, through gaining a deeper understanding of the hindrances to student's adaptation and how they succeed despite adversity.

## REFERENCES

- Ahern, N. (2007). Resiliency in adolescent college students.
- American Psychological Association. (2014). *The road to resilience*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Anney, V. N. (2014). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria.
- Appalasaamy, D. M. (2004). *Using an Orientation Programme to Prepare First Year Medical Students for a Problem Based Curriculum: A South African Case Study* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal).
- Arif, M. I., & Mirza, M. S. (2017). Effectiveness of an Intervention Program in Fostering Academic Resilience of Students at Risk of Failure at Secondary School Level. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 39(1).
- Atieno, O. P. (2009). An analysis of the strengths and limitation of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 13(1), 13-38.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton J. (2001). *Research Design & Problem Formulation: The Practice of Social Research*, pp75-84.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. (2015). *The Practice of Social Research*. (16<sup>th</sup> Ed). Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, T. H., & Phillips, L. J. (2016). The influence of motivation and adaptation on students' subjective well-being, meaning in life and academic performance. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(2), 201-216.
- Balkin, R. S., Watts, R. E., & Ali, S. R. (2014). A conversation about the intersection of faith, sexual orientation, and gender: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(2), 187-193.
- Baqutayan, S. M. S. (2015). Stress and coping mechanisms: A historical overview. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(2 S1), 479.
- Bashant, J. (2014). Developing Grit in Our Students: Why Grit Is Such a Desirable Trait, and Practical Strategies for Teachers and Schools. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction*, 13(2), 14-17.
- Bayram, N., & Bilgel, N. (2008). The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety and stress among a group of university students. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 43(8), 667-672.
- Bazelais, P., Lemay, D. J., & Doleck, T. (2016). How Does Grit Impact College Students' Academic Achievement in Science?. *European Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 4(1), 33-43.
- Beck, G. A. (2016). Surviving involuntary unemployment together: The role of resilience-promoting communication in familial and committed relationships. *Journal of Family Communication*, 16(4), 369-385.

- Bernard, M. E. (2004). Emotional resilience in children: Implications for rational emotive education. *Romanian Journal of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies*, 4(1), 39-52.
- Berry, D. M., & York, K. (2011). Depression and religiosity and/or spirituality in college: A longitudinal survey of students in the USA. *Nursing & health sciences*, 13(1), 76-83.
- Bitsch, V. (2005). Qualitative research: A grounded theory example and evaluation criteria. *Journal of Agribusiness*, 23(1), 75-91.
- Blumenstock, J., & Tan, X. (2016). Social Networks and Migration: Theory and Evidence from Rwanda.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative research journal*, 9(2), 27-40.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). What can “thematic analysis” offer health and wellbeing researchers?. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, 9.
- Brink, H., Van der Walt, C., & Van Rensburg, G. (2006). *Fundamentals of research methodology for health care professionals*. Juta and Company Ltd.
- Brooks, R., & Waters, J. (2010). Social networks and educational mobility: the experiences of UK students. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 8(1), 143-157.
- Brougham, R. R., Zail, C. M., Mendoza, C. M., & Miller, J. R. (2009). Stress, sex differences, and coping strategies among college students. *Current psychology*, 28(2), 85-97.
- Burns, N., & Grove, S. (2005). *The practice of nursing research, critique and utilization*. Philadelphia: St Louis.
- Buzdar, M. A., Ali, A., Nadeem, M., & Nadeem, M. (2015). Relationship between religiosity and psychological symptoms in female university students. *Journal of religion and health*, 54(6), 2155-2163.
- Bwisa, H. M. (2008). How to write a statement problem. *Your proposal writing companion*.
- Chipangura, S. (2013). *An investigation into the manifestation of stigma and discrimination and its consequences on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment efforts amongst people living with HIV/AIDS* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).
- Christensen, L. B., Johnson, B., Turner, L. A., & Christensen, L. B. (2011). *Research methods, design, and analysis*.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Corbin, J., & Morse, J. M. (2003). The unstructured interactive interview: Issues of reciprocity and risks when dealing with sensitive topics. *Qualitative inquiry*, 9(3), 335-354.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*.
- Durrheim, K., Painter, D., Martin, J., & Blanche, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Research in practice: applied methods for the social sciences*. UCT Press.

- Dyson, R., & Renk, K. (2006). Freshmen adaptation to university life: Depressive symptoms, stress, and coping. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 62(10), 1231-1244.
- Easterbrook, S., Singer, J., Storey, M. A., & Damian, D. (2008). Selecting empirical methods for software engineering research. In *Guide to advanced empirical software engineering* (pp. 285-311). Springer, London.
- Farrell, A. (2005). *Ethical research with children*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Fritz, M. V., Chin, D., & DeMarinis, V. (2008). Stressors, anxiety, acculturation and adjustment among international and North American students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(3), 244-259.
- Frydenberg, E. (2014). Coping research: Historical background, links with emotion, and new research directions on adaptive processes. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 66(2), 82-92.
- Galambos, C. Greene, R.R. & Lee, Y. (2004). Resilience Theory, *Journal of Human Behaviour In The Social Environment*, 8:4, 75-91, Doi: 10.1300/J137v08n04\_05.
- Garmezy, N. (1991). Resiliency and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty. *American behavioral scientist*, 34(4), 416-430.
- Gebreiyosus, Y. B. (2018). *Being a Refugee Student in Higher Education: Exploring the Challenges and Coping Strategies, A Case Study of Mekelle University, Ethiopia* (Master's thesis).
- Gilbert, N. (Ed.). (2008). *Researching social life*. Sage.
- Gizir, C., & Aydin, G. (2009). Protective factors contributing to the academic resilience of students living in poverty in Turkey. *Professional School Counseling*, 13(1), 38-49.
- Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse education today*, 24(2), 105-112.
- Gwacela, M. (2013). *Exploring food insecurity and socio-economic factors affecting academic performance: a case study of first year students on probation and at-risk of academic exclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg).
- Hanford, E. (2012). Angela Duckworth and the Research on 'Grit'. *Tomorrow's College*.
- Hannaway, D., Steyn, M., & Hartell, C. (2014). The influence of ecosystemic factors on black student teachers' perceptions and experience of early childhood education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 28(2), 386-410.
- Harerimana, A. (2013). *A Descriptive Study on the Utilization of Internet as an Academic Tool Among Undergraduate Nursing Students, at a Selected University in KwaZulu Natal* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban).
- Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W., & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research* (pp. 19-22). Pretoria: van Schaik.
- Hochanadel, A., & Finamore, D. (2015). Fixed and growth mindset In education and how grit helps students persist in the face of adversity. *Journal of International Education Research*, 11(1), 47-50.

- Holloway, I., & Wheeler, S. (2002). Ensuring trustworthiness and quality. *Holloway I, Wheeler S. Research in nursing. 2nd Ed. Blackwell Publishing, India 1996*, 250-63.
- Jansen, K. L., Motley, R., & Hovey, J. (2010). Anxiety, depression and students' religiosity. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 13(3), 267-271.
- Katz, N., Lazer, D., Arrow, H., & Contractor, N. (2004). Network theory and small groups. *Small group research*, 35(3), 307-332.
- Kausar, R. (2010). Perceived Stress, Academic Workloads and Use of Coping Strategies by University Students. *Journal of Behavioural Sciences*, 20(1).
- Kunene, S. N. (2017). Graduates Unemployment: *Exploring Challenges and Opportunities of Unemployed Social Work Graduates in Kwa-Zulu Natal*. (Unpublished Honours dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal).
- Lamula, S. P. (2017). *Students' understanding, perceptions and experience of plagiarism: a case study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Latham, G. P., & Locke, E. A. (2007). New developments in and directions for goal-setting research. *European Psychologist*, 12(4), 290-300.
- Leandro, P. G., & Castillo, M. D. (2010). Coping with stress and its relationship with personality dimensions, anxiety, and depression. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 1562-1573.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. New Park.
- Magagula, N. (2016). *Understanding the Resilience Of Social Work Students And Their Adjustment To The University Of Kwazulu-Natal*. (Unpublished Honours dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal).
- Mahali, A., Moletsane, R., Arogundade, E., Swartz, S., Khalema, N. E., Cooper, A., & Groenewald, C. (2018). *Studying While Black*. Race, education and emancipation in South African universities. Published by HSRC Press.
- Malkoç, A. (2011). Big five personality traits and coping styles predict subjective well-being: A study with a Turkish Sample. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 12, 577-581.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications.
- Martinez-Torteya, C., Anne Bogat, G., Von Eye, A., & Levendosky, A. A. (2009). Resilience among children exposed to domestic violence: The role of risk and protective factors. *Child development*, 80(2), 562-577.
- Martin, A. J., & Marsh, H. W. (2008). Academic buoyancy: Towards an understanding of students' everyday academic resilience. *Journal of school psychology*, 46(1), 53-83.
- Masten, A. S. (1994). Resilience in individual development: Successful adaptation despite risk and adversity.
- Matlala, M. Y. (2005). *Barriers to academic achievement of first year African students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal).
- Maundeni, T. (2001). The role of social networks in the adjustment of African students to British society: students' perceptions. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 4(3), 253-276.

- Moleli, M. F. (2005). *Protective factors that could foster resilience in first year students* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape).
- Morozov, V., Mykhailenko, L., Falko, N., Puente, E. R., & Galaidin, A. (2017). Socio-Psychological Adaptation of the first-year Students of the economic University as a component of individual professional development in the context of cultural and educational space. *Scientific Journal of Polonia University*, 24(5), 98-106.
- Mouton, J., Auriacombe, C. J., & Lutabingwa, J. (2006). Problematic aspects of the research, design and measurement process in Public Administration research: Conceptual considerations. *Journal of Public Administration*, 41(3), 574-587.
- Mudau, T. J. (2017). An exploration of the challenges faced by students residing off-campus in rural universities in South Africa. *Gender and Behaviour*, 15(4), 10568-10580.
- Mudhovozi, P. (2012). Social and academic adjustment of first-year university students. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 33(2), 251-259.
- Neuman, W. L. (2013). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Pearson education.
- Nghaamwa, T. N. T. (2017). *An analysis of the influence of induction programmes on beginner teachers' professional development in the Erongo Region of Namibia* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).
- Okioga, C. K. (2013). The impact of students' socio-economic background on academic performance in Universities, a case of students in Kisii University College. *American International Journal of Social Science*, 2(2), 38-46.
- Ortell-Pierce, J. S. (2011). *The Relationship Between Resilience and Coping in a Sample of Unemployed Women in the EThekweni Region* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban).
- Osborne, A. (2007). Life span and resiliency theory: A critical review. *Advances in social work*, 8(1), 152-168.
- Pather, S., Norodien-Fataar, N., Cupido, X., & Mkonto, N. (2017). First year students' experience of access and engagement at a University of Technology. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, (69), 161-184.
- Pidgeon, A. M., Rowe, N. F., Stapleton, P., Magyar, H. B., & Lo, B. C. (2014). Examining characteristics of resilience among University students: An international study. *Open journal of social sciences*, 2(11), 14.
- Pidgeon, A. M. & McGillivray, C. J. (2015). Resilience attributes among university students: a comparative study of psychological distress, sleep disturbances and mindfulness. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(5), 33.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2008). *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2003). Developing self-authorship: Exploring the experiences of high-risk college students. *Journal of college student development*, 44(6), 797-812.
- Prebble, T., Hargraves, H., Leach, L., Naidoo, K., Suddaby, G., & Zepke, N. (2004). Impact of student support services and academic development programmes on student outcomes in

undergraduate tertiary study: A synthesis of the research. *Wellington: Ministry of Education*. Retrieved March, 28, 2007.

Rahman, M. S. (2016). The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language “Testing and Assessment” research: A literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(1), 102.

Santos, R, S. (2013). *Why Resilience? A Review of Literature of Resilience and Implications for Further Educational Research*. Claremont Graduate University & San Diego State University.

Sarantakos, S. (2012). *Social research*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22(2), 63-75.

Sheppard, M. (2004). *Appraising and using social research in the human services: An introduction for social work and health professionals*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Shilpa S., Srimathi N. S. (2015). Role of Resilience on Perceived Stress among Pre-University and Under Graduate Students. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*. 2(2), 242-249.

Shuttleworth, M. (2008). Validity and reliability. Retrieved May, 15, 2013.

Smeets, E., Neff, K., Alberts, H., & Peters, M. (2014). Meeting suffering with kindness: Effects of a brief self-compassion intervention for female college students. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 70(9), 794-807.

Solomon, O. (2013). Exploring the relationship between resilience, perceived stress and academic achievement.

Sommer, M. (2013). *Psychosocial factors predicting the adjustment and academic performance of university students* (Doctoral dissertation).

Southwick, S. M., Bonanno, G. A., Masten, A. S., Panter-Brick, C., & Yehuda, R. (2014). Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European journal of psychotraumatology*, 5(1), 25338.

Stallman, H. M., & Hurst, C. P. (2016). The University Stress Scale: Measuring Domains and Extent of Stress in University Students. *Australian Psychologist*, 51(2), 128-134.

Stallman, H. M., Ohan, J. L., & Chiera, B. (2018). The Role of Social Support, Being Present, and Self-kindness in University Student Psychological Distress. *Australian Psychologist*, 53(1), 52-59.

Stake, R. E., Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). Strategies of qualitative inquiry. *Case studies*.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2014). What role does grit play in the academic success of black male collegians at predominantly white institutions?. *Journal of African American Studies*, 18(1), 1-10.

Strydom, H. (2005). *Information Collection Participatory Action Research*. In Strydom, H., Fouche, C, B., & Delpont, C, S, L., (Eds). Van Schaik. Pretoria South Africa. (2005).

Taha, N., & Cox, A. (2016). International students' networks: a case study in a UK university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(1), 182-198.

- The Sunday Independent. (2016). The Ministerial study found that only 5.3 percent of new students were getting housing, much of it below required standard.
- Terzi, S. (2013). Secure attachment style, coping with stress and resilience among university students. *The Journal of Happiness & Well-Being*, 1(2), 97-109.
- Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 48(4), 388-396.
- Tom, R. F. (2015). *Adjustment experiences and coping strategies of first-year students at the University of Limpopo (Turfloup Campus)* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Limpopo).
- Torres, G. C., & Garde, R. A. (2014). Resilience and coping strategy profiles at University: Contextual and demographic variables. *Electronic journal of research in educational psychology*. 12(3), 621-648.
- UKZN Website. (2018, September 15). Know your campus. Retrieved from <https://www.ukzn.ac.za/about-ukzn/campuses/>.
- Van Breda, A. D. (2001). Resilience theory: A literature review. *Pretoria, South Africa: South African Military Health Service*.
- Van Breda, A. D. (2018). A critical review of resilience theory and its relevance for social work. *Social Work*, 54(1), 1-18.
- Vuuren, N. (2014). *Promoting student success by tapping into the resilience of the at-risk student: a South African higher education perspective* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Webster, B. J., & Yang, M. (2012). Transition, induction and goal achievement: First-year experiences of Hong Kong undergraduates. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 13(2), 359-368.
- Weeks, J. (2011). *Population: An introduction to concepts and issues*. Nelson Education.
- Williams, J. M. G., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Mindfulness: Diverse perspectives on its meaning, origins and applications*. Routledge.
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in higher education*, 30(6), 707-722.
- Wilks, S. E., & Spivey, C. A. (2010). Resilience in undergraduate social work students: Social support and adjustment to academic stress. *Social Work Education*, 29(3), 276-288.
- Wanjohi, J.M. (2014). *Research Objectives*. Department of Chemistry.
- Wößmann, L. (2005). Educational production in East Asia: The impact of family background and schooling policies on student performance. *German Economic Review*, 6(3), 331-353.
- Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational psychologist*, 47(4), 302-314.
- Zulu, M. (2010). *An Exploration of the Interrelationship Between Intimacy Resolution, Coping Styles, and Suicidal Attitudes Among a Sample of University Students* (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban).

## ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



05 October 2018

Mr Siphesihle Ndumiso Kunene (214543762)  
School of Built Environment & Development Studies  
Howard College Campus

Dear Mr Kunene,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1557/018M

Project title: Understanding Coping Mechanisms used by first and second year university students in the Transition from Secondary to Tertiary Education: A case study of University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 04 September 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has 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

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Mr Mohammed Vawda  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Oliver Mtshali  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Angeline Msomi

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4507 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4608 Email: [simbasa@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:simbasa@ukzn.ac.za) / [academic@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:academic@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohun@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohun@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## **ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONSENT**

### **UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)**

#### **APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants**

#### **Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research**

Date: 01 October 2018

#### **Good day**

My name is Siphesihle Kunene from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the School of Built Environment and Development Studies. I am a master's student in Population Studies. I can be contacted on: 078 195 0679 or email: [214543762@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214543762@stu.ukzn.ac.za).

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves understanding coping mechanisms used by first and second year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. The aim and purpose of the research is to explore and better understand the coping mechanisms used by first and second year university students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education, in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College campus. The study is expected to enroll fifteen participants which encompass seven first years and eight second years. The research will involve interviews as a procedure to collect data. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be thirty to forty minutes.

I hope that the study will create the following benefit of providing knowledge, the study will provide essential information to both the students and university as to which strategies students utilize to cope with university demands and lifestyle. The study will help future students to be aware of challenges that are encountered by first year students and how those challenges can be effectively managed. The study won't give any direct benefits to participants but will be able to contribute to the body of knowledge on these issues.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. In any event you are not happy, or you feel that there was a misconduct on how you were treated you can contact the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on:

#### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

It must be stated that participation in this study is voluntary and if a participant wants to withdraw from participating they have the right to do so and nothing will be used against them. However, it must be noted that this will result in the delay of collecting relevant information as there is a replacement that must be made, so that the necessary information be collected. It must be noted that any misbehavior or lack of willingness to participate from the participants that the researcher might observe can result in the interview being stopped.

Participants in the study will not incur any costs to be in the study and they will be not remunerated to participate in this study.

Participants will be given names that are not theirs when the researcher deals with the data and the information collected, it will safely be kept by the researcher's supervisor and can only be distributed to the university if the university requests it. However, precautionary measures will be put in place that confidentiality of the participants be kept. It must be noted that the findings of the research will be presented to participants after completion of the study and the acceptance of the study by the university.

-----  
--

## **CONSENT**

I .....have been informed about the study:  
Understanding Coping Mechanisms Used By First and Second Year University Students In  
The Transition From Secondary To Tertiary Education: The study will be conducted by  
Siphesihle Kunene.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study which the researcher has explained.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on 078 195 0679 or email him on [214543762@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214543762@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness  
(Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Translator  
(Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### UNDERSTANDING COPING MECHANISMS USED BY FIRST AND SECOND YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY TO TERTIARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF KWA-ZULU NATAL HOWARD COLLEGE.

#### RESEARCH MAIN QUESTIONS

##### *Introductory Questions*

1. Why did you want to study at a university?
2. How did you feel when you got accepted at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal?

##### *Core Questions*

3. What are the challenges you encountered as a first-year university student in adapting to the university setting?
  - Academically
  - Adjustment challenges
  - University lifestyle
  - Financial Matters
  - Administrative Wise
  - Accommodation (and so forth)
4. Please tell me what you understand about the concept of resilience?
5. What are some of the risk factors that affected your resilience or your coping as a first-year university student?
6. What can you highlight as vulnerable factors during the transition phase?
7. What can you deem as protective factors during the transition chapter?
8. How has your family background contributed to your level of coping at university?
9. What do you think are the main challenges/issues that affect students in adapting to the university?
10. What coping mechanisms you employed as a first-year student to cope or rather champion the transition phase?
11. Amongst the methods you used, which ones worked, and which ones did not work?
12. What do you think can be done to promote and elevate resilience among first year students in order to help them adjust at the university?