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STRATEGIES FOR ACQUIRING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A RURAL-BASED UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

By

Mathebula Forget

Student Number: 11612850

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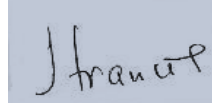**School of Agriculture**

University of Venda

Supervisor	:	Prof J. Francis
Co-Supervisor(s)	:	Mr C.A. Hagenmeier
		Dr P. Nyamukondiwa

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DECLARATION

I, Mathebula Forget, hereby declare that this dissertation for Masters in Rural Development (MRDV) submitted to the Institute for Rural Development at the University of Venda has not been submitted previously for any degree at this or another university. It is original in design and in execution, and all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Full Names: Mathebula Forget   **Signature**_____   **Date** : 6 March 2021

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ABSTRACT

The need for acquiring intercultural competencies (ICs) among postgraduate students increased drastically in the 21st Century. This was in response to the need for graduates from higher education institutions (HEIs) to be equipped with skills that enable them to work in diverse cultural settings. Thus, HEIs had to increase their efforts and develop strategies that enhance the acquisition of ICs. Despite the high demand for the acquisition of ICs, rural-based universities (RBUs) continue to find it difficult to promote it. The main objective of this study was to analyse the strategies used to acquire ICs by postgraduate students at a selected rural-based university in South Africa. The specific objectives were to (a) assess the extent of acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioural ICs among masters and doctoral students, (b) explore the strategies postgraduate students use to acquire ICs; and (c) to determine the major strategies used to acquire ICs. In this research, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was adopted to guide the study. A total of 104 Masters and PhD students from the University of Venda voluntarily responded to a research questionnaire sent to them electronically via Survey Monkey. The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed-ended questions and required responses on a Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data were stored as Microsoft Excel sheets. The data were transferred into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Correlation analysis was conducted to quantify the responses provided by male and female as well as both Masters and PhD students on how they relate to one another. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the perceptions of female and male students. The major factors that hindered the acquisition of intercultural competencies were the lack of participation in student's programmes. Moreover, there's too much politics in students programmes and lack of social cohesion programmes that promote social interaction among students. Acquisition of ICs was regarded as the best opportunity for one to gain experience outside the classroom. Students believed that acquiring ICs through established networks and collaborations prepares one to compete internationally and be recognized by international companies leading to good employment prospects. Student development-focused workshops were said to be crucial in acquiring ICs. Internships and field placements were rated the second most important strategies. The level of the study did not affect the perceived extent of acquisition of ICs. Moreover, there was a consensus that gender did not influence the acquisition of ICs. Results revealed that there is a need to strengthen and support current strategies to enable the smooth acquisition of IC components by students. Initiatives that address political and cultural intolerance, and promotes social cohesion, would help students to acquire ICs.

Keywords: Behaviours, culture, intercultural education, intercultural sensitivity, rural-based university.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ELT   Experiential Learning Theory

HEIs   Higher Education Institutions

IC   Intercultural Competence

IS   Intercultural Sensitivity

MoU   Memorandum of Understanding

RBUs   Rural Based Universities

SADC   Southern African Development Community

TLT   Transformative Learning Theory

UNIVEN   University of Venda

USA   United States of America

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The concept of intercultural competencies (ICs) was established in the 1950s. Since then, various scholars have defined ICs in many ways (Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Byram (2012) & Deardorff (2006) define ICs as a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills, and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in various cultural contexts. Chen & Starosta (1997) define it as the necessary precondition for an adequate, successful, mutually satisfactory communication, encounter and cooperation between people from different cultures. Jin (2014) defines ICs as the process that involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures. Differences in defining ICs are a result of the focus on the application of the term. Some scholars focus on cultural awareness, knowledge, and motivation while other scholars focus on communication and behavioural skills. The concept of ICs has a thoughtful impact on the way people behave and interact globally. One of the major impacts is the improvement in people's social interaction. A proper social interaction creates an enabling environment for people to work together for one common goal particularly the betterment of the world.

Deardorff (2006) outlines three perspectives of ICs. The first perspective is the effective or intercultural sensitivity to acknowledge and respect cultural differences. Second, is the cognitive or intercultural awareness, self-awareness of one's cultural identity and understanding of how cultures vary. Lastly, is the behavioural or intercultural adroitness, message skills, knowledge of appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Meier (2007), Ajitoni (2014) & Paine *et al.* (2016) classify critical components of ICs into three groups. The first group is Cognitive, which refers to a process involved in the acquisition and understanding of knowledge, formation of beliefs and decision making. Cognitive is better understood in the following: cultural self-awareness, culture-general knowledge, and culture-specific knowledge and interaction analysis (Janeiro & Fabre, 2014). Second is the Affective which is described as the process of success in producing a desired or intended results. Affective has the following series: - curiosity, cognitive flexibility, motivation and open-mindedness (Ntuli, 2012). Addition, there are behavioural skills. Deardorff (2015) explains behavioural skills as skills used to successfully interact with others. The behavioural skills are formed through relationship building skills. Behavioural skills include listening, problem-solving, empathy and information gathering.

Typically, ICs are gained through a combination of experience, training, and self-reflection. Even though much of what becomes ICs can be acquired through personal experience, many

programs have been designed to provide formal teaching or training, and they often help substantially. The mentioned components of ICs are regarded as more critical because they lead to the acquisition of other competencies. They are considered to be tricky to acquire but very key for personal development (Otten, 2003). The three major components of ICs are believed to be hard to acquire. However, once one of them is acquired, it attracts the other components. Acquisition of ICs demands flexibility and willingness to learn, adapt, relate and socialize. With the changes in globalisation and its driving forces, governments have recognised the acquisition of ICs by individuals and companies as necessary for driving development in communities. As De Wit (2010) postulates, postgraduate students with a deeper understanding of ICs have abilities and strategies to act and interact with others in a global, diverse and complex environment. A better chance of development in communities rest in better interaction among those with the responsibility to change the situation. When people interact, opportunities for the acquisition of skills are created. For example, development initiatives that are shared during people's interactions stand a better chance of being improved over time as replication takes place in various places. Students stand to benefit from one another when they interact. In modern society, the issue of intercultural training also plays a major role in the acquisition of ICs and has been well commended for the future development of rural communities. The acquisition of ICs has been well documented as the training of future employees in various skills and disciplines for the betterment of communities.

The assertions above are supported by Agnew & Van Balkom (2009) who postulate that, with the development of rural communities, there is a strong demand for postgraduate students to acquire components of ICs. It is believed that to survive in the 21st century, one needs to display components of ICs (Harrison (2012). From the 1960s, Asian universities, particularly in countries such as Afghanistan, China and India have been at the forefront of enhancing the acquisition of components of ICs. This has been viewed as a way of preparing Asian postgraduate students to become global citizens. Students that are considered global citizens can relate well with people from different cultural backgrounds. In the United States of America (USA), the issue of language has been prioritised in promoting the acquisition of ICs. This move has also influenced the educational system and educational life, making postgraduate students globally informed and relevant.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) started embarking on various programmes that enhance the acquisition of ICs. In England, the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES), was specifically introduced to help university students acquire components of ICs (Harrison, 2012). Through SOLEs, university staff and students are encouraged to acquire ICs in other parts of Europe. Furthermore, the concept of ICs in

Western Europe has been used in cross-cultural communication (Otten, 2003). The US Peace Corps volunteers have applied the concept when teaching in some foreign countries. In Australasia, developing ICs is a key focus and priority to integrative student learning efforts in higher education (Gierke *et al.,* 2018). The focus is to make students understand different cultures in a deeper way and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. The Chinese and United Kingdom (UK) governments are collaborating on a student exchange programme. This programme is fundamental to both China and the UK as it is exposing students to living in cross-cultural environments (Ajitoni, 2014). The programme is designed to equip students with transcultural competence. Universities from the Middle East and Nigeria have signed a Memorandum of Understanding as a way of pursuing the acquisition of ICs. Between 2012 and 2013; a staggering 289 000 students from the Middle East and North Africa studied in the two regions respectively (Bennett, 2011). In North Africa, the acquisition of ICs is viewed as a key driver for transformation and development in the 21st century.

In the early 1990s, the acquisition of ICs spread into many HEIs in South Africa (Mosia & Baijnath, 2016). South Africa is viewed by many as one of the most favorable destinations to study in the African continent. This is evident in the number of international students studying in South Africa from the USA, South Korea, Peru, Denmark, continentally and regionally. Almost every South African university has registered international students (Davis *et al*., 2014). Despite the growth in interest to study in South Africa, the acquisition of ICs in many South African Rural-Based Universities (RBUs) remains a challenge. South African RBUs were created in the apartheid regime and were historically disadvantaged. Therefore, in the 21st century, the South African RBUs are playing catch up game to the so-called developed universities. Therefore, in this study, the strategies used to acquire intercultural competencies among postgraduate students at a rural-based university in South Africa are explored.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The acquisition of ICs by postgraduate students at higher education institutions is flagged as important for learning and teaching in the 21st century (Laura & Nokelainene, 2017). There is enough evidence in literature that indicates that acquiring ICs help postgraduate students to navigate in the interconnected world (Bennett, 2009; Janeiro & Fabre, 2014). Acquisition of ICs increased in the early 1990s and many strategies have been used since then (Reza, 2015). Globally, there is an increase in efforts to enhance the acquisition of ICs for postgraduate students by higher education institutions. Despite many efforts in enhancing the acquisition of ICs, rural-based universities are faced with the challenge of promoting the

acquisition of intercultural competencies. Existing literature indicates that there is less effort in enhancing the acquisition of intercultural competencies for postgraduate students studying at rural-based universities (De Wet, 2010 & Schartner, 2015). This creates a gap in cultural competence between postgraduate students studying in RBUs and those studying in urban universities. Failure of having strategies that enhance the acquisition ICs at RBUs affect postgraduate students as many cannot develop skills to relate and interact globally. Hence, Jin (2014) articulates that the social interaction of postgraduates from RBUs is less effective and not well connected to people from the outside world, particularly postgraduate students from RBUs. However, postgraduate students from Urban-Based Universities are much better off compared to those from RBUs. In the early 1990s, rural and urban South African universities joined the world institutions in the quest to promote the acquisition of ICs. For this reason, it is crucial to analyse the effectiveness of the strategies used to acquire ICs by postgraduate students studying at rural-based universities in South Africa.

1.3 Justification/Rationale of the Study

This study will help in developing an appropriate programme for the acquisition of ICs among postgraduate students. The study will enhance knowledge and improve social cohesion and possibly, better quality educational outcomes. The findings will provide a meaningful guide for future researchers and ICs practitioners in the rapidly changing world. Results of the study can also be used to inform policymaking around rural development and higher education training. Moreover, the study can be used as a reference when developing new policies that promote the acquisition of ICs within HEIs. The study will also help in the identification of gaps by highlighting the necessity of postgraduate students to acquire components of ICs.

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of the study was to analyse the strategies which postgraduate students at a selected rural-based university in South Africa used to acquire ICs.
Specific objectives were to:

a) Assess the extent of acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioural ICs among masters and doctoral students;

b) Explore the strategies postgraduate students use to acquire ICs; and

c) Determine the major strategies used to acquire ICs.

1.5 Research hypotheses

a) Gender does not influence masters and doctoral students' perception of the extent of the acquisition of ICs;

b) The level of the study of postgraduate students does not affect the perception of the extent of acquisition of ICs;

c) There are no differences due to the level of study in the major strategies masters and doctoral students use to acquire ICs.

1.6 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Both the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) were adopted to guide this study. According to Ryshina-Pankova (2018), the TLT relates to a process in which knowledge is created through the transforming experience. On the other hand, the ELT enunciates that for postgraduate students to become interculturally competent they need to be given opportunities. Therefore, experiential learning postulates that opportunities that are in line with the development of postgraduate students should be availed. This plays a crucial role in preparing postgraduate students to be global citizens. When becoming global citizens, they also become ready for the work environment. Dimitrov *et al.* (2014) articulate that experiential learning supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding of real-world problems or situations. Based on this argument, a learning platform is necessary. The theory further suggests that through practical learning and active involvement, postgraduate students can gain various experiences through observation and reflection. In the 21st century, it remains of critical importance for HEIs to develop a platform that will allow postgraduate students to learn from actual real-life situations. It is this platform that contributes to producing a global citizen. Coast *et al. (*2009) emphasize that such programmes should be implemented in line with the objectives of assisting postgraduate students to be intercultural and globally competent.

Deardorff (2006) argues that when students are given opportunities to learn in an authentic situation on campus or in communities through internships, they stand to learn the cultural differences of communities. Internships provide an opportunity for learning and getting experience which becomes useful for students for the future. Therefore, the more students get exposed to learning programmes the more they become competent and experienced. Involvement in various postgraduate programmes helps motivate postgraduate students to gain self-confidence (Dearrdorff, 2006). Students are likely to return to their life and apply the new refined knowledge for better results and excel in life. That way, the process of improvement of the previous experience occurs.

Transforming learning theory can be described as a process of transferring knowledge to students. This occurs through a special design platform for postgraduate students to learn and adopt a new way of life (Dimitrov *et al.*, 2014). The process involved is very crucial in preparing the mind-sets of new postgraduate students. When the mind is properly prepared for the learning, the process becomes simpler and interesting. Transforming theory pronounces that in the process of knowledge transformation bad habits are dealt with. This theory also plays a role in helping postgraduate students to become more inclusive. Deardorff (2006) & Bennett (2009) recommend that learning while involving the participation of postgraduate students for constructive discourse and students' empowerment is essential. This theory assumes that active participation adds value to the experience and learning of postgraduate students. Maximum participation for postgraduate students' development is encouraged and promoted.

1.7 Operational Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

There are various meanings, explanations, or definitions for the terms below. However, for this study, below are explanations of key terms that have been considered for better expression of the issue under investigation.

Intercultural Competence is defined as the ability to interact with people from other cultures, acting in interculturally appropriate ways or is the ability to do a particular activity to a prescribed standard and is dependent on the employee's knowledge and skills. Competencies are the personal attributes or behaviours of an employee which result in effective or superior performance in a job (Deardorff, 2006).

Culture is defined as the values, beliefs, and norms held by a group of people. It is also defined as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society; at a minimum, including art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2000)

A rural-based university is defined as a university operating in a rural area or a university educating rural-based people to promote sustainable development (Dani and Shah, 2016).

In this study, a postgraduate student refers to an individual formally registered for either a master's or doctoral qualification at the University of Venda.

1.8   Organisation of the Dissertation

The dissertation is presented in five chapters. The first chapter is comprised of the historical background to the study, problem statement, and the rationale of the study, research

objectives, research hypothesis, theories and key definitions that inform the study. Chapter two is comprised of conceptual dimensions and literature review. Chapter three is formed by the description of the study area, research design, and research methodology, table of the expected outcomes, timeframe and budget. Chapter four presents the results and discussions of the study. The statistical results obtained from analysing the primary data collected from 104 postgraduate students enrolled at the University of Venda are also presented in this chapter. Descriptive statistics in the form of measures of central tendency (mean, mode and median) and measures of dispersion (minimum, maximum values, range, and variance) were used to describe the gathered data. The last chapter (Chapter five) concludes the study. It includes the summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides conceptual dimensions of the literature review of the study and is guided by the research objectives and formulated questions. Global, continental and local literature on perspectives of the strategies used to acquire ICs for postgraduate students has been reviewed. The literature review was conducted under the guidance of the research objectives and research questions.

2.2 Intercultural competence

The acquisition of components of ICs by postgraduate students in the 21st century has increased drastically and become more important (Barrett *et al.*, 2014). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as the source of knowledge adopted a concept of intercultural education to assist postgraduate students to acquire components of ICs (Janeiro & Fabre, 2014). Intercultural education promotes the understanding of different people and cultures. It includes teachings that accept and respect the normality of diversity in all areas of life. It makes every effort to sensitize the learner to the notion that we have naturally developed in different ways (Barrett *et al.,* 2014). The concept of intercultural education contributes massively to developing an intercultural competent graduate who is globally informed. Such graduates become internationally informed and relevant to the changing world. This makes it simple for postgraduate students from various institutions to relate and interact better. When postgraduate students relate and interact better, they become independent and confident to socialise with students from other cultures freely. Schartner (2015) asserts that the acquisition of ICs components at HEIs by postgraduate students helps in addressing stereotyping and associated challenges. Therefore, the categorization of people according to culture, language and clothes are unlikely to occur. According to Leyerzapf & Abma (2017), when postgraduate students particularly those from rural-based universities acquire ICs, their morale is boosted.

The acquisition of ICs is a continuous process. This means that there is no point where one can be declared competent enough. This is because the process of becoming culturally competent occurs every day. Every day is a learning platform for one to become culturally informed (Harrison, 2012). Leyla (2004) postulates that culture evolves from time to time, therefore one is required to learn new ways of doing things and adapting to the changes. This argument is supported by Wang & Kulich (2015) who laments that acquiring ICs can be best explained as a life learning process and there is no point where an individual can be deemed to be competent enough. Jackson (2015) argues that developing the components of ICs

requires a deep self-reflection, understanding of other cultures and appreciating the similarities and differences of various cultures. As alluded to in the discussion above, worldwide, HEIs have adopted the acquisition of ICs as one of the aspects of running the core business of teaching and learning. Various strategies are being used to support postgraduate students acquire IC components. Thus, the acquisition of ICs has a positive impact on the quality of learning and teaching at HEIs (De Wit, 2019).

Stone (2006) establishes that HEIs in Australasia and the United Kingdom are developing strategies that can enable postgraduate students to acquire various components of ICs. Similarly, study abroad programmes are being used in the USA as a strategy of acquiring components. Various scholarship opportunities continue to be made available for interested postgraduate students. In China, HEIs have adopted the concept of ICs. The concept of ICs also became important in fostering the teaching of Mandarin language, particularly to international students. Furthermore, the HEIs in China and the United Kingdom signed several MoUs that target strengthening relationships while fostering the acquisition of ICs by postgraduate students in the respective countries (Kim *et al.*, 2017). In Canada, HEIs are also implementing strategies for acquiring components of ICs (Adler, 2008). Ever since the 1990s, the concept of ICs spread into South Africa and the HEIs responded by applying the e-learning services to enhance the acquisition of components of ICs (Meier, 2007).

2.3. The model of intercultural competence

According to Jackson (2015) for postgraduate students to develop and acquire components of ICs, it requires a deep self-reflection and introspection. The understanding of other people's cultures and appreciating the similarities and differences of various cultures is very critical in acquiring components of ICs. To simplify this, Deardorff (2006) has developed a model that explains the process of acquiring ICs. Table 2.1 details this model. According to Wang & Kulich (2015), the acquisition of ICs components takes time and needs caution and proper embracing for one to excel. This argument is supported by Deardorff (2006) in her model of ICs. He postulates that there is a great demand for a desired internal outcome. The desired external outcome of the ICs is the ability to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately in other people's languages. Therefore, one should be able to communicate the message clearly to the second person without any failure using a language that is not his or hers. Laura & Nokelainene (2017) suggest that this kind of competence is likely not to be obtained if there is no effective participation of postgraduate students in the active engagement situations. This notion is supported by Beccaria *et al.* (2014) who maintain that active participation of postgraduate students' is a pre-requisite for successful placement in internship programmes, field placements and other programmes that seek to develop ICs components.

Janeiro & Fabre (2014) suggest that the desired internal outcome of the ICs is influenced by the attitudes and skills displayed by students. This plays a crucial role in their learning platform. How students relate with each other within the campus has an impact on how one acquires components of ICs. Furthermore, Hou & McDowell (2014) support the above concept by articulating that postgraduate students need to move out from their comfort zone to learn as much as they can. Jin (2014), Leyerzapf & Abma (2017) support this notion by indicating that a move from the comfort zones would enable postgraduate students to learn and gain more experience. This will provide students with a deep understanding of cultural knowledge including understanding other worldviews and sociolinguistics. Furthermore, a good attitude leads to the development of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery if it is properly managed and implemented. Attitude plays a crucial role in the learning platform of students. Postgraduate students then find it simple to relate with others in a classroom setup or a community-based situation.

Observation, listening, evaluating, analysing and interpreting skills are identified by Deardorff (2006) as among the most relevant if postgraduate students are to become more competitive. Students need to develop the above-mentioned skills as a way of developing the experience needed for them to excel in life. This suggests that students should be able to observe situations and understand that communities are unique. As alluded to in the discussions above, listening forms part of the learning of students. This aspect becomes more important when cooperating and interacting with others. It also adds value in developing a relationship with people from various cultural backgrounds or social understanding.

Table 2.1: Model of Intercultural Competences (Deardorff, 2006)

Desired external outcome:
Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude) to achieve one's goals to some degree

Desired internal outcome
An informed frame of references/filter shift:
Adaptability (to different communication styles & behaviours; adjustment to a new cultural environment); flexibility - selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviours; cognitive flexibility; ethno relative view empathy.

Knowledge and compression	**Skills:**
Cultural Self-awareness; Deep understanding and knowledge of culture (including contexts, role, and impact of culture & others' worldviews) Culture-specific information; Sociolinguistic awareness	To listen, observe and interpret To analyse and evaluate

Requisite attitudes:
Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity, openness to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures) withholding judgment, curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)

2.4 Process of becoming Interculturally Competent

It has been asserted in Chapter One that the acquisition of ICs has become a priority for HEIs in the 21st century. Various methods have been put in place to assist postgraduate students to acquire components of ICs. Internationalization has been one of the driving agenda in the acquisition of ICs. Internationalization is defined as a process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society (Wit *et al.*, 2015). Universities have been engaging each other in the international arena as a way of finding the best platform for students to be engaged in the various exchange programmes to gain the experiences needed. The exchange programmes are implemented as another method of preparing postgraduate students for life outside the university community. Janeiro & Fabre (2014) supports this assertion by postulating that since the adoption of the internationalization of higher education, the development of partnerships among HEIs has gained momentum. Several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) among universities have been signed as a way of finding a way of working together and strengthening their relationship. This makes collaboration smooth and strong amongst HEIs. It also creates a platform for learning from each other. The signed MoU assists HEIs to have a guiding principle when embarking on a partnership. The MoU also stipulates what each partner is expected to do and specifies the period in which the tasks are to be performed.

As alluded to in the discussion above, internationalization brings new prospects to the education system of the HEIs. This has resulted in many HEIs adopting the internationalization of higher education as one of the programmes to help students acquire ICs. With this at hand, it is important to note some of the series that influence the internationalization of higher education. Improving the quality of education, producing globally employable graduates, advancing cultural understanding and contributing to social cohesion are some of the arguments around the promotion of internationalization of higher education. The internationalization process has a big bond with the promotion of the acquisition of the ICs and plays a role in students being reckonable enough on the world market.

There are several strategies outlined by scholars within the concept of ICs. Deardorff (2006) outlines five strategies for acquiring components of ICs. Firstly, intentional and developmentally sequenced program design of learning; secondly, the balanced challenge and support leading to the reduction of anxiety in intercultural encounters; thirdly, facilitating learning before, during, and after ICs; fourthly, language emersion and extensive ICs and lastly, cultivating curiosity and cognitive flexibility. Barrett *et al.* (2014) also point out other

seven strategies for acquiring ICs components. The strategies mentioned below identified by Deardorff are very key in the acquisition of IC components by postgraduate students. The identified strategies are namely as follows: buddy programme, student exchange programme, homestays programme, research, and service-learning project, student-based volunteering, internships, and field placement. These strategies have also been outlined by   Barrett *et al.* (2014) as the most appealing to the challenges faced by postgraduate students. Despite the strategies being more appealing, the attitude displayed by each individual has a negative or positive impact on how fast one acquires ICs. Furthermore, the acquisition of IC components differs so is the process involved in acquiring them. However, strategies complement each other. The implementation of various strategies is met with its specific challenges. Challenges vary due to many issues; the set-up environment can easily influence the way strategies are being used and considered.

Cao *et al.* (2017) assert that it is very important for someone studying at HEIs to be culturally competent at work and school. He further postulates that Individuals that are effective and handle themselves appropriately in intercultural situations display high levels of cultural self-awareness and understand the influence of culture on behaviour, values, and beliefs. Therefore, it is always recommended for HEIs to have strategies put in place to support the acquisition of ICs. Delpechitre & Baker (2017) postulate that a person who commands a good number of the components described above is generally considered interculturally competent. However, few things should be addressed such as cultural knowledge or cultural contact. These components help individuals to find it easy to interact and relate with people from other cultures. The above skills contribute effectively in eliminating stereotype tendencies. This also applies to knowing other people's languages and helps individuals to communicate simply and get the message correctly using a borrowed language.

2.5 Influence of Gender on the Acquisition of Intercultural Competences

Gender plays a huge role in influencing how personal relations and interaction is conducted in any environment. However, according to Reilly (2012) men and women do not differ in general intelligence. Therefore, it is possible to find that there are female students who relate and interact better compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, some female students can excel better in academics than their male counterparts. Moreover, some female students have a great personality and sense of humour than their male counterparts. De Wit (2019) claims that having a better personality has a major role in the acquisition of IC components. This assertion has been supported by Leyla (2004) argues that females stand a better chance to acquire IC components due to the nature of their great personality. Moreover, according to King *et al.* (2013), the issue of gender in acquiring ICs is mediated and influenced by the

attitudes, values and beliefs a group of people has. This notion is supported by Deardorff (2015) who articulates that the perceptions that an individual has about male and female relations hold serious judgment. Mayer & Viviers (2015) hypothesized that the acquisition of ICs is also influenced by the religions that male and female individuals should not be personally related. Some female students are less sociable compared to their male counterparts. Many female students fear the unknown resulting in pushing themselves into isolation. Some female students also suffer from a societally class division. This makes it difficult to relate and connect with male students.

Laura and Nokelainen (2017) assert that the majority of female students find it simple to relate and interact with many peers outside of the classroom. Reilly (2012) assumes that male students always have an upper hand when interacting and socializing with female students. Some interactions result in males developing an interest to have romantic relationships. The acquisition of ICs by male and female students is also determined by how societies tackle the issue of human equality. In some societies, there is nothing wrong with a woman demonstrating a low level of adjusting and learning slowly as compared to a man while in other societies it's a matter of concern. Cultural values and practices influence one's social interaction and behaviour.

2.6 Influence of Level of Study on Acquisition of Intercultural Competences

According to Reilly (2012) students who stay long enough in the university system tend to acquire components of ICs faster than those considered to be junior students. The longer they stay in the system, the more they get used to people. Being in a system for more than a year creates an opportunity for one to know all the corners of the university. This leads to one gaining more experiences as far as student life on campus is concerned. Almost every day they develop a new friendship. The more friendships are developed among students, the more such individuals interact with new people. This helps them to interconnect with the outside world and feel relevant. Senior students tend to develop and acquire components of ICs faster than newcomers. Senior students also play a huge role in assisting new students to adjust to university life. Furthermore, senior students tend to develop and grasp the knowledge through participating in many activities that take place within the university premises. Senior students also find it simple to learn and adjust to a cross-cultural environment as opposed to junior students. They come with a lot of influence and high contribution to the development.

2.7 Rationale for Acquiring Components of Intercultural Competences

Matveev & Merz (2013) argue that it is important for students to acquire ICs as they help graduates to compete globally. Intercultural competencies help students to gain knowledge and skills which enable them to understand the world from the perspective of ordinary people. This assertion is supported by Kudo (2016) who postulates that the acquisition of ICs helps in producing a graduate that is recognized as a global person. Deardorff (2006) asserts that graduates who possess ICs are easily recognised by companies in the international arena. Acquisition of cultural diversity as one of the components of ICs and the ability to manage the interconnectedness of some aspects across cultures fosters the creative skills to interrelate with colleagues in the work environment. Janeiro & Fabre (2014) are of the view that this helps postgraduate students to be more tolerant of people from other cultures. The promotion of acquiring IC components prepares students to be prepared for the challenges that they will be faced within the international community. With the globalization of the world economy gaining momentum in the international arena, the acquisition of ICs also plays a crucial role in promoting the globalization of the world economy and multinationals. Wit *et al.* (2015) suggest that cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills are needed to have successful intercultural encounters. Besides, it also helps to have some knowledge of cultural, hierarchical, and communicative concepts.

Shafaei & Razak (2016) argues that acquisition of IC competence is essential for teaching and learning in a cross-cultural environment. Ramlutchman & Dayaneethie (2013) further reason that IC components do not only benefit students but also teachers. Possessing relevant IC components plays a critical role as it provides teachers and lecturers the opportunity to teach in the students' culture (Jayme, 2015). This becomes critical and impacts positively on the education students receive (De Wit, 2010). Furthermore, Sabine (2011) affirms that it plays a critical role in assisting the non-native speakers of the local languages to learn and adjust to the needs of the new environment. The IC components create a suitable environment for various languages to engage and communicate effectively without challenges. It also becomes more important for postgraduate students when working in multilingual groups. All participating students can freely participate effectively while using various languages without encountering communication challenges. In multicultural groups, the acquisition of ICs become more essential as it helps in addressing the challenges of group identity. This also helps students with low self-esteem not to lose their cultural identity. Janeiro & Fabre (2014) explain that promoting the acquisition of ICs helps preserve culture. Therefore, the acquisition of ICs promotes culture and contribute massively to cultural preservation.

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Poor demonstration of IC components by postgraduate students leads to stereotyping, miscommunicating and misinterpreting other people's culture (Gierke *et al.*, 2018). Where communication is broken, trust is also violated. This results in postgraduate students leaving in fear of each other. It creates an unhealthy environment where students are afraid of each other. Consequently, the level of interaction and socializing is affected. Postgraduate students who do not possess ICs are likely to behave inappropriately because of cultural differences (Rozkwitalska, 2014). This may result in many not willing to compromise for the sake of peace and progress. It is common for people to believe that their culture is superior to others'. Janeiro & Fabre (2014) suggest that if HEIs do not promote the acquisition of ICs, its postgraduate students will not enjoy multi cross-cultural relations with each other. Their focus will be sorely on completing the degree programme. Such graduates find it difficult to relate and interact with people outside the academic world. The acquisition of IC components remains of global importance as all nations work together promoting world cooperation. This has been evidenced by the signing of MoUs for collaboration and cooperation by HEIs in teaching and learning. The individuals with better understanding and knowledge require less supervision or monitoring at work and turn to be more productive and innovative. Laura & Nokelainen (2017) postulate that this improves the chances of carrying out highly effective community projects that will help in the improvement of economic and social factors. When projects are properly implemented, they tend to have a positive impact on the lives of people and also boost the economic activities of the host community. This may lead to the creation of employment opportunities. This makes the people of the host community more engaged in the day-to-day activities of their community.

2.8. Core components of intercultural competences

2.8.1 Affective

Albir & Olalla-Soler (2016) outline effective processes as emotions that span during intercultural interactions. These emotions are strongly related to self-concept, open-mindedness, non-judge mentalism, and social relaxation. In general, positive emotions generate respect for other cultures and their differences. According to Hansen *et al.* (2011), affective skills demand practical involvement. Therefore, the issue of curiosity and practicing cultural humility is a key to success. This involves the process of self-teaching of another people's culture. For one to develop a better attitude, there is a need to tolerate other people's ways of doing things. Moreover, one should always highlight the attitude of learning and appreciate other people's culture. Less judgment and a lot of appreciation and compliments characterize this process.

Where attitudes are properly applied, individuals tend to enhance the skills and develop more multiple perspectives. This plays a critical role in someone's life as the chance of improving the level of understanding of how other people operate can simply be adopted. Barrett (2012) argues that a postgraduate who has acquired IC components will have many viewpoints of issues from many angles. This notion is supported by Deardorff (2015) who claims that postgraduate students who have acquired ICs are better at relating and interacting with people from the outside world. Such students are also believed to make rational decisions. Moreover, students become more analytical of the various situations and make sense of abnormal or unusual situations.

2.8.2 Skills

According to Barrett (2012) developing the art of listening to people from other cultures remains of critical importance when one is in the process of becoming interculturally competent. The skill of listening attentively helps individuals to have a better way of interacting with people from various cultures. Postgraduate students who possess good listening skills are likely to better understand the economic, social and political inequalities in a globalized and pluralistic society (Matsui, 2016 & Dalib *et al.,* 2017). This notion is supported by Agnew & VanBalkom (2009) who argue that possessing components of ICs help improve one's understanding of economic, social and political issues affecting the world. Students who understand the world are likely to interact better with almost everyone. Thus, students will acquire the skills to adapt in various environments and interact effectively. Challenges normally encountered during intercultural interactions such as discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice are addressed politely as people communicate effectively. The acquisition of various skills remains a critical aspect in the development of the world hence all nations are working together for one common goal. Therefore, a multi-skilled postgraduate tends to be more resourceful to his/her community. Even state institutions are looking for more skillful individuals for purposes of improving the economic status of rural communities. Postgraduate students who have acquired various skills also prefer to be in more challenging environments to continuously learn from others and improve their knowledge.

2.8.3 Cognitive flexibility

According to Janeiro & Fabre (2014), the understanding of situational and environmental aspects of intercultural interactions and the application of intercultural awareness are affected by the understanding of and one's own culture. Self-awareness in intercultural situations refers to the ability of self-monitoring in such interactions to censor anything not acceptable in another culture. On the other hand, cultural awareness leads to the individual's understanding of how his/her own culture determines the feelings, thoughts, and personality of other people.

This assertion is supported by Meier (2007) who also asserts that cognitive abilities play a critical role in determining the way people behave towards those from different cultures. Cognitive abilities also play a vital role in helping people to relate and interact better. Where there's smooth interaction, people tend to exchange ways of improving the lives. Therefore, social interaction remains important in every aspect of acquiring IC components. The interaction of people in the work environment is considered very important. In many cases, greetings such as the handshake are viewed as a welcoming gesture. This lays a simple, relaxed and conducive environment for proper observation and learning from the hosts. Rienties *et al.* (2013) argue that once there is a loss of connection between students and the host communities during student visits, there's a lot that is likely to go wrong. They argue that a proper foundation of learning would have been missed. However, if student's visits to various communities are properly implemented the student is likely to learn almost everything in a suitable environment.

2.8.4 Knowledge

The acquisition of knowledge is one of the most important aspects of ICs. Krajewski (2011) asserts that acquiring knowledge creates a friendly environment. It helps students to become more culturally aware as the acquisition of new knowledge happens every day. Every moment becomes a learning platform and an opportunity to grasp new knowledge. The acquisition of intercultural knowledge leads to the student becoming culturally self-aware. According to Deardorff (2006), acquiring the correct knowledge creates communicative awareness. The latter author adds that it makes one multilingual and improve ways of communicating with people from other cultures. Students are also exposed to learning cultures from other tribes. This creates an opportunity for them to find some similarities and differences in their culture. The acquisition of IC components also provides a great opportunity for one to become a great cultural expert. Through the acquisition of IC components, students are boasted by the cultures of other people. This becomes a learning experience outside class. Trede *et al.* (2013) also assert that the level of interaction among students is improved. People tend to develop a better understanding of other people's cultures through interaction and acquisition of knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge as a core component of ICs creates an environment free from discrimination based on culture. The world can become a better place to live in as people learn to appreciate and respect each other.

2.8.5 Behavioural skills

Janeiro & Fabre (2014) highlight the acquisition of behavioural skills as a process of how effectively and appropriately the individual directs actions to achieve goals. Actions during intercultural interactions are influenced by the ability to convey a message, proficiency with

the foreign language, flexibility, and management of behaviour, and social skills. Ramlutchman & Veerasamy (2013) postulate that the way a person behaves has a great influence on how one communicates. This notion is supported by Trede *et al.* (2013) who assert that the way a person communicates has a great influence on how the person behaves. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two complement each other. Furthermore, having good behaviour and flexible communication results in orientation activities. Moreover, an orientation action that has a common good for the society results in an elimination of prejudice, discrimination, and conflict in a society. Thus, the passing of the message from one party to another is not affected due to bad behaviour or negative attitude towards one's culture. The flow of communication should be clear and concise.

2.8.6 Cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence can be understood as the capability to relate and work effectively across different cultures (Delpechitre & Baker, 2017). Jackson (2015) explains intercultural intelligence as the process of making sense of the previous experience obtained in a learning environment. The environment can either be friendly or unfriendly to the one acquiring the cultural intelligence. The environment set up to acquire intercultural intelligence create an opportunity for the person to have the ability to understand the situation and experience reality. This creates an effective platform, and people tend to learn fast when the environment is effective. When HEIs create friendly environments, postgraduate students will have a lot to learn from staff and other students. This allows them to learn and appreciate each other's cultures. Therefore, no culture will be valued more important than the other. Laura & Nokelainen (2017) argue that the development of cultures has a positive influence on the development of rural communities. Friganovic *et al,* (2017) support this statement by arguing that the teaching of culture is of paramount importance for social integration particularly when people are migrating from one place to another. This has a positive influence on community development. Cultural teaching also plays a role in ensuring that people keep knowledge of where they come from. Therefore, competent graduates tend to understand and have a better picture of cultures' role in the development and improvement of people's life.

2.8.7 Global knowledge

Understanding the world is one of the most prerequisites of becoming an interculturally competent person. This aspect provides an opportunity for students to be more globally connected and informed. Deardorff (2006) postulates that being globally knowledgeable makes students more relevant. He further asserts that this makes them more reliable. Being

globally knowledgeable means that students will stay up to date with what will be happening around the globe. Deardorff (2015) asserts that students who obtain global knowledge shift cultural boundaries. The more students become globally knowledgeable, the more they become socially transformed. It creates a better place and a better world where people can relate without judging each other.

2.9 Summary of Literature Review

It has been revealed in the literature review that in the 21st century, the acquisition of IC components by postgraduate students has increased. Several of the world's HEIs are trying to find ways of assisting postgraduate students to acquire components of ICs. The literature revealed that several HEIs are engaging in formal relations as a way of trying to find methods that can be used to assist postgraduate students to become global citizens. The findings show that students who possess components of ICs stand a better chance of finding employment opportunities compared to those who don't. Deardorff (2006) hypothesize that students who display IC components are mostly targeted by employers as they display better skills required for the work environment such as being professional at all time. This assertion is supported by Jackson (2015) who argues that those who do not have components of IC do not have a better relationship with colleagues in a work environment while those who have acquired IC components can relate with almost everyone one while practicing professionalism. The relating of co-workers remains a very critical issue for any operating institution for purpose delivery its objectives. The more students relate better with people from various backgrounds and cultures they stand a better chance to acquire IC components.

According to the literature, postgraduate students who demonstrate components of ICs decorate the world with the humbleness and appreciation of other people's culture. Furthermore, because of having high qualities of ICs, they appreciate the work of globalization. Such postgraduate students relate with students of the international community the same way they relate with local students. This social relation and interaction help them to be competent for the needs of the global community. It has been noted that the process of becoming culturally competent happens every day. Each day becomes a learning platform. Furthermore, IC components complement each other. Despite having good arguments to tell about the acquisition of IC components, literature also reveals that there is a great need for HEIs to improve the strategies for acquiring ICs. It has been noted from the existing literature that there's a huge impact that acquisition of ICs has on teaching and learning at HEIs. This includes improvement in the quality of education that HEIs provide and the quality of graduates that are produced. The RBUs continue to play a passive role in promoting the acquisition of ICs by postgraduate students. This continues to happen despite evidence from the literature

showing the benefits of promoting the acquisition of possessing ICs by postgraduate students has its benefits.

The literature review has also presented a clear picture that the acquisition of IC components presents an opportunity for students to grasper new knowledge that can be used to develop the communities they come from and the world at large. This is because through social interaction students would learn about other challenges and how they had possible solve them. Literature also revealed that postgraduate students who are considered to be interculturally competent play a significant role in the development of communities. Such individuals have got a better approach and have a better potential of uniting communities around culture. It has been proven and highlighted in the literature that culture plays a significant role in the development of rural communities. When citizens are culturally united, they can work together peacefully. The community unifies and work for one common goal for the betterment of their livelihoods and future.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual literature review of the study. Literature was gathered from a global, continental and local literature on perspectives of strategies was reviewed. This chapter discusses the research methodology applied in the study. The chapter also presents the means of how the research objective was achieved. Moreover, a description of a study area is outlined. Figures, tables and diagrams are used to better explain some important features of the study. Ethical consideration adhered to is also discussed.

3.2 Description of the Study Area

The study was carried out at the University of Venda (UNIVEN). It is one of the 26 South African universities. The university is situated in Thulamela Local Municipality of Vhembe District Municipality in the far north of the Limpopo Province. The University of Venda was established in 1982 (Francis *et al.* 2016). In 2021, it marks 39 years of its existence. It was established under the apartheid government and it was only meant to cater to the black population. This institution operated under the Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959, which supported the separation of tertiary education according to race and languages. Ever since the university has transformed and replaced old infrastructure with modern infrastructure. The University of Venda is comprised of eight schools namely: School of Law, Human and Social Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Education, Management Sciences, Agriculture and Health Sciences. The university offers both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. There are both local and international students registered for various programmes. Many of the local students come from Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces while the dominant international students come from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, Kingdom of eSwatini, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and Botswana. For the 2018 academic year, the university had 16 536 registered students comprised of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

3.3 Research Design

The study was guided by the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The design helped to gain an understanding of personal experiences through qualitative methods and evaluating them using quantitative means. The explanatory sequential mixed methods design was further chosen to explore and better describe the nature of individual experiences. Triangulation of data collection methods, techniques and sources was employed. For instance, students were categorized according to gender and level of study to increase clarity and

completeness of results. In addition, a qualitative study was conducted first and the results were used to develop the questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used in order to best address research objectives which required exploratory and explanatory data collection techniques. Furthermore, when quantitative and qualitative methods are combined, it helps to provide a better understanding of the problem under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Data was collected through a survey questionnaire which was circulated through emails, WhatsApp and Facebook. Open-ended questions are explanatory in nature and offer researchers an ample opportunity to gain insight information or data. Furthermore, the researcher opted for an open-ended questionnaire to have a deeper understating of the perceptions and attitudes of participants on the extent of acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioural ICs among masters and doctoral students. Closed-ended questions were also important for quantifying results. Therefore, the use of closed-ended questions was also very instrumental in the research objectives of the study (b.)- explore the strategies postgraduate students use to acquire ICs; and (c.)- determine the major strategies used to acquire ICs.

3.4 Population and Sampling

The study targeted postgraduate students at the University of Venda. At the time of the study (2020), the University of Venda had 757 postgraduate students registered for full-time masters and Ph.D. studies. Multi-stage random sampling was used to select respondents. The selected sample was further clustered into two groups of Masters and Doctoral students. Convenient sampling was also used to determine and identify respondents. While voluntary sampling was further utilised and applied by respondents as students voluntarily responded to the survey. For purposes of reliability of the results, the study targeted 300 postgraduate students. A survey questionnaire was distributed through email, WhatsApp and Facebook. The survey questionnaire comprised of the Likert scale type and semi-structured questions. Completing the survey took between 15 to 25 minutes. A total of 104 postgraduate students responded to the questionnaire which translates into 14% of the sample.

3.5 Data Collection

Data was collected through the triangulation method. Triangulation methods refer to the use of multiple methods or data sources in research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). The use of the triangulation method enables the testing of data validity through the convergence of information from various sources. Postgraduate students were categorised into two groups, firstly the level of study and second gender of participants. Literature review consisting of clarification of concepts, components, and strategies used in

the acquisition of ICs and factors influencing the acquisition of ICs were examined. A study on the qualitative study was first conducted and its results were used to inform the quantitative study. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was in Likert scale and semi-structured questions. The questionnaire also comprised of open-ended questions. Applying Likert scale questions enabled the researcher to measure the attitudes and perceptions of the respondents towards the acquisition of IC components. Respondents were requested to give frank and honest answers. Masters and Ph.D. students participated in a survey questionnaire which was circulated through emails, WhatsApp and Facebook. This was conducted through a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire also helped to assess the extent of the acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioural intercultural competencies among Masters and Doctoral students. Major strategies were determined through matrix scoring. Through the administration of the questionnaire, the strategies for acquiring ICs were ranked against each other. The higher the strategy is ranked the higher priority it becomes. Please correct your page numbering throughout the document.

3.6 Data Analysis

To achieve the overall aim and objectives of the study, data was entered into a computer software using Microsoft Excel and transferred into Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. Various tools within SPSS were used to interpret and make sense of collected data. Furthermore, descriptive statistics (measures of central tendency – mean, mode, median and measures of dispersion – minimum, maximum, skewness, kurtosis, variance, etc.) were used to understand variables constituting the data. Reliability statistics were also employed in measuring the degree to which questions that were tested on the same scale were internally consistent. Furthermore, correlation analysis was also performed to establish how behavioural, cognitive and affective skills' overall mean scores were related to several biographical information variables. Non-parametric tests were also used to test –if the level of the study of postgraduate students affected their perception of the extent of acquisition of ICs and to check the existence of any differences in perceptions due to the level of study. In particular, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to test the hypothesis (b) while the Kruskal Wallis test was used to test hypothesis (c). Graphs and frequencies were also used in providing answers to research objectives relating to the strategies masters and doctoral students use to acquire intercultural competencies and the major strategies used to acquire intercultural competencies.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Before the commencement of data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the study. Participants were not given any money as a form of appreciation for their participation.

However, participants were informed that the participation was voluntary. Participants were asked to sign a consent form confirming their willingness to participate. Furthermore, it was clarified to participants that they could freely withdraw at any stage if they felt that they no longer felt like continuing with the study or if they felt uncomfortable. The anonymity of participation was assured. Where names of participants were used, these were kept secret and coding descriptive was applied. Data obtained from the study were used for this study only. Since the research or the study was about people, an ethical clearance certificate from the University Research Ethics Committee was obtained before carrying out the study. An approval from the university to carry out the study was obtained before commencing. Sources of data that were used in the study have been correctly cited following the IRD referencing style.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the study. The chapter will present statistical results obtained from analysing primary data collected from 104 postgraduate students enrolled at the University of Venda. Descriptive statistics in the form of measures of central tendency (mean, standard deviation) and measures of dispersion (minimum, maximum values, range, variance were used to describe the gathered data. Tables were also used to further describe the data. The demographic information and composition of age, gender, and education level of the participants are presented in the following section. The chapter is divided into two sections with the first section covering the qualitative study and the second section covering the quantitative study.

4.2 Demographic Details of Respondents

Of the 104 students who responded to the questions, about 60% were male. More than half of the respondents (53 %) were 19-35 years old. The remaining 53% and 38% were aged 36-50 and more than 50 years, respectively. Approximately, 59% of the student respondents were single followed by those who were married (38%). The rest were divorced. Slightly more than two-thirds (68 %) were enrolled for Master's degree programmes with the remainder being Ph.D. candidates. Most of the respondents (40%) were in the second year of their postgraduate studies. Following these were those in third (26%) and first-year (20%) of studies. The rest were in the fourth and fifth years of study. Slightly more than two-thirds were enrolled for master's degree programmes with the remainder being Ph.D. candidates.

4.3 Phase 1 of Study

4.3.1 Strategies of acquiring Intercultural competences

Table 4.1 shows the strategies which the postgraduate students at the University of Venda used to acquire intercultural competencies. Students indicated that they acquired intercultural competencies through participating in "cultural learning and cultural events" and "student leadership structures such the Student Representative Council". Participating in Africa day celebrations and other social events were among the strategies used by postgraduate students to acquire ICs.

Table 4.1: Strategies of acquiring Intercultural competences

Responses	Number of responses	% of respondents
1. By participating in Cultural learning and cultural events	36	35
2. Participating in student leadership structures such as led in the SRC	28	27
3. Through communication during student gatherings and using various local and other African languages	24	23
4. Seeking information and staying up to date with other people's culture through watching television and reading about them	23	22
5. By participating in students' movements non-academic activities and getting elected to the executive management of student's organisation.	21	20
6. By networking and building relationships with other students during community engagements	19	18
7. Active involvement in student-based organisations	19	18
8. Participating in social events such as Africa Day celebration	10	10
9. Participating in social activities aimed at integrating students (both local and international)	7	7

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4.3.2 Support by the University in acquiring intercultural competences

"Promoting cultural diversity through implementing room allocation procedure that promotes mixing of students from various cultures", "enacting of policies meant to promote inter-culturalism among students and "celebrating of cultural events and accepting people from different cultures backgrounds as students" were the most mentioned forms of support meant to enhance the acquisition of ICs at the University of Venda. On the other hand, conducting student workshops and orientation workshops specifically for first year students was the least mentioned strategy for promoting the acquisition of ICs.

4.3.3 Benefits of acquiring intercultural competences

As shown in Table 4.3, the most frequently mentioned benefit of acquiring ICs was that "students acquire better knowledge" This was mentioned by 39% of the respondents of the study. Speaking many different languages was also highlighted as another benefit of being culturally competent while other respondents also stressed increased employability.

4.3.4 Factors preventing postgraduate students from acquiring intercultural competences

Eleven factors were mentioned as the most issues hindering postgraduate students from acquiring intercultural competencies. Among them, "bad behaviour and attitude tendencies exhibited by students hinder proper social integration" and "lack of willingness from postgraduate to learn and acquire knowledge about cultural backgrounds of other students" were the most common factors with the former being mentioned by 18 % and the latter by 16 % of the respondents.

4.3.5. Strategies for promoting the acquisition of intercultural competencies among postgraduate students

Table 4.5 shows 18 recommended strategies to consider when supporting the acquisition of intercultural competencies among postgraduate students. "Promotion of interaction among students and student-orientated workshops" and "allow students to run their own students programmes without interference" were the most popular perceptions. They were each mentioned by 35% of the respondents. "Promote the issue of student and traveling seminars" was among the least mentioned.

Table 4.2: Support by the University in acquiring intercultural competences

Responses	Number of responses	% of respondents
1. Promoting cultural diversity through implementing room allocation procedures that promotes mixing of students from various cultures	19	18
2. Enacting of policies meant to promote inter-culturalism among students	17	16
3. Celebrating of cultural events and accepting students from different cultures backgrounds	17	16
4. Supporting social club activities run by the International Relations Directorate such as the Buddy Programme.	14	14
5. Creating opportunities in community engagement and encouraging students to volunteer and participate	13	13
6. Offering free access to sports grounds as a way of encouraging maximum participation in socially motivated programs such as soccer, volleyball and tennis	12	12
7. Providing a free and safe environment for students to pursue freely their political and social movements, thus providing students with an opportunity to learn from each other.	11	11
8. Conducting orientation workshops specifically for first year students	9	9

Table 4.3: Benefits of acquiring intercultural competences

Responses	Number of respondents	% of respondents
1. Students acquire better knowledge	41	39
2. Developing new friends and getting connected to new people almost every day	39	38
3. Gaining experience in for future employment opportunities	37	36
4. Learning to behave better and relate better with people from different cultures	35	34
5. Learning new things and becoming more confident	35	34
6. Getting new employment opportunities	34	33
7. Getting opportunities to travel and knowing many places	29	29
8. Moving out of comfort zone and embracing new challenges	27	26
9. Increasing chances of getting employment	21	20
10. Having a broader perspective and understanding of the world	17	16
11. Learning to withhold being judgemental	17	16
12. Being able to embrace various cultures	13	13
13. Speaking many or various languages	13	13

Table 4.4: Factors preventing postgraduate students from acquiring intercultural competences

Responses	Number of respondents	% of respondents
1. Bad behaviour and attitude tendencies exhibited by students hinder proper social integration	19	18
2. Lack of willingness from postgraduate to learn and acquire knowledge pertaining to cultural backgrounds of other students	17	16
3. Poor socializing among students	15	14
4. Students segregation based on nationality and cultures	13	13
5. Other students are so focused on their work that they spend most of their time on campus.	11	11
6. Poor social cohesion programmes which promote unity among students at the university	11	11
7. Some students do not create enough time to associate with others	9	9
8. There are not enough resources to fund students' programmes	9	9
9. There's a lack of dedication from postgraduate students to participate in students programme offered in the university	8	8
10. Students are interested in direct benefits	8	8
11. Students' activities become dominated by politics and become irrelevant and boring	7	7

Table 4.5: Strategies for promoting postgraduate students' acquisition of intercultural competences

Responses	Number of respondents	% of respondents
1. Promote interaction among students through facilitating orientation workshops	36	35
2. Allow students to run their own students programmes without interference	31	30
3. Create awareness about free participation in university programme	29	28
4. 5. Create more sporting codes for students	25	24
6. Create space for students to interact such as organising seminars and living and learning activities	25	24
7. Create awareness about free participation in university programmes	24	23
8. Embedding cultural learning in academic programmes	22	21
9. Organise gender awareness programmes	22	21
10. Develop a friendly intercultural education policy	21	20
11. Provide internships for learning purposes	16	15
12. Encourage more student volunteerism and student placement. 13.	16	15
14. The university should carry out campaigns to educate students on the benefits of engaging in intercultural activities	15	14
15. Provide more resources to support intercultural programmes such as student exchange, homestays, buddy programme, and student orientated workshops.	11	11
16. Promote volunteerism and participate in various sporting codes. Funding sporting activities	11	11
17. Organise postgraduate seminars	9	9
18. Promote participation of students in travelling seminars	5	4

4.4 Phase 2 of the Study

4.4.1 Behavioural skills

Table 4.5 shows the extent to which postgraduate students acquired behavioural ICs. The students regarded "openness contributes to my intercultural learning and acceptance of people from cultures different from mine" and "Behavioural skills help me to generate a clear sense of self" as the respective top two out of the seven ICs. They ranked "Behavioural skills help me to be tolerant to other cultures" as the least developed behavioural ICs. There were no statistically significant differences (P > 0.05) in student perceptions due to age, gender, marital status and level of study.

4.4.2 Cognitive skills

"Cognitive skills help me to develop self-awareness of my cultural identity" and "Cognitive skills help me to understand how cultures vary" were regarded as the most developed ICs of postgraduate students at the University of Venda (Table 4.6). It was revealed that "Cognitive skills have a positive influence on my personal development as a postgraduate student" was the least developed intercultural competence out of the 10 that were considered. The only differences in perception due to gender were observed for "Cognitive skills help me to understand how cultures vary".

4.4.3 Affective skills

The six affective skills considered to have been acquired by postgraduate students, the view that "Affective skills tend to make me more flexible in what I do" (mean ± standard deviation, 4.2 ± 0.59) was regarded to be most applicable. The other competencies in descending order of having been acquired were, "Affective skills help me become more adaptable to situations I come across" (4.2 ± 0.76), "Affective skills make me a self-reliant individual" (4.1 ± 0.64, "Affective skills help me develop deeper confidence to deal with situations I face" (4.1 ± 0.78), "Affective skills enhance my open-mindedness" (4.0 ± 0.85), and "Affective skills help me to have and keep an open mind" (4.0 ± 0.82).

Table 4.6 Extent of development of behavioural skills as intercultural competences of postgraduate students

Competence	Descriptive statistics (n = 104)	
	Mean	**Standard deviation**
1. Openness contributes to my intercultural learning and acceptance of people from cultures different from mine	4.2	0.08
2. Behavioural skills help me to generate a clear sense of self	4.1	0.08
3. Behavioural skills contribute to changing my perspectives of situations I come across	4.1	0.08
4. Behavioural skills help me not to be judgmental	4.1	0.08
5. Behavioural skills help me to engage in a cross-cultural environment such as in our university	4.1	0.08
6. Acquisition of behavioural skills changes bad attitudes I might have to good or better	4.0	0.07
7. Behavioural skills help me to be tolerant to other cultures	3.8	0.07

* = P < 0.05   ns = not statistically significant difference   n is the sample size

4.3.4 Strategies commonly used to acquire intercultural competences

It is shown in Table 4.7 that the strategies that students at the University of Venda regarded as the most effective in equipping them with ICs were student development-focused workshops; internships and field placement; and student-based voluntary work, respectively. Differences in perceptions between male and female students were observed for "student development-focused workshops" and "Buddy programme" (P < 0.05). Although there were no differences in perception due to age and gender for the effectiveness of "internships and field placement" as a strategy for equipping students with intercultural competencies, the opposite was true for marital status and level of study (P < 0.05). Lastly, there were differences in perception of the effectiveness of joint research" and "Intercultural education and training programmes" (P < 0.05) in developing ICs of students at the University of Venda. There were no differences in perception due to age, gender, marital status and level of study (P > 0.05) regarding the rest of the strategies applied.

4.4. Conclusions

The chapter presented the findings of the study on the strategies used by postgraduate students to acquire ICs. The results of the qualitative and quantitative study were presented and analysed. The sense was developed and explained. Where necessary, graphs were used to demonstrate meanings.

Table 4.7: Extent of development of cognitive skills as intercultural competences of postgraduate students

Competence	Descriptive statistics (n = 104)	
	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Cognitive skills help me to develop self-awareness of my own personal cultural identity	4.2	0.08
2. Cognitive skills help me to understand how cultures vary	4.2	0.08
3. Cognitive skills help me improve verbal	4.2	0.08
4. Postgraduate students who display behavioural skills have better knowledge or understanding of issues than those who do not acquire intercultural competences	4.1	0.07
5. Cognitive skills help me to adapt to various environments	4.1	0.06
6. I believe that a graduate who displays behavioural skills socially relates better to people from various cultural backgrounds	4.1	0.08
7. Cognitive skills help me to accept and acknowledge different cultures	4.1	0.08
8. Cognitive skills help me to improve my knowledge of other cultures	4.1	0.06
9. I believe cognitive skills contribute to development of sense of humour in me	4.0	0.07
10. Cognitive skills have a positive influence on my personal development as a postgraduate student	3.9	0.06

* = $P < 0.05$ ns = not statistically significant difference   n is the sample size

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Table 4.8: Common strategies that postgraduate students at the University of Venda use to acquire intercultural competences

Competence	Descriptive statistics (n = 104)		Significance of association with			
	Mean	Standard deviation	Age	Gender	Marital status	Level of study
1. Student development focused workshops	4.3	0.08	ns	*	ns	ns
2. Internships and field placement	4.1	0.08	ns	ns	*	*
3. Student based voluntary work	4.1	0.07	ns	ns	ns	ns
4. Cultural events that the university and student formations organise	3.9	0.08	ns	ns	ns	ns
5. Joint research	3.9	0.07	*	ns	ns	ns
6. Sporting activities or tournaments	3.9	0.09	ns	ns	ns	ns
7. Research and service learning projects	3.9	0.07	ns	ns	ns	ns
8. Intercultural education and training programmes	3.9	0.09	*	ns	ns	ns
9. Buddy programme	3.6	0.08	ns	*	ns	ns
10. Travelling seminars	3.6	0.09	ns	ns	ns	ns
11. Homestays programme	3.6	0.08	ns	ns	ns	ns
12. Student exchange programmes	3.6	0.08	ns	ns	ns	ns

* = P < 0.05   ns = not statistically significant difference   n = sample size

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the discussion of results presented in Chapter 4. Conclusions and recommendations are also drawn. The main objective of the study was to analyse the strategies which postgraduate students at a selected rural-based university in South Africa used to acquire ICs. The study had three specific objectives, the first objective was to assess the extent of acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioural ICs among masters and doctoral students; the second objective was to explore the strategies postgraduate students use to acquire ICs; and lastly determine the major strategies used to acquire ICs. In the following section, both qualitative and quantitative results are discussed. Then, recommendations for promoting postgraduate students' acquisition of intercultural competences are explained. Finally, the general conclusions drawn from the study are presented.

5.2. Discussion of the Results

The literature analysis has revealed that the demand to acquire IC components has increased drastically in the 21st century. HEIs have forged corporations to create a smooth environment for corporations to enable postgraduate students to engage in exchange student exchange programme. By so doing, it creates a space and environment for students to acquire IC components. This new development has been marked by the signing of MOUs by HEIs as a way of enabling such corporations through the signing of MOUs. Furthermore, a huge movement of students across the globe has marked the need for the acquisition of IC. This would enable students to relate and interact better in the new environment. The recognition of multi-cultural individuals by international companies had also put more postgraduate students to be more eager to learn and have skills to adapt to a new environment. Additionally, acquiring ICs give students better opportunities for employment as international companies require dynamic individuals.

Cultural learning has been marked as an important aspect in transforming the lives of postgraduate students. Cultural learning requires more than becoming culturally aware or practicing tolerance. Instead, it is the ability to identify and challenge one's cultural assumptions, values and beliefs, and to make a commitment to communicating at the cultural interface. This exposition confirms the findings of Delpechitre & Baker (2017) who postulate that interacting with people from other cultures helps students to acquire ICs as well as to adapt to new environments. Jackson (2015) explains cultural intelligence as the process of making sense of the previous experience obtained in a learning environment. Therefore, through cultural learning, an opportunity for students to learn from each other as well as speaking each other people's languages is presented.

An ability to communicate and pass the message from one person to another has also been marked as one of the imperative characteristics. It has been highly emphasised that the communication barrier is removed through proper interaction. People then learn to appreciate each other and accept each other as equals. No culture is either considered to be superior to others. According to Cheng *et al*, (2012) all cultures are valued the same and equal and complementing each other. The consideration of cultures equally provides a friendly environment for all students to engaged and interact. De Wit (2019) notes that tolerance is the first step in the right direction to the acquisition of IC components. It becomes easier for students to engage in robust discussions expressing themselves in various languages without communication breakdown. Students transform into better people who are ready to change the world and contribute positively. Some other students seek information by associating themselves with people from other cultures. While other students enjoy reading about other people's culture and as well as watching television.

According to De Wit (2018) debates that students acquire ICs through the means of communications where foreign languages are used. Laura & Nokelainen (2017) supports this assertion by postulating that through building and maintaining lines of communication, students can acquire intercultural competencies. For instance, these can be acquired through communication during student gatherings and using various local and other African languages. This happens to be the simplest and fastest way for international students to learn local languages and make new friends. Moreover, during student gatherings, local languages are most commonly used while at the student churches they preach in English and translate into local languages. Deardorff (2015) also hypothesizes that students with better communication stand a better chance to relate and interact with people at the international level. Communication remains critical for students to become interculturally competent and relevant in the 21st century.

The findings also reveal that postgraduate students at UNIVEN also participate in student leadership and volunteering themselves as leaders of various student formations. This happens simply because they can interact with a very large group of students daily. It also becomes a platform for learning other people's languages as they will learn during an interaction. Student volunteerism is also encouraged and recognized by handing over the certificates of appreciation. Additional students volunteer with the hope of improving their CVs. A good CV enables students to be considered for employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors. The notion of student leadership is supported by Jackson (2015) who postulates that students who possess experience in student leadership stand a better chance of becoming global icons.

Involvement in university activities where students engage for social (for example, getting involved in student-based organizations that deal with community-related issues (for example, Amplifying Community Voices Student Association, (ACVoSA), political (such as participating in political activities of the university such as serving in the SRC) and economic goals were suggested as some of the strategies postgraduate students use to acquire intercultural competences. This idea has been supported by Wang & Kulich (2015) who demonstrate that university programmes are aimed at helping students transfer and develop to be a better individual.

Participation in social events such as sports was also cited as another way of acquiring ICs. These social programs transcend from sports participation to other social events directed at promoting social cohesion such as the buddy programmes and student orientated workshop programmes. Moreover, students who are also interested in business happen to create a business together and become partners. Wang & Kulich (2015) support the above arguments by postulating that social programs that promote social cohesion should be enhanced and implemented by HEIs to uplift students. However, becoming socially integrated does not translate into being competent enough because acquiring ICs is a continuous learning process. Therefore, the social programs involve learning and one learns every day. Kim *et al.* (2017) & Romani-Dias *et al.* (2019) also assert that the programme of learning happens every day and the social programs will be an arena for learning and improving.

This encompasses collaboration research efforts by individuals as a gateway for acquiring ICs. For instance, writing academic papers can also promote intercultural learning and appreciation of one's cultural background. The university hosts conferences, which provide an opportunity for postgraduate students to interact with people of high calibre and students from various institutions, which present an opportunity for joint research that results in the publication of research papers.

However, globalization has its positive attributes in the development of people's lives. Wit *et al.* (2015) argue that globalization improves the level of intercultural encounters. Globalization creates an opportunity for postgraduate students to become more culturally intelligent. Leaving in a new environment creates a vacuum and forces one to learn new skills of practical understanding in a foreign environment (De Wit, 2019). However, the student's abilities for intercultural effectiveness are varied and unique. This results in creating a gap for the general understanding of how and why other students are more effective in other people's cultures in a cross-cultural environment. For students to adjust and survive in a foreign land they need to acquire cultural intelligence to relate and adjust to the needs of the new environment.

The university supports the acquisition of ICs by offering free access to sports grounds as a way of encouraging maximum participation in socially motivated programs such as soccer, volleyball, tennis. Furthermore, the university also participates in celebrate historic days in South Africa that are embedded and targeted to influence people's integration in society such as Africa Day (commemorated on 25 May) which is celebrated in the whole of Africa and Cultural day (commemorated on 24 September). September is considered a heritage month in South Africa. During heritage month and various programmes are rolled out across the country as a way of carrying a campaign to educate people about their and other people's culture. Various organisations come on board to have their unique way of celebrating the heritage months. Various cultures are celebrated, the attire of cultural clothing and serving several cultural foods.

Through participation in social cohesion programmes, students develop positive attitudes that lead to positive criticism and positive development (De Wit, 2018). Developing a positive attitude also leads to the development of a better way of social interaction with people of other cultures. Scally (2015) suggests that through social cohesion, one tends to develop a positive ambiguity and have a better way of explaining bad experiences in a good way. Individuals also tend to develop the love of staying in a multicultural environment. Such individuals appreciate challenges and embrace them in a positive way for future development. It is believed that challenges lead to the new fortune of life. The findings also revealed that postgraduate students at UNIVEN do not dedicate their time to student social interaction programmes hence the low level of acquisition of intercultural competencies.   Another challenge outlined was the issue of political interference where other students lose interest due to micro-managing by those who have a political interest in many students' formation.

It was observed that the majority of respondents agreed with the view that openness contributes to their intercultural learning and acceptance of people from cultures different from theirs. In support of this statement, Stone (2006) alleges that Higher Education Institutions in Australia had become more aggressive in implementing strategies of acquiring intercultural competencies. Respondents also believed that cognitive skills helped them to develop self-awareness of themselves and personal cultural identity. Janeiro & Fabre (2014) believe that acquiring intercultural competencies helps postgraduate students to develop better attitudes and skills. The acquisition of ICs components should not be mistaken to be for people who travel the world but for all who need to see changes in communities. It has been highly recommended and emphasized that postgraduate students need to efficiently interact socially and relate with other people from different cultures with the hope of acquiring skills and learning new lessons outside the class. These lessons can simply be practically implemented in the daily life of human beings. In return, better community development and improvement of people's lives is achieved. De Wit (2019) contends that the more

people interact, the more cultural diversity becomes enhanced. He further assumes that the interaction of human beings also remains critically important for the achievement of world globalisation and attainment of world peace. When human beings relate civilly, issues the clash of civilization and hatred among cultures becomes minimum and avoidable. Therefore, people get an opportunity to work towards one goal of improving the livelihoods of human beings. They then work together towards rural development and the improvement of people's lives. Everyone strives for excellence other than the pull each other down syndrome which is usually perpetrated by hatred and intolerance against others' cultures. Various skills and methods of addressing challenges that face people on daily basis are shared. The shared skills are then replicated by others in their development and use skills learned from others to improve their communities.

5.3 Recommendations for ensuring postgraduates acquire intercultural competences

5.3.1 Promote interaction among students

The most effective way of ensuring that postgraduate students acquire ICs is through implementing social integration programmes for promoting interaction among students. This includes implementing activities such as sporting, adopting accommodation allocation criteria that promote interaction among students. Allocating rooms based on students' level of study should be avoided. Moreover, the university management should not interference with students' affairs. The university should provide the required infrastructure for hosting student-organized events such as cultural days, seminars, workshops. Moreover, resources required to fund student activities need to be availed if postgraduates are to properly acquire intercultural competencies. Furthermore, awareness programmes through an enhanced orientation of new students need to be created so that students are aware of the free participation nature of university social programmes such as the buddy programme.

5.3.2. Embedding cultural learning in academic programmes

Another way of ensuring that postgraduate students acquire ICs is through embedding cultural learning in academic programmes. Through this move, the importance of learning other people's cultures will be taken seriously by all parties concerned. This may take any of the following options:

a) Developing a semester module on cultural competencies for postgraduate, for example, a course related to community development or ICs or community participation
b) Educating students about the richness of other people's cultures. This will enable students to interact with each other without cultural challenges.

5.3.3. Gender awareness programmes

There is a need for the university to hold gender awareness programmes to educate both male and female students on the importance of promoting the acquisition of ICs. The awareness programmes should also be directed at addressing gender-related issues with the potential to prevent postgraduate students from acquiring ICs.

5.3.4. Improved facilities

The state and quality of the facilities used for hosting postgraduate programmes aimed at encouraging participation in intercultural competencies need to be improved to ensure that postgraduates acquire ICs. For instance, school facilities such as sports grounds and infrastructures for recreation should be upgraded to capacitate them to accommodate all students.

5.3.5. The crafting of intercultural friendly educational policy

To ensure that postgraduate students acquire ICs, the university should craft and adopt an educational policy that promotes the acquisition of intercultural competencies by students. This will provide more opportunities for students to embark on programmes that support the acquisition of ICs by postgraduate students.

5.3.6. Provision of internships for learning purposes

The provision of internship programmes for learning purposes can also serve as a tool for ensuring that postgraduate students acquire ICs. This also includes the need for the university to engage partner companies as a way of uplifting the lives of students.

5.4. Conclusions

The study was set to investigate the strategies which postgraduate students at a selected rural-based university in South Africa use to acquire ICs. The study also assessed the extent of acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioral ICs among masters and doctoral students, explore the strategies masters and doctoral students use to acquire ICs; and determine the major strategies used to acquire ICs.

The study findings revealed various methods used by the university to help postgraduate acquire components of ICs. However, even though the university has many programmes that support the acquisition of ICs by postgraduate students there is reluctance in students to participate in many

programmes. Many cited the issues of lack of commitment to student's programmes as the time for academics and social activities clashes. Other students spend much time at work and have less time to interact with others on campus as they stay off-campus. The issue of discrimination based on nationality or tribe has also been highlighted as an issue that hinders the progress of students when acquiring ICs. This is simply because many students tend to discriminate based on nationality and the language that others speak, and this makes other students feel unwelcome.

The study also revealed and categorized four benefits of acquiring ICs namely, knowledge, and experience, behavioural and social benefits. Knowledge benefits refer to the benefits enjoyed by an individual who has acquired ICs as he/she becomes better informed. Moreover, students become well informed about other people's cultures and find ways of living thus becoming more tolerant and globally informed. Moreover, students become better individuals and have a better understanding the world transformation. The acquisition of IC components helps students to adjust to the rapidly changing world and helps one to become more marketable for work opportunities in both private and public sectors. The acquisition of IC components helps students view situations and the world in a very unique way. Additionally, the individual develops self-integrity and diversity. Lastly, social benefits can be described as the opportunity obtained for creating friendships and long-lasting networks that may prove useful in the future through improved prospects for getting employment.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Informed Consent

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Strategies of Acquiring Intercultural Competences Among Postgraduate Students at a Rural-based University in South Africa

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : Mathebula Forget (Masters in Rural Development)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : Prof J Francis (Supervisor).

: Mr C.A. Hagenmeier (Co-supervisor).

: Dr P Nyamukondiwa (Co-supervisor)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The concept of intercultural competence (IC) was established in the 1950s. Since then various scholars have to defined IC in many ways (Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Byram (2012) and Deardorff (2006) define IC as a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills, and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in various cultural contexts. Chen and Starosta (1997) define it as the necessary precondition for an adequate, successful, mutually satisfactory communication, encounter and cooperation between people from different cultures. Jin (2014) defines IC as the process that involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures. Differences in defining IC is a result of the focus on the application of the term. Some scholars focus on the cultural awareness, knowledge, and motivation while other scholars focus on communication and behavioural skills. The concept of IC has a thoughtful impact on the way people behave and interact act in the globe. One of the major impacts is the improvement in people's social interaction. A proper social interaction creates an enabling environment for people to work together for one common goal particularly the betterment of the world. However, the existing literatures outlines that the social interaction of postgraduates from RBUs is less effective and not well connected to people from the outside world, particularly postgraduate students from RBUs. However, postgraduate students from Urban-Based Universities are much better off compared to those from RBUs. In the early 1990s, rural and urban South African universities joined the world institutions in the quest to promote the acquisition of intercultural competences. For this reason, it is crucial to analyse the strategies to

acquire intercultural competences by postgraduate students studying at rural-based universities in South Africa.

The purpose of the study is: The main objective of the study is to analyse the strategies for postgraduate students at a selected rural-based university in South Africa use to acquire intercultural competences.

Outline of the Procedures : (*Responsibilities of the participant, consultation/interview/survey details, venue details, inclusion/exclusion criteria, explanation of tools and measurement outcomes, any follow-ups, any placebo or no treatment, how much time required of participant, what is expected of participants, randomization/ group allocation*).

A semi-structured interview guide will be developed using English as a medium of instruction. Furthermore, the targets of the study are literate therefore, no challenges will be experienced or any need of vernacular languages. This party is divided into 4 sections: Section A; Biographic information of the participants, section B; Characteristics of Intercultural Competences, Section C: Components of Intercultural Competences and Section D: Strategies of Intercultural Competences. The study is targeting a minimum of 100 to 150 maximum participants. The targets is directed at Masters and PhD student at the University of Venda. It is estimated that 20 to 30 minutes will be spend with a single participant.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: (*Description of foreseeable risks or discomforts to for participants if applicable e.g. Transient muscle pain, VBAI, post-needle soreness, other adverse reactions, etc.)* The study will bear no indirect or direct risk to participant.

Benefits : (*To the participant and to the researcher/s e.g. Publications*)
The participants will be more knowledgeable on impact of interacting with other students at Higher Institution of Learning. This knowledge will also enable them to interact with different people from various culture with no direct challenges. Furthermore, there will be new findings around the concept of Intercultural Competency.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: (*Non-compliance, illness, adverse reactions, etc. Need to state that there will be no adverse consequences for the participant should they choose to withdraw)* if the participant is no longer interested in continuing with the study or feel that his/her rights are violated.

Remuneration : (*Will the participant receive any monetary or other types of remuneration?)* None

Costs of the Study : (*Will the participant be expected to cover any costs towards the study?*) None

Confidentiality : (*Description of the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained and how will this be maintained*) Yes, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will be prioritize. The data will only be used for purpose of this study only.

Research-related Injury : (*What will happen should there be a research-related injury or adverse reaction? Will there be any compensation*?) There's no related research being conducted.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

(Prof J Francis), Mr C.A Hagenmeier or Dr P Nyamukondiwa (Core-supervisors) Please contact the researcher (tel. no. 082 500 9341), my supervisor (tel. no 0159628004.) or the University Research Ethics Committee Secretariat on 015 962 9058. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Innovation, Prof GE Ekosse on 015 962 8313 or Georges Ivo.Ekosse@univen.ac.za

General:

Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population

CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher (*name of researcher*) , Mathebula Forget, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number:
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (*Participant Letter of information*) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

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- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant   Date   Time   Signature

I, **Mathebula Forget** Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Mathebula Forget   Date: ------------------------2019   Signature…………………

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

…………………….   Date ………………..   Signature…………………..

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)

…………………   Date………………   Signature……………………..

APPENDIX B: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Instructions

Please place X in the appropriate box below.

1. Age
Equation 1B: Biographic information

a) Less than 18 years	
b) 19-35 years	
c) 36-50 years	
d) 51 years and above	

2. Gender

a) Male	
b) Female	

3. Marital status

a) Single	
b) Married	
c) Divorced	
d) Widowed	

4. Which degree are you registered for?

a) Masters	
b) PhD	

5. Level of study: For how long have you been registered for this degree?

a) 1st year	
b) 2nd year	
c) 3rd year	
d) 4th year	
e) 5th year and above	

APPENDIX C: DATA COLLECTION TOOL

SECTION A: Importance and Acquisition of Intercultural Competences

Intercultural Competences refer to a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills, and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in various cultural contexts. They are the necessary precondition for an adequate, successful, mutually satisfactory communication, encounter and cooperation between people from different cultures.

Instructions

Taking into account the explanation of "intercultural competences" presented above, kindly answer the following questions in your own words. Note that there is no right or wrong answer.

1. What do you do that makes you acquire intercultural competences?

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2. What does your university do to support the acquisition of intercultural competences?

----

3. What do you regard as the benefits of acquiring intercultural competences?

- -

- -

4. What factors hinder postgraduate students from acquiring intercultural competences in your university?

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5. What should be done in your university to ensure that postgraduate students acquire intercultural competences?

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SECTION B: Key Components of Cultural competences: Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural skills

Instructions

You are requested to use the following key to best reveal your understanding and preferences. Use what you experience in your university when answering the questions below. The question is, to what extent do you agree with the views or perceptions presented below?

1= Strongly Disagree	2= Disagree	3= Neutral or not sure	4= Agree	5= Strongly Agree

Behavioural skills: *knowledge of appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility, and interaction management and social skills.* Now consider the views below and answer to the best of your ability, taking into account how they apply to you as postgraduate student at your university	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Behavioural skills help me to be tolerant to other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
2. Acquisition of behavioural skills changes bad attitudes I might have to good or better	1	2	3	4	5
3. Behavioural skills help me to engage in a cross-cultural environment such as in our university	1	2	3	4	5
4. Behavioural skills help me to generate a clear sense of self	1	2	3	4	5
5. Behavioural skills help me not to be judgmental	1	2	3	4	5
6. Behavioural skills contribute to changing my perspectives of situations I come across	1	2	3	4	5
7. Openness contributes to my intercultural learning and acceptance of people from cultures different from mine	1	2	3	4	5
8. I believe that a graduate who displays behavioural skills socially relates better to people from various cultural backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5
9. Postgraduate students who display behavioural skills have better knowledge or understanding of issues than those who do not acquire intercultural competences	1	2	3	4	5

Cognitive skills: self-awareness of one's own personal cultural identity and understanding how cultures vary. Now consider the views below and answer to the best of your ability, taking into account how they apply to you as postgraduate student at your university.	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Cognitive skills have a positive influence on my personal development as a postgraduate student	1	2	3	4	5
2. Cognitive skills help me to adapt to various environments	1	2	3	4	5
3. Cognitive skills help me to improve my knowledge of other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
4. Cognitive skills help me to accept and acknowledge different cultures	1	2	3	4	5
5. Cognitive skills help me improve verbal (public speaking) and written communication	1	2	3	4	5
6. Cognitive skills help me to develop self-awareness of my own personal cultural identity	1	2	3	4	5
7. Cognitive skills help me to understand how cultures vary	1	2	3	4	5
8. I believe cognitive skills contribute to development of sense of humor in me	1	2	3	4	5

Affective skills: acknowledging and respecting cultural differences Now consider the views below and answer to the best of your ability, taking into account how they apply to you as postgraduate student at your university	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Affective skills help me to have and keep an open mind	1	2	3	4	5
2. Affective skills make me a self-reliant individual	1	2	3	4	5
3. Affective skills tend to make me more flexible in what I do	1	2	3	4	5
4. Affective skills help me become more adaptable to situations I come across	1	2	3	4	5
5. Affective skills help me develop deeper confidence to deal with situations I face	1	2	3	4	5
6. Affective skills enhance my open-mindedness	1	2	3	4	5

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Section C: Strategies through which postgraduate students at my university acquire intercultural competences

Instructions

Using a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate the following strategies of acquiring intercultural competences as they apply at your university.

Strategies of Acquiring Intercultural Competences	1	2	3	4	5
1. Buddy programme					
2. Student exchange programmes					
3. Homestays programme (students placed and living as members of households for experiential learning and conducting research)					
4. Travelling seminars (students going to other universities to share their work with peers and other stakeholders there)					
5. Research and service-learning projects					
6. Student-based voluntary work					
7. Internships and field placement					
8. Intercultural education and training programmes					
9. Cultural events that the university and student formations organise					
10. Sporting activities or tournaments					
11. Joint research					
12. Student development-focused workshops					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!!!!!!!

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