STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT ONE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

by

MISOZI CHIWESHE

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PROMOTER: Prof NP Mudzielwana

CO-PROMOTER: Prof T Runhare

Date

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AUTHOR DECLARATION

I, **MISOZI CHIWESHE**, declare that this thesis entitled "**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT ONE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY"** is my own work and all resources that have been used or quoted have been indicated and duly acknowledged by means of complete references.

25 February 2022

M. Chiweshe **Date**

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DEDICATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the engagement and experiences of International Postgraduate Students (IPGS) in South African universities. Given the situation of being in a foreign country, IPGS were likely to face unique challenges as they engage in the new higher education environments. This is against the background that the concept of student engagement features prominently in most academic performance predictions in higher education. The study was a qualitative case study situated in the interpretive paradigm. Tinto's Social and Academic Integration Theory and Kahu's Conceptual Framework of Student Engagement guided the study. A purposive sample of 22 former (11) and current (11) IPGS and one (1) representative from the International Relations Office (IRO) constituted the study participants. The dimensions of student engagement and experiences of the participants were captured through audio-taped one-on-one, telephonic semi-structured interviews. The university internationalisation policy document was analysed to explain policy against practice. Data captured was managed, sorted and organised through the process of thematic coding. The study established that IPGS were positively engaged in their studies despite the challenges encountered because of their sheer determination to get the prestigious South African qualification. Secondly, IPGS found dissatisfaction with the services provided by the institution and the IRO was a letdown as their primary host. The findings also revealed that there were genuine challenges peculiar to IPGS. To succeed with their studies IPGS had to find ways to deal with the struggles where the institution was not of assistance. Results availed information that can be used to help design services and resources that address IPGS' needs and generate continued development and improvement in hosting HEI systems to enhance the quality of IPGS' academic experience.

Key concepts: International Postgraduate Students, international relations office, student engagement, engagement challenges, academic achievement, coping strategies

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AUSSE	Australian Survey of Student Engagement
CAQDAS	Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CHE	Council of Higher Education
EUROSTAT	European Statistical Office
FDI	Focus Group Interviews
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IPGS	International Post Graduate Students
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OIA	Office of International Affairs
PISA	Programme for International Student Association
SA	South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASSE	South African Survey of Student Engagement
UHDC	University Higher Degrees Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
IRO	International Relations Office

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Chapter one

Overview of the study

> *Everything about constructivist approach to learning points towards the importance of learners getting as close to the material content of what it is hoped they will learn as possible and then doing something with it. By undertaking actions and activities, mental or physical, which centre on the facts, the concepts or the skills in question, learners are in a position to move forward in their learning. This closeness is sometimes referred to as engagement*(Pritchard,2009:29).

1.1 Introduction to the study

This introductory chapter presents the background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives and questions that guided the enquiry. The rationale of the study is blended with the significance of the study and delimitations. The chapter also discusses the research design and the methodology.

Several researchers agree that globalisation of higher education has dramatically shrunken the world and made it more unified (Kishino & Takahash, 2019:536). The number of international students in search of education across borders continues to expand worldwide (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018:1267) rising from two million in 1999 to five million in 2016, an indication of the pull of the diverse educational programmes across nations (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018:219). Likewise, the growing number of international students has resulted in a rise in internationalisation policy attention in recent years (OECD, 2018:218) and stimulated international student research among academics (Alloh et al., 2018:1).

South Africa has taken no exception in the internationalisation of its education system. All 23 public universities in South Africa play host to international students with the numbers of students continually growing each year (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015:1). In 2016, South African public universities enrolled a total of 69 381 students of foreign nationality accounting for 7% of the total enrolment

(Higher Education and Training, 2016:18). In that enrolment, three in every five international students were enrolled through a contact mode of learning while 38% of them enrolled through a distance mode of learning. In the same vein, Higher Education and Training also noticed an upsurge in the number of graduates for all qualification types throughout the period 2009-2016 with the highest increases in doctoral and master's degrees which yielded an achievement rate of 83% for the contact mode students in 2016, with international students performing slightly better academically than the host nation students (Garcia, Garza & Yeaton-Hromada, 2019:265). However, the reality observed by the academic community is that despite the good academic performance, International Post Graduate Students (IPGS) are more likely to be confronted with challenges during their studies compared to their local counterparts (Alloh et al., 2018:1; Fass-Holmes, 2016:439; Mokhothu & Callaghan, 2018:1). Given that there are sub-groups of students at risk of dropping out in South African universities because of the unique challenges they encounter, it is, therefore, important to understand how IPGS engage in their studies and the challenges that they face and yet manage to record high academic success rates (Manik, 2015:233). This is in support of Garcia et al. (2019:461) who maintain that the quality of educational experiences in an institution influences student institutional retention and success rates.

How IPGS engage in and benefit from the college experience may vary greatly (Kuh, 2003:30; Wawrzynski, Heck & Remley, 2012:106). In this present study, for example, there could be a variation within IPGS experiences which are of interest to this study, hence the call for the exploration of IPGS engagement experiences and challenges in a South African university with the hope that understanding their experiences from their narratives will assist institutions to improve "on what they can implement at the institutional level in their context to make student success a reality" (Manik, 2015:230).

1.2 Rationale and significance of the study

During 2000-12, the number of foreign tertiary students worldwide more than doubled, with an average annual growth rate of almost 7% (OECD, 2014:343). To that effect, the number of international students globally increased from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.5 million in 2012. Once international students are enrolled efforts must be made to

ensure that they are well received and assimilated quickly into college life to improve retention and ensure adequate classroom performance (Hegarty, 2014:321).

The benefits students obtain while studying away from home come with a series of challenges and struggles for them to overcome (Koseva 2017:879). Research has backed that indeed international students are confronted with a variety of obstacles in terms of language, adaptation, homesickness and culture shock and differences in communicative pattern as they undertake studies in foreign countries (Hegarty, 2014:228; Koseva 2017:876). However, far less attention is paid to the challenges of international students in their trek at preparation for study abroad, during their study abroad, or at the post-graduation stage (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:561). Nevertheless, international students, see the benefits as compensation for the struggles (Koseva 2017:876). This is an indication of a highly motivated group of students on campus (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:561). This scenario validates the necessity to continue developing and expanding research on challenges faced by international students abroad and explains the need for resourcefulness in supporting international students (Koseva 2017:877). This investigation was, therefore, conceived as a need to highlight struggles international students come across in pursuit of postgraduate education.

To help develop this study, an intensive preliminary literature review was necessitated. It was during this literature review that a gap was glaring in information relating to IPGS in South Africa which focused on the challenges of IPGS in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This study, therefore, advanced the research agenda by adding to existing knowledge on a focused study of student engagement experiences at one of the universities in South Africa. Likewise, several national and international studies reviewed either utilised quantitative surveys or archival records to explore student engagement in learning institutions. This study, however, took a qualitative case study approach thereby adding to the existing literature on educational qualitative approaches to study student engagement in HEI.

Student engagement is useful to anyone devoted to student learning and success. Hence, the information obtained informs students, parents, student advisors and counsellors, academics, education departments and HEI about how international students spend their time and effort while they are at a foreign university and how the

experiences affect development, perceptions and individual and institutional academic achievements. 'It is important that professionals working directly with international students know how to adapt to the diversity of the group, effectively communicate with them, and understand their needs' (Koseva 2017:876). Hence, 'a collaborative approach among university constituents and a shared understanding of international students' needs and struggles can lead to higher student retention and an enhanced educational experience' (Hegarty, 2014:232), which benefits both the students and the institution because inadequate support and understanding increase the challenges of IPGS (Koseva 2017:877).

The findings of the study could as well help inform IPGS and guardians about effective engagement practices which could improve the engagement levels which in turn may lead to a satisfying and successful university experience. The study also alerts guardians of the challenges their children encounter when they study abroad. The awareness will help guardians make informed decisions on the kind of support they can provide for a successful academic experience for their children. IPGS as well need to be alerted on the available support and resources when familiarising with the new environment and to know that their predecessors also went through the same struggles but managed to succeed (Hegarty, 2014:321).

Prior research has proved that the prevalence of university students drop out is a result of challenges that confront them during their studies. These barriers usually emerge in a variety and diversified forms and thus intensify the challenges (Koseva 2017:876). More so, the challenges vary among countries, within countries, from institution to institution and among individuals. Ammigan and Laws, (2018:1296) Titrek et al. (2016:154) and Willms (2003:55) bemoan that the variation of the challenges may not draw the attention of national concern. The use of a case study informs relevant authorities to view international student engagement challenges as unique to certain university peculiarities compared to the universal approach to student educational policies and programme designs. Therefore, this study benefits the students and the institution of study by using the findings of the study to enhance the learning environments through the provision of support services and resources that promote student engagement. It is through this empirical study that suggestions guided by research are made for the students and the institution to stimulate student

engagement on campus by curbing the challenges IPGS face when studying out of the comfort of the home environment. So, “there is need for a critical consideration of how internationalisation efforts are embedded within the strategic plan of each institution, how they are implemented and, most importantly, how their effectiveness is evaluated” (Koseva 2017:889).

Student engagement is often stressed within the agendas of student retention and determination (Mwangi, 2016:1017). Hence, the results of this study bring awareness of the implications of engagement of the student and institutional achievement. This is against the background that, generally, educators divert their energies on education at the expense of student welfare and retention (Willms, 2003:57).

The results of this study will similarly help provide baseline data to inform policy makers and other academics in the HEI of South Africa, who wish to conduct detailed national surveys on IPGS’s experiences, challenges, academic achievements and persistence as predicted by student engagement. Highlighting IPGS engagement experiences in HEI can stimulate academic community conversations on emerging issues about IPGS in universities.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The international student population in most universities the world over is on the increase, especially at the postgraduate level (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan 2016:984). Due to globalisation and the influence of Information Communication Technology (ICT), universities are becoming more and more international in their diversification of enrolment because of this student migration (Kahn, 2014:1016). South Africa, likewise, has witnessed an upsurge in the number of international students opting to study in the country (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209). In 2013, 74 000 international students registered in South African universities which accounted for 8% of the student body and 15% of them were postgraduate international students (Mokhothu & Callaghan 2018:1). It was also found that for every three international students, two were from the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Mda, n.d:1). Students from the SADC are lured by the geographical proximity of the nations, the shared cultures, the apparent high quality of education leading to better employment and most of all, the bilateral agreement of the subsidised fees for all SADC member states (Mda, n.d:1; Mokhothu & Callaghan 2018:5). Mda (n.d:1) notes

that non-SADC African countries also sent in almost twice the previous enrolment figure during the period between 2001 and 2006. However, South Africa welcomes the influx of enrolment because of the economic gains to the nation (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209). With the rising enrolment of international students, universities, as well as the IPGS, should be aware of and address the challenges that international students face in their universities that could impact their studies and success rate. Interaction or engagement within a university or an institution for that matter influences one's academic participation and performance (Aaron et al., 2018:1321; Chrysikos, Ahmed & Ward, 2017:100). As international students face a new study environment, they are likely to face engagement challenges with peers, the international officers and the academic staff (Ammigan, 2018:1295; Fass-Holmes, 2016:935). This study, therefore, explores challenges that IPGS encounter in their engagement with these university stakeholders which could negatively influence their success rate in their studies.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore student engagement challenges experienced by IPGS at one South African university. Prior research confirms that the core of the conceptualisation of student engagement is its focus on the activities and experiences that are associated with desired university outcomes (McCormick, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2013:5). Exploring the student engagement and experiences of IPGS was significant to student and institutional academic successes. The knowledge gained provided explanations of IPGS engagement challenges that might influence the academic success of a university and opportunities that promote and enhance academic achievements (Allen et al., 2018:409; Lyche, 2010:652) at a South African university. Further, the study sought to examine professional services and resources available in the university that support IPGS during their studies. Additionally, the study sought to understand how IPGS handled the challenges they encountered in a foreign country. Having a better understanding of students' academic challenges, the university can realise and acknowledge what students require and successfully offer supportive campus resources and services (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015:1).

To explore the engagement and experiences encountered by IPGS at one South African university, this study addressed the following research objectives:

1.5 Main research objective

To explore engagement experiences of IPGS which affect academic performance at one South African university.

1.5.1 Sub-objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1.5.1.1 Articulate the types and nature of engagement and experiences between IPGS and their peers as well as staff at one South African university.

1.5.1.2 Examine professional support services provided to support the IPGS at one South African university.

1.5.1.3 Explain challenges faced by IPGS in their engagement with their peers as well as staff at one South African university.

1.5.1.4 Discuss strategies employed by IPGS to cope with their studies at one South African university.

1.6 Research questions

The main research question for this study is:

What are the engagement experiences of IPGS which affect academic performance at one South African university?

1.6.1 Sub-questions

1.6.1.1 Which are the types and nature of engagement and experiences between IPGS and their peers as well as staff at one South African university?

1.6.1.2. Which are the professional services and resources provided to support the IPGS at one South African university?

1.6.1.3 What are the challenges faced by IPGS in their engagement with their peers as well as staff at one South African university?

1.6.1.4 Which strategies are employed by IPGS to cope with their studies at one South African university?

1.7 The theoretical framework for the study

Many theories explain the dropout and retention of college students. The various theories share the view that retention is a result of student engagement in learning (Dupere et al., 2018:9; Mastrorilli, 2016:17). For example, the Theory of Involvement by Alexander W. Astin (1999) has its roots grounded on a longitudinal study of college dropouts whose aim/purpose was to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affect the students' persistence (Astin, 1999:523). After reviewing the theories used by different scholars, the theory of retention and social integration by Vincent Tinto appealed for this study because of its guide to investigating IPGS student engagement and experiences as threats to university retention (Kahu & Nelson, 2018:59). This is in line with Wawrzynski et al. (2012:108) who suggest that since there are no theories in the literature that are peculiar to South African student engagement, "South African education scholars will utilise the American higher education concepts, theories and models to inform research on student engagement and success". This study, therefore, explores challenges faced by IPGS and how they managed to cope, remain in college and complete their studies in an environment which threatens retention due to the unique challenges of studying in a foreign country. This study should therefore add value to the dearth of adequate concepts and models that help to understand internationalisation of higher education in the South African context which is alluded to by Wawrzynski et al. (2012:108).

Social and Academic Integration theory by Vincent Tinto

This study was guided by the social and academic integration theory by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1993). Tinto came up with the model out of the concern of student dropout and attrition in higher education institutions (Abdullah et al., 2015:277). He postulates that positive interaction between the staff, the peers and the social system of a university can stop the process of students dropping out of higher learning institutions. He predicts that it is the commitment invested to either academic or social integration that decides whether students left the college prematurely or the study is completed. Vincent Tinto's assertions have propelled to the fore-front the investigation of sociological analysis of retention and academic success in higher education institutions (Schreiber, Luescher-Mamashala & Moja, 2014: v). This study was also guided by these assertions to investigate and analyse IPGS engagement experiences

as barriers known to expose students to the risk of disengagement, student dropout or delayed graduation.

The central idea of the model is its complementary relationship between social and academic integration. Chrysikos et al. (2017:100) explain that social integration entails campus relationships that students experience with people and the academic-related activities that students engage in. Academic integration is the shared academic attitudes and values. Both integrations influence the decisions that IPGS make on whether to persist or withdraw from their studies. Tinto further proposes that the extent of the academic and social integration together with the determination of the students and the institutional goals are all instrumental to student retention (Karp, Hughes and O'Gara (2008:2). The more the integration intensifies, so will the student connectedness to the institution, resulting in positive outcomes such as retention and graduation. In this way, stronger ties are created between the student and the university that translate to individual and institutional success. Contrary to this, the undesirable behaviour patterns widen the rift between the student and the university social community thereby creating a difference in the shared goals of the institution and student, which may lead to dropout or delayed graduation (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The submission is that "persistence is thus a function of integration into the academic and social aspects of the university system, mediated by goal commitments" (Schreiber et al., 2014:vi). The above understanding is vital for this current study in the prediction of the types and levels of engagement challenges and achievements of IPGS because the kind of relationships on campus developed can influence college achievements (Chrysikos et al., 2017:97).

Tinto's theory requires students to move beyond the experiences they bring to accommodate the experiences of the new university environment. Students who are capable of associating with the university of their studies are more likely to remain enrolled in that university (Chrysikos et al., 2017:100). This is more important for IPGS who have diverse socialisation experiences from their respective nations of origin wishing to belong or feel connected to the new environment. The authors acknowledge that some students may fail to associate themselves with the new environment and those whose association to the institution is not strong enough have the potential to drop out of the university.

Tinto (1993) also notes that interactions with the university personnel, educational related activities and peer interaction roles of social integration strategies (Chrysikos et al., 2017:100) and the strategies are essential experiences that promote student persistence in colleges (Davison & Wilson, 2013:314). It is extensively documented and acknowledged that international students post positive success rates, are hardworking and have a high desire to learn (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822). However, Tinto (2014:21) suggests that student success does not arise by coincidence but institutions and individual students must play a role. With these elements in mind, Vincent Tinto's work paved a way for a sociological examination of ways in which IPGS can cope with the unique student engagement challenges and experiences they encounter in universities. To that effect, this study explored the engagement challenges and coping mechanisms IPGS adopted that lead to academic success in a foreign country.

In a lecture given to higher education student affairs and teaching and learning professionals in South Africa in 2013, (Schreiber et al., 2014: viii) Tinto underlines that active engagement with other students in learning and participation in academic-related activities are the most predictors to learning outcomes (Tinto, 2014:20). He puts it forward that students who interact with staff and other students create relationships thereby increasing study time that yields academic excellence. It is against these claims that Tinto says, "for many students, social engagement is often a precursor to academic engagement". It is for these motives that Tinto's theory and its assumptions will help explain the engagement and experiences encountered by IPGS as they interact with academic activities.

Students who are not able to form sound relations on campus expose themselves to the risk of dropping out. Besides, the nature of relationships in higher learning institutions is dynamic as students constantly interact with the university's academic systems (Schreiber et al., 2014: v). For the noted observations, institutions must provide services to create a conducive campus if they must maximise student retention and success (Davison & Wilson, 2013:314). Tinto (2006:6) advises that it is important to understand the challenges that students experience and to be aware of what the institution can provide for student success. He goes on to say without support, most students may fail to complete their study programmes. In his view, once students are enrolled, institutions are indebted to providing the services to their full potential. It was

during Tinto's lecture in South Africa that Perna (2014:31) noted that the first lesson Tinto gave was that "promoting college student success requires more than enrolling students; higher education institutions must also provide the support that students need to persist and progress to the completion of the degree." In that way, students can develop social and academic integration skills in both informal and formal ways (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). Tinto's model, therefore, provides a useful framework to identify and explain the engagement and experiences of the IPGS in a selected university that will allow for the understanding of their continued persistence and academic success in a South African university (Schreiber et al., 2014, 2014:vi).

1.8 Preliminary Literature

Figure 1.1 Preliminary literature review

1.8.1 The Internationalisation of higher education institutions

This study explored experiences and challenges that IPGS encounter in their engagement with the university of their destination. The study adopted the South African definition for an international student stated by The Department of Higher Education and Training: South Africa (2017:11). An international student will, therefore, be identified as "an individual registered as a student in a public or private higher education institution in a country other than their country of citizenship". Students who originated outside South Africa but had permanent residents were regarded as South Africans and were therefore not part of the population of the study.

Over the past half-century many HEI the world over have witnessed an influx of international students entering the universities (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:984). The United States (US), with 26%, is the global leader destination for students who prefer to study outside their original countries. The next destination of attraction is the United Kingdom (UK) with 15% of the students followed by France and Australia gaining ground at 11% and 10% respectively as the preferred overseas study destinations (Choudah, 2016: i). The reason for the US leading is the purported

high-quality education and for that reason, the students anticipate better career opportunities and a prosperous livelihood after graduating from US universities.

Globally, the internationalisation of higher education is gaining interest due to the various needs of the universal world (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138). For example, international students are known to bring economic gains to the host nation. Also, international students have an academic advantage to the institution because of the rigorous selection process they go through. Again, they bring diversity in thinking and become a good source of cultural diversity in the host university (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822). Within this universal context, South Africa as a nation has similarly seen a rise in the numbers of international students in its higher education institutions (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209). The department of Higher Education and Training: South Africa (2017:11) explains that in 2013-2014 there were 73 859 international students in the South African public universities which was a substantial growth from the 46 687 who enrolled in 2002. The highest percentage (73%) of the international students came from SADC countries. Other countries on the African continent contributed 16% while 9% of the students came from the rest of the world. The SADC countries provide the most students in South Africa and Zimbabwe tops the list, followed by Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in that order (Mda; Mokhothu & Callaghan 2018:5). This positive trend of movement in South Africa, as stated by the Department of Higher Education and Training, is made possible by the 1997 SADC Protocol on Education and Training which stipulates that:

- higher education institutions in South Africa should reserve at least 5% of admissions for students coming from SADC nations.
- higher education institutions should treat students from the SADC countries as home students for purposes of tuition fees and accommodation.

By approving the protocol, the South African government undertook its initial step to internationalise higher education in the country and saw a growth rate of international students with the greatest increase realised in the postgraduate programmes. Chinyamurindi (2018:209) asserts that because of the expansion of the international student population in South African universities, strategies must be put in place for international students to develop a sense of belonging in South Africa that would enhance their academic experiences and retention rates.

However, international students come from a diverse range of nations, backgrounds, experiences, skills and levels of English proficiency (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138). Consequently, they face difficulties and unique challenges in adapting to the new environments intensified by the demands of the academic rigours that accompany higher education level competence (Perry, 2016:741). It is more so for the IPGS, whose level of research experience are more demanding and challenging than the undergraduate students. It is this subset of IPGS facing the most challenges on foreign land that became of interest to this study. Having IPGS on university grounds, therefore, necessitates examining the unique challenges that they encounter and provision of the right support for engagement (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:139) through national and institutional policies, processes and services for the realisation of student and institutional achievements (Department of Higher education and training: South Africa, 2017:11).

To effectively serve this growing population it has become necessary to strengthen the student support systems (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan 2016:984). Moreover, a study abroad and dissertation writing are high-impact education practices in higher education which research suggests influence student engagement and retention (Kuh, 2008:19). Covington (2017:2) proposes that student success is gained through student activities in universities and it is the responsibility of the university to provide these activities. This study, therefore, explains the experiences and engagement challenges of IPGS and the professional support and services deployed or lack of it at a South African university.

1.8.2 Student engagement and its significance to international students

Student engagement is described as participation in educationally purposive activities inside and outside the classroom that represent two critical features which yield a range of measurable outcomes (Covington, 2017:4; Quaye & Harper, 2014:2). First, it is the students' commitment to the time and energy into their studies and other educationally purposive activities to achieve their educational goals. The second feature is how the institution deploys its resources and organises the curriculum, teaching opportunities and support services that contribute to the desired outcomes of

learning, satisfaction, persistence, and graduation. Additionally, Quaye and Harper (2014:2) clarify that engagement does not only involve participation but also the range of perceptions that accompany the practice. Kahn (2014:1016:1006) says that because of the current upsurge in the mobility of students across nations in search of higher education, student engagement has become a matter for both the student and the institution. This concern has propelled to the forefront definite education practices that promote student engagement marked by active collaborative teaching, student interacting with staff, the higher level of academic challenge, enriching educational practices and supportive campus environments at the national sector and institutional levels (Kuh, 2003:26). Consequently, this study examines the concerns of engagement challenges and experiences of the IPGS as they commit their time and effort into their studies and how the institution deploys its support services and resources that enhance student engagement in academic activities.

The intentions of this present study mirror the Council of Higher Education (CHE) national pilot study which was undertaken as a reaction to SA universities' low pass rates and some students not graduating on time (Strydom & Mentz, 2010:1). The observation is that the graduation rates are generally lower than the set standards of the national plan for higher education (Department of Higher Education and Training: South Africa, 2015:12). Jaffer and Garraway (2016:63) similarly note that despite the significant increase of black students entering higher education in post-apartheid South Africa, still, very few black students graduate on time and some drop out before completion. The urgent need for improved retention and graduation rates in the South African higher education institutions provides a strong rationale for this current study which will explore the engagement challenges of IPGS whose successes could contribute to the overall success rates in a South African university. This intended study, however, is a case of one university in South Africa and it will focus on international postgraduate students because of the unique challenges and needs they experience studying in a foreign country (Hanassab & Tindwell, 2002:155), while the CHE study was a survey which had all public universities in South Africa for its population with a sample of seven universities and 13 600 undergraduate students participating. One implication of the study was that improving levels of student engagement is effective in improving success rates in universities and the results proved that there are differences in how students of different subgroups experience

higher education in South Africa (Strydom, Basson & Mentz, 2010:25). The results are important for this proposed study as the literature will be useful in providing a framework for establishing the significance of the study and laying the ground for discussing the findings of this intended case study (Creswell, 2009:24).

1.8.3 Engagement challenges faced by international students in foreign universities

Prior investigations indicate that international students encounter many difficulties during their study abroad which are not experienced by domestic students. However, it has been noted that despite the challenges they come across, the number of students that are crossing the borders to study continues to increase universally (Titrek et al., 2016:148). This indicates that by studying in a foreign country and succeeding, international students represent a highly motivated group of students whose focus is on academic achievement and its benefits (Khanal & Gaulce, 2019:560). Nevertheless, the high motivation for studying abroad does not come with ease (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1828). Likewise, Ammigan (2018:1295), Fass-Holmes (2016:935) and Perry (2016:714) lament that while all new students must adjust to the novel campus life, international students bear the most brunt of the experience. The challenges international students encounter often incapacitate them academically (Covington, 2017:4) and even with support services and resources put in place, many a time the challenges dominate and the result becomes the underutilisation of the available services and resources due to frustration (Covington, 2017: 4). Thus, all international students at any given institution require services that are unique to them (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:986). Perez-Encinas and Ammigan caution that it is important to also realise that the needs or challenges for international students will differ with the duration of the study or the length of stay in the host country. For example, the language barrier could be a challenge to new international students but as time passes the challenge fades as the students become proficient in the domestic language (Gautam, Lowery & Mays, 2016:514). For this study, it is important to have both the current and former masters and doctoral students to ascertain the effects of duration of stay and study on the challenges experienced by IPGS.

The academic community has illustrated the presence of challenges for international students studying at higher education institutions in the US (Tas, 2013:8), Malaysia

(Talebloo & Maki, 2013:143) in the UK (Bamford, 2008:2), in Turkey (Titrek et al., 2016:154), Sweden (Williams-Middleton, 2010:7) and many other areas not referred to in this preliminary literature review. The concern for the diverse challenges for IPGS for this intended study is justified today because, despite prior investigations, some of the problems still prevail as evidenced by current literature (Tas, 2013:8). In this situation, university output may be compromised by international students' academic struggles (Fass-Holmes, 2016:934). Tas (2013:8) adds that similarly, the challenges may affect the graduation rates which are known indicators of student success, retention and institutional accountability. For that reason, it is the intention of this study through an empirical exploration of the university being studied, to examine and explain the challenges that the IPGS face during their time of studies. It is also important to recognise that the diversity of the institutions and students creates a challenging situation and therefore "requires well-articulated and collaborative programming and outreach" to overcome the challenges (Ammigan & Laws, 2012:1296). Quaye and Harper (2014:8) suggest that the decisions made for international students must embrace students' voices. This study, through interviews, will hear from the current and former IPGS the challenges that they experience(d) as they pursue(d) their studies.

Several pieces of research highlight various challenges that manifest among the IPGS in HEI. The challenges are as diverse as the higher education institutions and the students (Ammigan & Laws, 2012:1296). For that statement, researchers have categorised the challenges faced by international students as per findings of the studies conducted in the different regions and different institutions with diverse international students. Literature shows that some challenges overlap the categories. For example, the challenge of language can be academic if students cannot communicate their writings in proper English (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018:17) or social if international students cannot dialogue with peers and the rest of the university community in their local language (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1829). Hence, some of the challenges are discussed contextually as per the research findings by different authors.

Talebloo and Baki (2013:139), in their literature search for their study in Malaysia, distinguished the challenges into the general living adjustment, financial problems, health care concerns, academic difficulties, socio-cultural difficulties and personal psychological adjustment. However, the findings for their study in a Malaysian university, Talebloo and Baki (2013:140) highlighted the challenges related to facilities, social environments, academic and lack of international service programmes. In another university by Malakloluntu and Selan (2011:836) still in Malaysia, the challenges were found to be financial, religious, personal and academic. A study in Turkey revealed an array of challenges. These include language, accommodation, cultural, separation from family, academic achievement and security (Titrek et al., 2016:154). The study concluded that the challenges differed with individuals and they posited that the challenges could also be different from place to place. The diversity of the findings from the given researches advances the need for case studies, like this current study, when investigating challenges for international students.

1.8.4 University support services and resources for international students

International students are lured to a university by the professional supporting services that are offered by an institution (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:985). Supporting services have a bearing on the engagement level of a student (Kahu, 2013,760). International students enrolled in a university with supportive services and a fully integrating academic system are more satisfied with their university life and will remain students of that university until completion (Korobova & Starobin, 2015). Perry (2016:718) proposes that with the high regard and the value of completion rates and persistence in HEI, supportive environments are worth recognizing. However, international students are barely aware of the existence of the support services and let alone utilise them (Thomas, 2012:18). Thomas professes that services can only be utilised when they are visible and easily accessible to the student, suggesting that professional services can only contribute to the development and identity of students if the students know what support services are available on campus. McCormick (2013:65) substantiates that it rests on the HEI to mould student experiences and the environments to promote high-level student involvement.

Universities need to understand the level of satisfaction of these students with the supporting services they offer (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan 2016:985) because international students deserve more in terms of academic support (Choudah, 2016: ii). Harper and Quaye (2014:1) also believe that international students deserve unique services through strategic and intentional conditions that compel students to the maximum potential of university life. Trowler (2010:44) and Thomas (2012:7) recommend the international affairs office to be central in monitoring students' involvement in educational practices and to work with academic administration and the faculty to create enough prospects for every international student to be involved.

1.9 Research Paradigm, Design and Methodology

This section describes the research paradigm, design and methodology for this study (Figure 1.2).

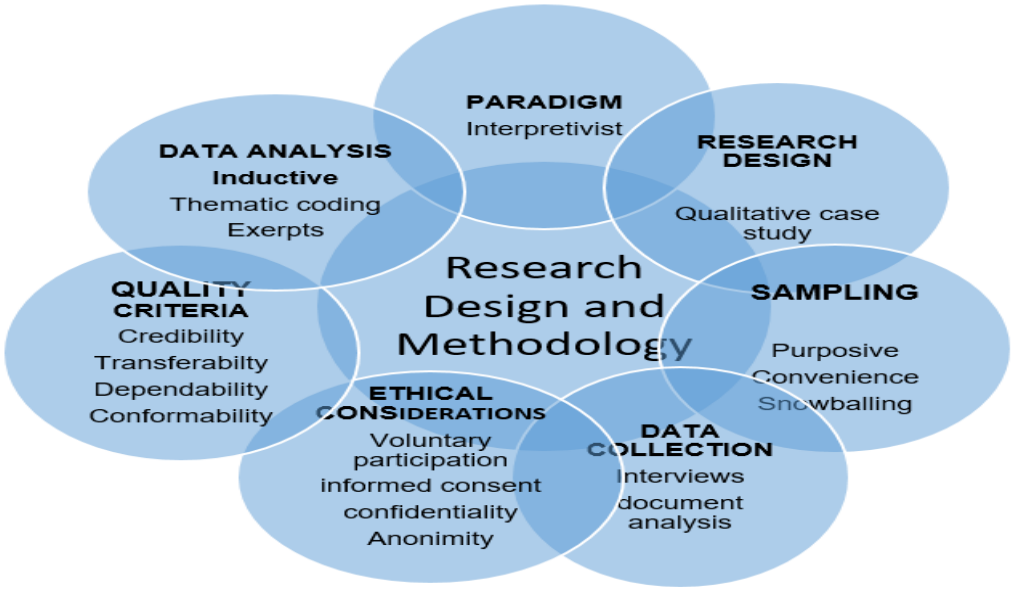

Figure 1.2: Research Paradigm, Design and Methodology

Interpretivism supports researchers in terms of exploring their world by interpreting the understanding of persons or groups (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). This study attempted to explore a group of IPGS engagement experiences and challenges encountered to understand what students do during the studies that make them either persevere or complete their studies at a selected South African university. Taylor and Medina (2013:4) put forward that the experiences of students can best be understood through the interpretive paradigm. To answer research questions through multiple views, I

used the experiences of IPGS and the representatives of the IRO to construct and interpret understandings from the data collected at the university under study (Creswell, 2009:9). The acceptance of multiple perspectives in interpretivism will lead to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the IPGS engagement experiences and academic success (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25).

The interpretive paradigm was supported by the case study design (Szyjka, 2013:111). This study was a case of a South African university which employed a qualitative approach, chosen for its ability to allow for an in-depth understanding of the relationships, behaviours, motivations and experiences of students in the university (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:26). The research problem, research questions, the researcher's world view, assumptions and personal experiences determined guidelines for the researcher in selecting the qualitative case study (Creswell, 2009:3; Devetak, Glazar & Vogrinc, 2010:77). This study was a qualitative case study to explore and explain the engagement experiences and challenges of the IPGS, their coping mechanisms with the challenges encountered in the university and the institutional support services and resources for the students. This aspect me as the central research instrument by personally collecting information to allow for the understanding the context of the participants (Creswell; 2009:3; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013:258; Tracy, 2013:25). This qualitative research stressed participants' verbal descriptions (Devetak et al., 2010:78) Silverman (2013:6) that presumed voice and subjectivity in characterising IPGS' challenges.

The study used multiple techniques and sources of data collection for diversity and triangulation of the techniques to get meaningful truthfulness of the individual characteristics in a single study (Devetak et al., 2010:78). The rigour breadth, richness and depth to the enquiry of the research (Kumar, 2014:157) was therefore achieved through interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2009:181; Silverman, 2013:189; Yilmaz, 2013:315) through one-on-one telephone interviews and document analysis (Tracy, 2013:25).

Being a qualitative study, I had no intention of selecting a statically representative sample but based the selection on the parameters and characteristics of the population as a basis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:78) to gain comprehensive knowledge

about IPGS experiences by purposively selecting a sample (Kumar, 2014:228) guided by the purpose of the study (Al-Busaidi, 2008:14).

From the institution, the current IPGS and the IRO representative were conveniently selected for the study based on their availability and accessibility by phone. Snowball sampling was also applied using networks for IPGS for the one-on-one interview. To get representative viewpoints, IPGS were also conveniently selected based on their assortment of countries of origin (Wu et al., 2015:4). For this study, it was important to obtain dynamics of experiences in different cohorts (Dyer, Jackson & Livesey, 2018:33) and variations in perception hence the sample consisted of both former and current students and the mix of doctoral and masters international students.

At analysis, transcribed and document analysis data was manually organised into meaningful categories and themes that emerged from the data collected and thematically analysed (Szyjka, 2012:318). Interviews, observations and document analysis data were organised either per individual response or by clustering responses together across participants (Maree, 2016:108; Creswell, 2015:30; Szyjka,2012:318). Since the study stressed participants' verbal descriptions (Devetak et al., 2010:78), to characterise IPGS' challenges, excerpts were used to 'voice' the phenomena of student engagement experiences and challenges at a university in South Africa.

1.10 Delimitation of this study

South Africa has taken no exception in the internationalisation of its education system (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209). Hence, this study was conducted at one South African university as a case study. The use of a case study informed relevant authorities to view international student engagement challenges as unique to certain university peculiarities compared to the universal approach to student educational policies and programme designs. The focus of the study was on exploring unique struggles that IPGS must contend with, how the IPGS coped with the challenges and the provision of the right support for engagement when studying in one South African university. To obtain the dynamics of experiences in different cohorts and variations in perception (Dyer, et al., 2018:33), former and current IPGS and a mix of doctoral and masters students participated in the study. Since professionals working directly with international students must know how to adapt to the diversity of the group studies

(Trowler, 2010:44; Thomas, 2012:7), a representative of the IRO also participated in the study.

1.11 Definition of key concepts

This section defines the key terms used in the study. Existing definitions and meanings are given to make readers understand the essence of the concepts. Contextual definitions are correspondingly drawn to furnish decided meanings for this research to prevent multiple interpretations by readers.

International students: Definitions vary per nation's education system (Migration Advisory Committee, 2018:18). In the United States (US), international students are individuals whose birthplace is outside the United States and are studying in the US on a non-immigrant, temporary visa that allows for academic study at the post-secondary level. (Rose-Wood and Rose-wood, 2018:310). The definition excludes immigrants, permanent residents, citizens, resident aliens and refugees. In the UK an international student is an individual who comes from another country and is a resident in the UK to study for either a short or long course at all levels of education (Migration Advisory Committee, 2018:18). This definition can be operationalised in different sources.

UNESCO (2018:33) defines an international student as an individual who has physically crossed an international border between two countries to participate in tertiary educational activities for 1-7 years in a destination country outside their country of origin. In general, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and EUROSTAT (2018:33) define international students as those who are not residents of their country or those who received their prior education in another country. They say when data on international students is not available, data of foreign students is used. Foreign students are defined per their citizenship and, therefore, international students are a subset of foreign students (OECD, 2013:1).

In South Africa, an international student is a person registered as a student in a public or private education in a foreign nation (Higher Education and Training: Republic of South Africa, 2017:9). International students with permanent residence status are considered domestic students. This study adopts the South African perspective that international students are all registered students who are not South African citizens

and do not own a South African identity card. South African students in the study are also referred to as domestic, local or host students.

Academic achievement: When searching for the construct academic achievement, Google Scholar database results yielded studies with research articles citing academic performance, academic success, academic achievement and learning outcomes used in the same context within the studies. This revelation agrees with Dev (2016:70) and York et al. (2015:1) who also observed that there are major conceptual problems in similarities and differences of academic measurement constructs within researchers. Based on literature York et al. (2015:1) reviewed concerning the construct academic achievement, they recommend a definition that includes aspects of academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success.

Arora (2016:47) defines academic achievement as the "degree or level of success or proficiency attained in some academic work". In India, academic achievement is put in the context of achievement level, such that it is expressed as marks obtained by students in annual examinations ranked as high, above average, below average and low, with the help of the quantile point (Kalita, 2016:2). Some scholars define academic achievement by how much a student can recall learning experiences under examination circumstances. In that case, academic achievement is defined as the ability of a student to study and recall facts and communicate in a written or oral examination (Kpolovie, Joe & Okoto, 2014:73). Earlier in time, Finn & Rock (1997:221) defined academic success in three parts. First, by the passing grade in high school, Secondly, by the reasonable scores on standardised achievement tests and lastly, by the student graduating on time. Korobova & Starobin (2015:75) perceive academic achievement as a process, defining it as the extent to which students will be achieving their educational goals generally measured by assessment. These definitions are evidence that academic achievement is generally measured through assessment and the grades will determine the quality of achievement.

Astin's extensive research on student involvement confirms that any form of student engagement is positively associated with a wide variety of academic achievements (Strydom et al., 2012:3). Some studies, for example, Dev (2016:73), Schreiber and Yu (2016:159) and Willms (2003:9) treat student engagement as a predictor of academic

achievement. Some other student engagement predictors such as academic efficacy, self-control, motivation, determination, and co-curricular activities have also been associated with academic achievement (Balfanz & Byrne, 2012:6; Lester, 2013:4; Lochmiller 2013:10; Nova Scotia School Board Association, 2014:6).

Many education systems regard academic achievement highly and hence, the major goal of any college or university is to work towards the attainment of academic excellence. Therefore, teachers, students, and parents are often concerned about examination outcomes as a measure of academic achievement (Korobova & Starobin, 2015:76; UNESCO, 2016:33) and certificates are often used to certify students' level of academic achievement for selection to the next educational level and job hiring purposes (Dev, 2016:70; Kanyongo, 2005:69). Grades and Grade Point Average (GPA) are the most readily available assessments for higher education institutions (York et al., 2015:8). For example, in South Africa at Wits University, the grading system for first-class is 75% and over (code A), upper second class is 70-74% (B), for second class it is 60-69% [C], the third class is 50-59% [D] and a fail is 0-49% [F] (Wits University, South Africa).

For this study, academic achievement is described by the extent to which a student and the university have achieved the short or long-term educational goals, self-efficacy, high need for education, self-control, sound relationships on campus, participation in academic-related activities, acquisition of skills and competencies, high regard for education, timely progress of the dissertation and the ability of a student to graduate from the university with a certificate.

Student engagement: Lester (2013:2) and Olson and Peterson (2015:1) note that the definition of student engagement is constantly re-defined in more specific ways to cater to different contexts. For example, in higher education student engagement is described by Lester (2013:2) as to how faculty and staff engage students in and outside lecture rooms, how students engage with other students, the level of student motivation and learning strategies used in institutions. Willms (2003:8), in his report for the Programme for International Student Association (PISA), broadly states student engagement as "student perceptions towards schooling and their participation in school activities". Willms also puts engagement in the reading context, that is, the enthusiasm and interest in reading and how much time is spent on reading for pleasure

and other varied materials. In Kahn (2014:1005), student engagement is given as the time, commitment and resources that students invest in their learning experiences.

Olson and Peterson (2015:1) observed that student engagement has many facets in that it is not static, it is complex from one institution to another and the level will differ with everyone. Similarly, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (2017:75) notes that student engagement is multi-dimensional and thus no single definition can refer to the concept of student engagement. Thus, Fredricks, et al. (2004:60), Lester (2013:2), and Pagar (2016:7) categorise student engagement into behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions. Finn and Rock (1997:223), however, recognise three levels of student engagement which intertwine with the three dimensions of student engagement mentioned above. Level one students comply with college rules such as punctuality, attendance and meeting requirements initiated by the teacher. The second level involves learners who are resourceful with the characteristics of level one. Leaners who are at level three will display level one and two attributes and be brought to level three by actively participating in other academic-related activities.

Dunleavy et al. (2012:3) and Willms et al. (2009:7) define student engagement by aggregating the dimensions and levels into social, institutional and intellectual types of engagement which are defined by nine survey measurements. The social aspects are measured through the sense of belonging, participation in college life and positive relationships in the school. Institutional engagement is observed through attendance, positive assignments efforts and the value for educational outcomes. Intellectual engagement is measured through interest, effort and quality instruction. Students who display positive behaviour on social, intellectual and institutional engagement are said to be engaged while those who display negative behaviour such as boredom, anxiety and sadness are said to be alienated, disaffected or disengaged.

Through the above measures, Willms et al. (2009:7) then express student engagement in a rounded way to mean, "the extent to which students identify and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging to the institution, participate in academic and none academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of college and make a serious personal investment in the academic requirements".

For the scope of this study, student engagement was defined in a university context through three components. First, student engagement is the amount of time, effort and other resources that students and the institution dedicate to educationally effective activities. Secondly, it is the experiences and relationships of a student with peers, the academic staff and others who support the learning in the university environments. Lastly, student engagement will include university practices that get students to participate in activities that are linked to learning experiences that "enhance the learning outcomes and development and the performance and reputation of the institution" (Kahn, 2014:1005).

1.12 Outline of the study

Concluding this chapter is an outline of the six chapters that make up the research report.

Chapter one: Overview of the study: The chapter presents the background and research questions of this study. The paradigm, methodology and data collection methods will also be described. Organisation of the study is also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter two: Theoretical framework: This chapter discusses and justifies the theoretical framework for this study. The theory of involvement by Vincent Tinto will be discussed and put into context. The retention and social integration theory by Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1993,1997) is a model which came up out of the concern of the student dropout and attrition in higher education institutions (Abdullah et al., 2015:277). The chapter includes the student engagement conceptual frame that helped articulate the state of IPGS engagement at the institution of study.

Chapter three: Literature review: Chapter three comprises of literature review. An overview of the global perspectives of international students was reviewed. Benefits of international students to host nations, domestic students, international students, the sending nation and the global world, are also included in the literature review. Student engagement of international students and its benefits are examined. Challenges of international students are part of the discussion in the chapter. Services and resources that promote IPGS engagement are explained.

Chapter four: Research design and methodology: This chapter details the research design and methodology for this study. The topics include the setting of the study, participants and sampling procedures. Data collection methods, justification, measures of quality control and ethical considerations are explained.

Chapter five: Presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion: Topics presented in chapter five include presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of results.

Chapter six: Findings, limitations, conclusions and recommendations. The chapter basically gives the summary of findings, limitations, conclusions and recommendations generated from the study.

1.13 Chapter summary

This introductory chapter presented an overview of the study that included the background, the problem statement, objective and research questions, the rationale of the study, and delimitations. To conclude the chapter, the layout of all the six chapters was presented. The next chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THIS STUDY

"The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational programme is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that programme" (Alexander Astin, 1999:519).

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One served as an introduction to the overview of this study. The background of the study was set forth together with the statement of the problem, the purpose of study, research objectives and questions and an overview of the theoretical framework which guided this study were also put forward. Chapter One also included literal and contextual definitions of key concepts of this study, the research design and methodology, measures of quality control, data analysis, the significance of the study, delimitations and ethical considerations for this study. To end the chapter, a summary of the chapter was outlined and chapter two was introduced. Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework and conceptual framework that best guided this study.

To put the chapter into perspective, the terms theoretical and conceptual framework are defined as gleaned from relevant literature. The significance of learning theories in educational research and practice is also put forward as a preliminary to the choice of the theory and framework that guided this study.

2.2 Uses of learning theories in education and research

Klette (2012:5) acknowledges the many purposes theories serve in the educational field but reckons the challenge is on the choice of the theory to use. This is because several theories have been proposed to explain educational issues. Wilson and Peterson (2006:2) advise that the choice should be determined by the researcher's understanding and the fit of the theory. For example, scholars such as teachers are often driven by theories learnt in teacher training colleges or through years of practice to guide teaching and evaluation of school practices. Without appropriate learning theories as guides, educational designs and instructions would lack direction and purpose as theories impact learning practices by prescribing the right methodologies

and formats for learning and allow for the feasibility of inclusive learning (Ouyang & Stanley, 2014:171).

Schunk, (2012:3) refers to learning theories as “organised principles that describe how students absorb, process and recall knowledge during learning”. Klette (2012:3) denotes a theory as a “particular kind of explanation”. Learning theories in this way provide scientifically based accounts of variables that influence learning process and provide explanations of ways in which that influence occurs (Alzaghoul, 2012:27). The author expands that theories also present educators with tools for designing more effective learning environments such as the university under study. Given the above considerations, this study presumed that the application of the Social and Academic Integration theory by Vincent Tinto could help explain engagement experiences and decisions made by IPGS as they interact in a higher learning institute. The relevance of the theory also helped explain how the institution provides for more conducive learning environments as IPGS attempt to cope with the unique challenges they face in a foreign environment.

Schunk (2013:30) proposes that data collected in educational research can be methodically linked to learning theories underpinning a study. As Ouyang (2014:171) submits, findings of any study can be disoriented if a research is not situated in a theoretical framework. Similarly, in a report by the Research Council of Norway, in an article written by Klette (2012:4), theories provide an organised way through which characteristics of the world can be observed, studied or analysed and provide a framework for interpreting observations. Above that, Klette substantiates that through theories, actions and behaviours of students can be predicted and explained. Regarding the above propositions, the theory of Social and Academic Integration was seen relevant to this study as it was presumed that learners need to be engaged to prevent premature exit from their studies. Hence, the theory chosen framed the concept of integration for engagement and its prediction for dropout or retention. Similarly, Schunk (2013:30) quotes Suppes that theories impact research by providing a framework for interpreting environmental observations and serve as a link between research and education. As such, the theoretical framework also allowed for the collected data to be methodically organised and made sense of.

2.3 Basic categories of learning theories

Traditionally there are three basic theoretical frameworks that scholars pool from to guide their studies. They pool from the behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism theoretical frameworks (Alzaghoul, 2012:28). Zhou and Brown (2015:6) specify that behaviourism focuses on objective change in observable aspects of learning, stimulated by rewards and targets in education. This is on the strength that since behaviour can be learned it can also be unlearned and replaced by new behaviour. This study utilised the Social and Academic Integration by Tinto. The theory was accordingly pooled from behaviourism theories as the theory focuses on observable engagement aspects of learners which are stimulated by interactive environments that support learner retention (Astin, 1999:519; Hughs, 2015:8). Thus, the behavioural patterns of the IPGS' informal and formal engagement with both staff and peers were connected to the Social and Academic Integration theory by Tinto (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99).

On one hand, researchers who pool from the constructivism theoretical framework regard learning as a process in which the learner does not just receive but is active in knowledge construction based on prior experiences (Alzaghoul, 2012:28). The learner is central to the learning and the teacher acts as the facilitator and advisor. In this respect, both students and staff are perceived as active agents in the process of students' academic development, placing the staff and students as cordial and collaborative active agents in knowledge development (Verenikina, 2010:3). Therefore, learners who can take responsibility and get involved in decision making become more committed to learning (Kuh et al., 2008:557). These assertions imply that students and staff should be unified in the learning process to remain focused and engaged. This is because students learn and enjoy learning if they are dynamically involved in the process (Kalpana, 2014:29). The inclusion of the Social and Academic Integration theory by Tinto for the study is therefore reinforced by correspondingly falling under constructivism as it also advocates for active academic staff and student interaction (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The student brings along to the university prior ideas and abilities that lead to a set of commitment and goals and the institution is required to set out student expectations to aid to institutional goals and student's academic success. The academic staff play the role of facilitator and advisor as IPGS engage in their studies.

The pool of cognitive theories, looks beyond behaviour and explains brain-based learning where the learner individually processes information and the processing of that information depends on the capacity, effort and depth of processing of that student. (Alzaghoul, 2012:28). The focus of the Social and Academic Integration by Tinto relates to a student's commitment to the institution (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). As such, the current study had no intention of looking beyond behaviour as it was beyond the scope of this study to delve into the abstract aspect of how learners process information that would lead to learner retention or dropout. However, the concept of student engagement made this aspect possible by specifying observable aspects of the cognitive dimension of student engagement in behavioural terms such as concentration, effort to understand high order concepts, mastery of higher-order skills, appreciation of challenging work and the value for education (Olson & Peterson, 2015:1). For that reason, the study could include the cognitivism perspective.

The Social and Academic Integration by Tinto's theory thus pools from behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism traditional theoretical frameworks. The combination of the three perspectives, therefore, fortifies the choice of Tinto' theory which has a holistic approach to investigating IPGS engagement experiences at one university in South Africa. The next section will thus explain Tinto's theory and its relevance to this present study.

2.4 Social and Academic Integration Theory by Vincent Tinto

Tinto's 1993 integration theory has been the most widely preferred retention theory for those who seek to understand student engagement, dropout and attrition (Chrysikos, et al., 2017:98) and it is now in the fore-front into a sociological analysis of retention and academic success in higher education institutions (Schreiber et al., 2014: v). Tinto came up with the theory of Social and Academic Integration out of the concern of students in HEI of learning failing to complete their studies and their lack of willpower to remain in university (Abdullah et al., 2015:277). This assertion strengthens the significance of the theory as the study was triggered by the widely accepted notion that international students encounter a set of unique challenges during their studies which affect their determination or departure decision (Aaron et al., 2018:1321; Ammigan & Laws, 2018:1295; Chrysikos, et al., 2017:100; Fass-Holmes, 2016:935). Tinto postulates that constructive interaction between staff, peers and social systems

of a university can enhance the retention of students. The prediction is that low commitment to either academic or social integration can cause students to consider withdrawing from their studies. So, these assertions propelled the Social and Academic Integration theory (Figure 2.1) to explain the possible impact of challenges on IPGS' university experiences and outcomes.

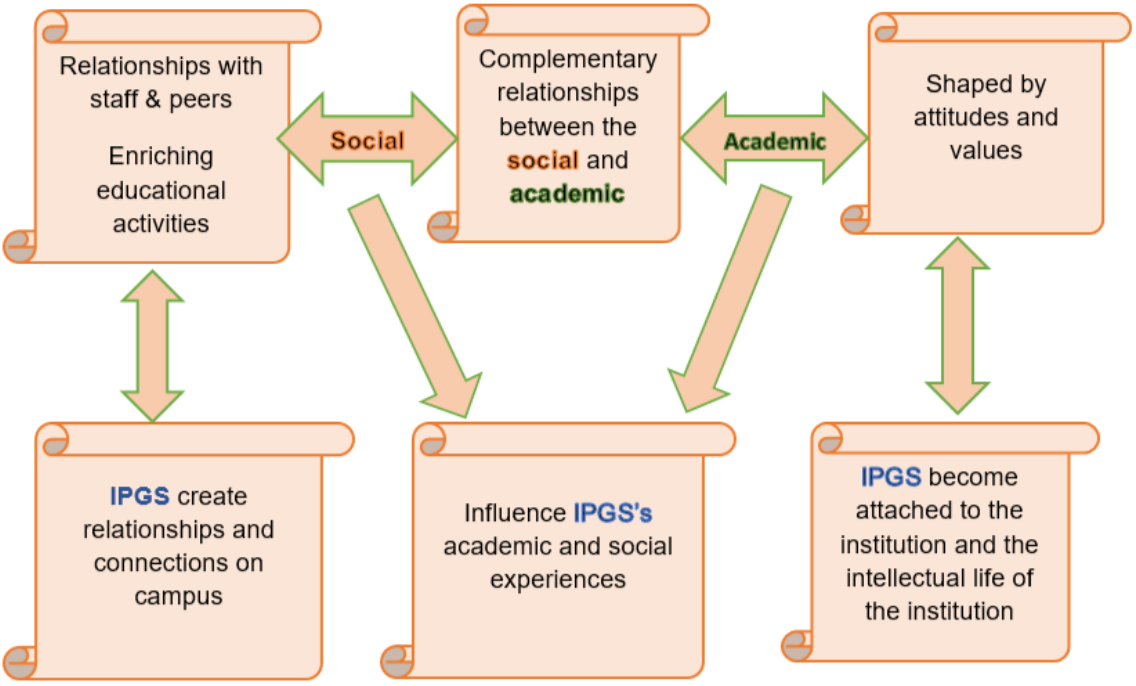

Figure 2.1 The central idea of the Social and Academic integration theory by Tinto

Chrysikos et al. (2017:98) suggest the term integration used by Tinto is the buzzword for engagement in higher education research. Discussions regarding student persistence and student success have, therefore, positioned on the construct of student engagement which in turn, has drawn broadly on the Social and Academic Integration theory. Likewise, this study was driven by the Retention and Social Integration theory by Vincent Tinto (1993) because of its relevance to investigating student engagement. The study assumes that IPGS has a unique set of university challenges that impact their academic engagement which may influence the decision to continue, drop or delay their studies.

The central idea of the Academic and Social integration theory is the complementary relationship between social and academic integration in relation to a student's commitment to the institution (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The authors clarify that social

integration entails campus relationships and alliances that students experience with peers and staff together with enriching educational experiences such as student government, faculty, clubs, *indabas* and associations in the college which lead to social integration. On the other hand, academic integration refers to the shared academic attitudes and values which can be influenced by faculty interactions on campus. Academic integration emerges when students become attached to the intellectual life of the college while social integration arises when students create informal or formal relationships and connections on campus (Karp, Hughes & O'Gara, 2008:3). These two characteristics of Tinto's theory and their evolution are believed to influence a student's academic and social experience in college and if the conditions are opposing, they can eventually influence decisions made by students concerning their studies (Archambault et al., 2009:652). This relates to IPGS whose adverse conditions, such as engagement challenges encountered, may influence decisions made about studies. Tinto argues that successful interaction between students, the academic and social systems in universities may forestall students' negative ideas about abandoning their studies (Abdulla et al., 2015:277). This is on the background that social and academic integrations influence their day-to-day thoughts concerning their stay in universities.

Tinto's theory also proposes that the extent of the academic and social integration and determination of the students together with institutional goals are all instrumental to student persistence (Karp et al., 2008:2). The more the integration intensifies, so will the student connectedness to the institution enrolled, resulting in positive outcomes such as retention and graduation. That way, stronger ties are created between the student and the university which translates to both student and institutional successes. On the contrary, the undesirable behaviour patterns widen the rift between the student and the university social community thereby creating a difference in the shared goals of the institution and student which may impact negatively (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The submission is that "persistence is thus a function of integration into the academic and social aspects of a university system, mediated by goal commitments" (Schreiber et al., 2014:vi). The above understanding is vital for this study in the prediction of the types and levels of academic and social engagement because each can predict IPGS challenges and thus influence college achievements (Chrysikos et al., 2017:97).

Archambault et al. (2009:652) explain that Tinto's theory represents a continuous and evolving process that begins when students enter the university and begin to interact within its academic and social system. The theory requires students to move beyond their previous experiences and accommodate the experiences of the new environment. The study similarly assumes that IPGS is transitioning in a foreign country and new environment and the degree to which an IPGS can cope with the challenges will rely on the available resources and how they will utilise the resources (Kim et al., 2017:400) to facilitate the integration and minimise challenges they encounter in the new environment. This is more important for IPGS who have diverse socialisation experiences from their respective nations of origin but also wish to belong or feel connected to the new environment. Kim et al. (2017:400) acknowledge that some students may fail to associate with the new environment and those whose association to the institution is not strong enough have the potential not to succeed in studies. Thus, the way students will commit to specific academic goals will directly influence involvement in studies which will in turn influence the time committed towards the institution and studies. Put together, goals and institutional commitment will set the course of student engagement from entry onwards and conversely, disengagement could result from a weakened relationship between the individual and the institution (Archambault, 2009:653).

It is extensively documented and acknowledged that international students post positive success rates, are hardworking and have a high desire to learn (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822). However, Tinto (2014:21) considers that student success does not come by luck but rather by institutions and individual students influence it. Tinto, (1993) in his theory, extends that university personnel, peers and enriching educational experiences are social integration strategies that enhance success (Chrysikos et al., 2017:100; Davison & Wilson, 2013:314). With these elements in mind, Vincent Tinto's work paved way for examining ways in which IPGS coped with the unique student engagement challenges as predicted by student-staff and student-peer interaction on campus. To that effect, this study examined the interactive nature of engagement and coping mechanisms the IPGS adopted that might otherwise lead to undesirable outcomes.

In a lecture given to higher education student affairs and teaching and learning professionals in South Africa, in 2013, Tinto advised that active engagement with other students in learning and participation are the most enriching educational experiences that predict learning outcomes (Schreiber et al., 2014: viii; Tinto, 2014:20). He laid it forward that, students who interact with staff and other students create campus relationships that increase study time thereby yielding academic excellence. Earlier, Pike and Kuh (2005:202) also found that students generally depend on the support of each other during their learning experiences. Pike and Kuh (2005:202) in their study found that "the quality of interactions among groups is a key factor influencing the interpersonal environment at an institution". It is against these claims that Tinto says: "for many students, social engagement is often a precursor to academic engagement" and hence it is because of these motives that Tinto's theory and its assumptions were used to explain the nature of engagement and experiences encountered by IPGS as they interacted and participated in a South African university environment.

The nature of relationships in higher learning institutions becomes dynamic as students constantly interact with the university's academic systems (Schreiber et al., 2014: v). Students who are not able to form sound relations on campus expose themselves to the risk of dropping out (Chrysikos et al, 2017:100). This necessitates institutions to provide services that create conducive campuses if student retention and success must be maximised (Davison & Wilson, 2013:314). On the other hand, Tinto (2006:6) advocates for the understanding of challenges that students experience and to be aware of how institutions can be of service to the students for them to achieve their academic goals. He goes on to say, without some form of support, most students may fail to complete their study programmes. In his view, once students are enrolled, institutions are indebted to providing the services to their full potential. Similarly, it was during Tinto' (2013) lecture in South Africa that Perna (2014:31) shared that "promoting college student success requires more than enrolling students; HEI are indebted to provide the support that students need for them to persist and progress to completion of the degree". That way, students can develop social and academic integration skills in both informal and formal ways (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The present study assumed that IPGS go through the process of fitting into a foreign country and a new environment and the degree to which an IPGS can cope with the challenges will depend on the available support systems and resources and

how they support and resources will be utilised (Kim et al., 2017:400). Tinto's model, therefore, provided a useful framework to identify and explain the supporting services and resources that were provided to IPGS for better engagement in their studies. The use of the model is strengthened by Dary et al. (2016:6) who confirm that student engagement will manifest within an environment that is supportive of students' needs.

Tinto's theory also provided a considerable explanation of the ongoing and unfolding processes from the time students enter and interact within the university's academic and social systems. Tinto predicts that it is the kind of commitment to either academic or social integration that will decide the progress of studies. It is the same characteristics and their evolution that influence a student's academic and social experience in college, and if the conditions are adverse, they can eventually influence the decisions to be made concerning studies (Archambault et al., 2009:652). Tinto claims that positive interaction between staff, peers and the social system at a university can minimise attrition rates. He also points out that students who have a sense of belonging to an institution are more likely to remain in the institution and if they remain on the side-line they are likely to exit prematurely. Past works of Pike and Kuh (2005:205)) affirm that interaction among diverse groups is most likely to have positive effects when the groups share the same ambitions and group members cooperate with the support of the institution. Finally, taken together, student and institutional commitment will set the course of student engagement from entry onwards.

Since social and academic integration advances student engagement with challenges encountered by IPGS (Tinto, 2006:6), this study, therefore, is set to consider the academic and social integration theory together with the conceptual framework of student engagement by Kahu (2013). The integration arose from Alexander Astin's expansion of Tinto's concept of academic integration and social integration by student involvement as well as its importance to Tinto's theory that explains the process of dropout in institutions of higher education. This study, therefore, also adopted Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework of student engagement which advances that the affect (emotional), behavioural and cognition describe the state of being engaged. This is because some scholars have highlighted the concept of engagement as involving the components of emotional, behavioural and cognitive dimensions (Burch, 2015:225;

Dyer et al., 2018:32; Kahu, 2013:766). Kahu's conceptual framework of student engagement will be explained next in perspective to the study.

2.5 Kahu's Conceptual framework of student engagement

Student engagement is a certain road to academic success because students who are highly engaged increase their chances of success in academic studies (Kahu, 2018:60; Kahu & Nelson, 2018:59). However, it is widely understood that engagement is a multi-construct (Burch et al., 2015:227), it is complex (Leach & Zepke, 2012:194) and as varied as the context in which it is defined (Kahu & Nelson, 2018:59). Hence, the call by Kahu (2013:758) to have a clear conceptualisation of the construct engagement to facilitate a clearer understanding of student experiences. To that effect, Kahu (2013) developed a conceptual framework of student engagement (Figure 2.2) that highlights the interactions between influences, the state of being engaged and the impact of student engagement in a bid to clarify and understand the engagement concept (Dyer, Jackson & Livesey, 2018:31). The framework was perceived by the current study to be suitable to articulate the nature of student engagement experiences and challenges that materialise with being an IPGS at a South African university.

The six fundamentals of Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework are the socio-cultural context, the structural and psycho-social influences, engagement, and the proximal and distal consequences. The framework positions the student at the centre with the potential of feedback within and across (Kahu, 2013:766). The student engagement experience is rooted within the socio-cultural context which is influenced by features of both the student and the institution. It thus embraces supports and impediments as influences to the tripartite state of student engagement.

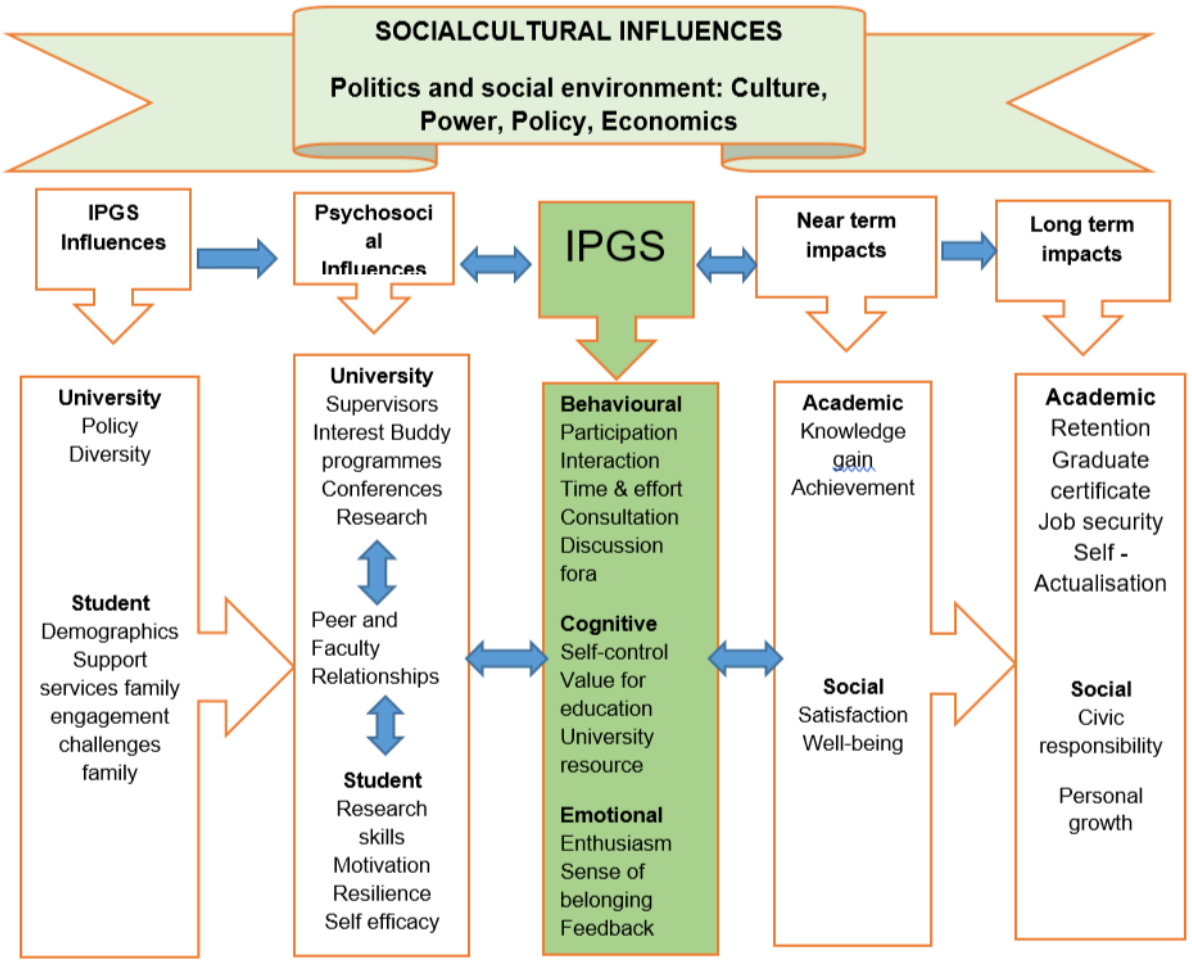

Figure 2. 2 Student engagement frameworks adapted from Kahu's conceptual framework

The study, as previously mentioned, assumes that IPGS encounter a unique set of institutional difficulties that impact their academic performances and the extent to which an IPGS can cope with the challenges is dependent on the support and resources available as well as how the IPGS will make use of the available resources (Kim et al., 2017:400). Thus, to analyse the results, this study picked up six elements of Kahu's conceptual framework to help explain the nature and types of engagement and challenges encountered as IPGS navigated the new university environments during their studies. The framework also helped explain the influences that could enable or form barriers to IPGS engagement. Kim et al. (2017:400) concede that research that explores the impact of challenges on academic success is fundamental in highlighting the influences of student engagement.

Abdulla et al. (2015:275) advance the idea that student engagement attends to institutional and individual development. Prior writings by Pike and Kuh (2005:186) and recent writings by Kahu (3013:767) reiterate that university structural influences such as institutional policies, discipline, curriculum, culture and assessment practices, influences levels of engagement within the institution. The need for competence by students is reinforced when the university environment is the best in that structure and when students are aware of what they are required to do to enhance their capabilities (Fredricks et al., 2019:5). Research conducted previously by (Kim et al., 2017:397) also supports that students who attend institutions that have higher levels of structural and curriculum diversity show higher levels of learning and cognitive development. However, Kahu (2013:767) alerts that the impact of these external factors may not be permanent but can only be felt at times of crisis. Since the presence of IPGS adds to the diversity of institutional environments, the study suggests the utilisation of such diversity may positively influence the curriculum, policies, culture and relationships on campus if well-taken advantage of. Hence, some items of the interview protocol sought ways in which IPGS' structural influences of engagement, such as the diversity of the IPGS, were utilised by the university. The study assumed that the inclusion of IPGS in curriculum and policy planning engagement may be enabled and may equally reduce barriers to learning and positively influence IPGS and university output.

Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework also considers the immediate psycho-social influences of engagement. The framework, correspondingly with Tinto's theory emphasises the student-student and student-staff relationships as paramount to student engagement supported by scholarly studies of Dyer et al. (2018:51). The supportive role of peers and staff is basic to academic life and therefore, without the support students will find the academic experience challenging (Hardy & Bryson, 2016: 15). Tinto's (1993) theory similarly advocates for the interaction of students with university personnel and peers as a strategy for social integration (Chrysikos et al., 2017:100). Tinto says "for many students, social engagement is often a predecessor to academic engagement" (Tinto, 2014:20). The vertical and horizontal direction of the arrows within this section of the framework acknowledges the complex interplay of how the engagement influences impact on the output of learning (Kahu 2013:767). Kahu suggests it is better to make students aware of the choices of influential factors available to them and the potential impact these factors have on their engagement

and success at university. Thomas (2012:18) bemoans the lack of awareness and utilisation of the supportive services and resources that surround the students which may ultimately impact the consequences of engagement. It thus prevails that engagement breeds engagement, for example, positive student-staff relationships foster engagement, which in turn promote respectable relationships on campus (Kahu 2013:767). IPGS studies are mainly research guided by academic staff and similarly depend more on collaborating with other students and hence the aspect of the near influences of Kahu's conceptual framework was fundamental to understanding this study.

As said earlier, facets behavioural, cognitive and affective are widely accepted as dimensions of student engagement (Abubakar et al., 2017:7; Burch et al., 2015:227; Fredricks, et al., 2004:60; Owen et al. 2016:130). Therefore, a student's engagement can be defined by their behavioural participation, emotional/affective attachment and cognitive devotion to their studies (Derek, 2013:2; Ndudzo, 2013; Li & Lerner, 2013:20; Olson & Peterson, 2015:2; Willms et al., 2009:6). It is these multi-dimensions of student engagement that Kahu, ascribes to as the state of being engaged and they are positioned centrally to the framework. Likewise, it is the three dimensions of student engagement that can enable or form challenges to student engagement. By that, the framework acknowledges that engagement is more than just a set of behaviour but involves emotional and cognitive aspects; it is dynamic and is impacted by external factors which allow or block engagement experiences (Dyer et al., 2018:32). The study sought to articulate the types and nature of student engagement as experienced by IPGS with their peers as well as staff at the university under study. For that objective, it is these dimensions of student engagement that defined the types and nature of the IPGS engagement experiences at the university.

The facets of student engagement include the emotional engagement which manifests as student enthusiasm and connectedness to the institution, staff and other students (Dyer et al., 2018:32) as well as the discipline being studied (Kahu & Nelson, 2018:65). Kahu and Nelson (2018:65) think connectedness has an influence on retention through its consequences. For example, disconnectedness to the university may create anxiety which may hamper both behavioural and cognitive engagement. Karp, Hughes and O'Gara (2008:2) similarly advance that preventing the integration process

may be contradictory to institutional connection. Therefore, the study of the connectedness aspect of student engagement had to be sought from the IPGS because unless students feel connected to the host university they are at great risk of dropping out or delay in completing their studies.

Engagement, as the framework suggests, has near-term and long-term academic and social impacts (Kahu's, 2013:767). Literature exposes that there are just as many influences of student engagement as are the consequences. For example, positive engagement has been linked to near-term impacts such as knowledge and academic acquisition while the long-term academic impacts are retention, academic success and lifelong learning. The short-term social impact linked to engagement is satisfaction and welfare while the long-term academic impacts include active civic participation and personal development. The impacts of student engagement were integral in the interview protocol items for this study to understand the academic achievement of IPGS amid engagement challenges faced.

In society, academic achievement is regarded as a measure to one's total potentialities and capacities (Singh, 2014:29). Some studies have highlighted impacts of engagement such as self-esteem (Kim et al., 2017:398; Leach & Zepke, 2011:200), improved output rates (Kahu, 2017:62; Trowler, 2010:23), as well as greater employment opportunities and future success (Kahu et al., 2017:64; Singh, 2014:29). The long-term consequences of student engagement are a feature of Kahu's framework that acknowledges that student engagement does not only impact individual content competence but also a student and societal development. The impacts parallel the earlier works of Tinto, (1975) which emphasise the complementary relationship between social and academic integration (Chrysikos, Ahmed, Ward, 2017:100). Another important feature of this part of the framework is the recognition that impacts are bi-directional between engagement and both its immediate and long-term consequences, as illustrated by the arrows in the framework (Figure 2.2). This part of the framework critically contributed to this study in delving into IPGS' value for education, student-staff engagement, support service and how the engagement experiences and challenges impacted them.

Overall, per Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework, the whole process of student engagement experiences takes recognition of the wider social, political and cultural environment in which the student and the university are embedded. Dyer et al. (2018:33) stipulate that part of this wider environment is the institution in which the student is enrolled. Tinto's (1995) theory equally suggests that "from the time the students enter the university they interact within its academic and social systems as a continuous and evolving process (Archambault, 2009:652). However, Tinto's theory challenges students to move beyond the experiences they bring to accommodate the experiences of the new university environment (Chrysikos et al., 2017:100). For example, engagement challenges can hinder a student's engagement because of reduced happiness (Burch, 2015:56). Also, IPGS engagement can be an enriching student experience but at the same time it can be more stressful than that of native students and, therefore, requires students to cope with the stressful events (Pink et al., 2016:3). Matthew, et al. (2016:3) similarly admit the existence of challenges that are associated with the well-being of students and engagement experiences. These concerns called for this study to look at ways in which IPGS cope with the challenges as an indication of moving beyond the challenges experienced.

Kahu (2013:768) contends that "no single research project can examine all the facets of the complex and dynamic construct of student engagement". The key lies in admitting to the multi-dimensional student engagement experience and the complexity of connectedness of the elements but still recognising the presence of other facets. Kahu (2013:768) suggests the best way is to try and understand student engagement and its consequences to be placed in a better position to address the students' needs for the improvement of educational output. Significantly, the framework suggests that the strategies available for improving student engagement should be holistic. That means it should involve students, staff, the institution and the government as stakeholders of the learning engagement experiences (Kahu 2013:769). Kahu continues that the framework does not profess to portray every impact and connection between them but rather to identify important factors that connect them. Likewise, this investigation did not examine all the complexities and dynamics of IPGS engagement experiences rather it focused on the relationships on campus and support services and resources of student engagement that may impede or promote IPGS engagement.

Several authors content that the evaluation of the complex engagement construct is difficult and to date has largely been assessed using national surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in America, Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) in Australia and South African Student Engagement (SASSE) in South Africa (Dyer et al., 2018:30; Kuh, 2003:25; Schreiber & Yu, 2016:160). However, Kahu's (2013:770) conceptual framework is ear-marked for smaller population studies like single universities as it does not recommend the generalisation of student experiences because of their peculiarity from context-context and student-student. Prior research generally confirms that student engagement is varied more within a given institution than compared institutions (Kuh, 2003:26). Further, previous research confirms "that institutions differ in how they engage students and that no institution is uniformly high or low across all measures of student engagement" (Pike & Kuh, 2005:201). The framework similarly suggests the use of in-depth qualitative methodologies to capture the assortment of the engagement experiences of the diverse students. More so for this study, the framework was relevant as the aim was to explore the experiences of a subset of IPGS as a single case study of a university, where interviews and document analysis were used to collect data from a purposively selected sample which comprised of former and current IPGS and a representative from the IRO. Likewise, the above assertions were important to capture the uniqueness of both the subset of IPGS and the university under study.

Therefore, it was the befitting characteristics of Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework of student engagement and the general understanding of student engagement that Kahu's (3013) conceptual framework was applied to articulate the types and nature of engagement experiences between IPGS and their peers as well as staff. The challenges were highlighted from the experiences together with the coping strategies of IPGS. Overall, the frameworks of Tinto (1993) and Kahu (2013) were used as a basis for understanding student engagement and the process of data analysis for this present study.

2.6 Chapter summary

Chapter two outlined and contextualised the social and academic integration theory by Vincent Tinto as applied to student engagement, dropout and student attrition.

Tinto's theory clarifies the ongoing and unfolding process from the time students enter the university and interact within its academic and social systems. The chapter also contextualised the student engagement framework as conceptualized by Kahu that facilitates a clearer understanding and analysis of student engagement experiences in a higher learning institution. The next chapter presents literature review that helped put student engagement in higher learning institutions into viewpoint.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding IPGS student engagement experiences in higher education institutions

"You can have data without information but you cannot have information without data". Daniel Keys Moron American Computer Programmer and Science Fiction writer.

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Three reviews the literature on the phenomenon under study. The ensuing chapter explains the main concepts that frame this study by discussing past research upon which this study builds, problematises, extends and sums up what is currently known about the topic (Tracy, 2013:99). The chapter is organised into three parts. The first advances the global perspective of internationalisation of HEI and the benefits of international students to the host nation, international students, sending country and global world. The second draws upon the conceptualisation of student engagement and its implication to IPGS experiences in HEI. The section reviews the literature on how South African HEI has embraced student engagement. The engagement experiences and the unique challenges of IPGS will be highlighted in the second part. The third presents literature on professional services and resources that support IPGS engagement in HEI. The fourth section is a review of what studies have presumed to be principles that inform approaches to enhance service delivery for better performance of IPGS.

The literature review was a process which commenced from the conceptualisation of the study problem up to the end of the study. For the study, echoing Kumar (2014:49) and Tracy's (2013:99) considerations, the literature review was conducted to:

- bring clarity and focus to the research problem. Reading several books, journals, reports, reviews and past theses around the phenomenon under study broadened the proficiency in the area and put forward what other researchers have done. This aspect allowed for a broadened knowledge base on internationalisation of education and student engagement. In that way, the

conceptualisation of the research problem became clearer. Also, the literature reviewed facilitated the identification of gaps in the existing body of knowledge and justified the significance of this present study. Nevertheless, similarities to this study were also drawn and henceforth, justified the expansion of knowledge on the phenomenon under study.

- guide the research methodology. Going through other scholarly works around the problem of study brought awareness to what methodologies for similar studies were used and how they were used. Therefore, the choice of the methodology used for this study was advanced from an informed point of view through literature review.
- contextualise findings of this study with the existing body of knowledge. For that case, findings by other scholars were used for discussing findings and arguments for this current study thereby further contributing to the already existing body of knowledge. As a result, the literature broadly guided this study.

3.2 Global perspectives of internationalisation of higher education

Over the past half-century, many HEIs the world over has witnessed an influx of international students entering universities (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan 2016:984). Using Choudah's (2016: i) data, the US, with 26%, is the global leader destination for students who desire to study abroad. The next attraction is the UK with 15% of the students, followed by France and Australia gaining ground among the preferred overseas study destinations at 11% and 10% respectively. The report states that the US leads in enrolments because of the purported perception of the US having a high-quality education. Also, international students look forward to a better career opportunity and a prosperous livelihood after graduating from US universities.

Globally, internationalisation of higher education is gaining interest due to various needs of the universal world (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138), for example, international students are known to bring economic gains to the host nation and academic advantages as international students go through rigorous selection especially if the migration is facilitated by the home government. Internationalisation also brings diversity in thinking as well as being a good source of cultural diversity (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822). Various other benefits of internationalization of HEI were highlighted in the literature as discussed later in the chapter.

3.3 Internationalisation of higher education in South Africa

To make it clear what is meant by an international student, this study will adopt the South African definition stated by The Department of Higher Education and Training: South Africa (2017:11). An international student, therefore, refers to "an individual registered as a student in a public or private higher education institution in a country other than their country of citizenship". This definition includes students who originate outside South Africa but have permanent residence in South Africa.

Within the universal context, South Africa as a nation has witnessed a growth in the numbers of international students in its HEI (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209). The Department of Higher Education and Training: South Africa (2017:11) highlights that during 2013-2014 there were 73 859 international students in South African public universities which saw substantial growth from the 46 687 enrolled in 2002. The highest percentage (73%) of the international students came from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. The other countries on the African continent contributed 16% while 9% of the students came from the rest of the world. While the SADC countries provided the most students in South Africa, top on the list is Zimbabwe, followed by Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, in that order (Mda; Mokhothu & Callaghan 2018:5). This positive trend of movement in South Africa, as stated by the Department of Higher Education and Training, is eased by the 1997 SADC Protocol on Education and Training which stipulates that:

- HEI in South Africa should reserve at least 5% of admissions for students coming from SADC nations and,
- HEI should treat students from the SADC countries as home students for purposes of tuition fees and accommodation.

By approving the protocol, the South African government undertook its initial step to internationalise higher education in the country and saw a growth rate of international students with the greatest increase realised in IPGS programmes.

International students who go to South Africa are from a diverse range of nations, backgrounds, experiences, skills and levels of English proficiency (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138). Accordingly, they come face to face with difficulties which are peculiar to them alone and adapting challenges to the new South African environments is intensified with the demands of the academic rigours that accompany higher education (Perry, 2016:741). Having international students on university grounds in South Africa, therefore, necessitates an understanding of their challenges and provision of the right support systems (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:139) through national and institutional policies, processes and services for the realisation of student and institutional achievements (Department of Higher Education and Training: South Africa, 2017:11). To effectively serve this growing population it has become necessary to strengthen the student support structures (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan 2016:984). Covington (2017:2) proposes that student success is gained through student engagement at a university and it is the responsibility of the university to support the studies of those studying abroad.

3.4 Benefits of internationalisation

Hanassab and Tidwell (2002:306) believe educators should not underestimate the resources international students present. With that assertion in mind, The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2013:240) identifies three groupings of benefits international students contribute to the host nation, international students and benefits to countries with students studying abroad. Additionally, literature evidence for this present study gleaned and filled in benefits of international students from a global perspective. As such, this study clustered the benefits of international students into four categories (Figure 3.1).

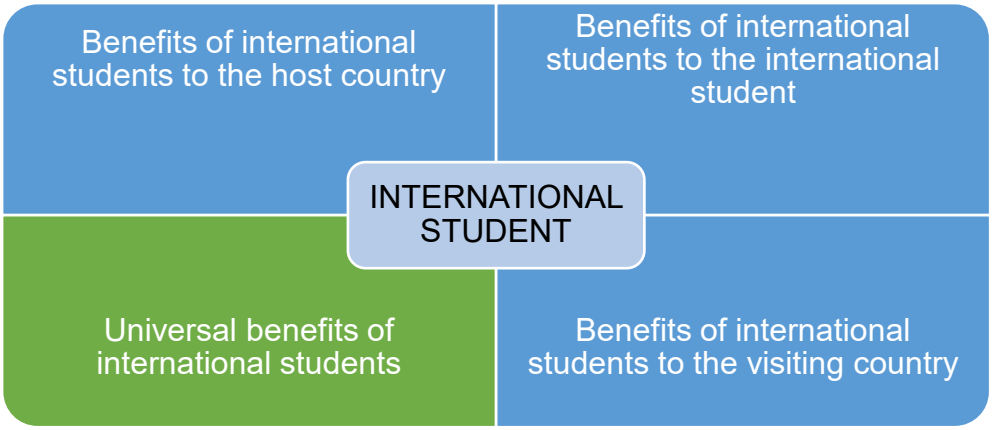

Figure 3.1 Categories of the benefits of international internationalisation. Adapted from The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2013).

3.4.1 Benefits of internationalisation to the host country

To begin with, international students are enormously important to any host country for academic and financial advantages (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822). Both local and foreign students show a lot of interest in their studies in any academic institution whose population includes international students. The main motivation behind recruiting international students in universities is the income the institutions generate (Glass & Gesing, 2018:313; Hegarty, 2014:225; UNESCO, 2018:36). Wekullo (2019:32) collaborates that in South Africa, international students are the most significant sources of institutional revenue, more importantly considering the ongoing decline in state funding and the free-education-for-all for the local students. In that regard, a steady inflow of international students through alumni recommendations boosts the South African economy (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013: 9; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002:315). The financial benefits are obtained through the fees international students pay as well as accommodation and living costs which the students incur during their stay in South Africa (Department of Business Innovation and Skills; Manik, 2015:2). More so, the establishment of long-term commercial trade and diplomatic links with other countries is an economical resource that contributes to the South African budget (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002:315). Retaining through improved services and support systems for international students means improvement in budgetary concerns, add Perry et al. (2016:196).

A study by Mda (n.d:13) established that one-third of international PhD students desired to stay in SA after completing their studies. When international students opt to stay after graduation they reciprocally offer the critical skills needed for the growth of the South African economy. The meaning is that, while IPGS gain employment in South Africa, South Africa as well benefits by importing the diverse skills and knowledge of international students (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013:9). Further, international students bring about an enhanced overall reputational benefit for South Africa as well as a potential boost in national and global economic competitiveness due to the existence of an essential pool of talented international students and researchers within the higher education sector. This enables the development of South African research and development capacity.

South African students as well stand to benefit from international students. When IPGS cross borders for further studies in South Africa, they tag along with their cultures, values, beliefs, behaviour patterns, ways of learning and divergent thinking, thereby enriching South African academic campus experiences (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002:315; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015:1). Thus, host students get enhanced experiences by intermingling with a sub-group of diverse international students on campus (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822; Manik, 2015:2). Similarly, South African students gain global experience and become aware of the potentials they may attain by socialising with highly motivated fellow Africans (Mda, n.d:13).

Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1822) believe international students can enhance the host university's academic excellence because of the rigorous selection of candidates who are sent on scholarships from the sending country. Additionally, when domestic students benefit from the cultural diversity of international students, they also develop an awareness of their cultural sensitivity and skills by mingling with people from different social and cultural backgrounds. Again, the local students and the whole university community become multi-lingual and in the process, they learn and understand foreign cultures and traditions.

Literature reveals evidence that the broader communities outside South African university campuses also become culturally diverse through the presence of international students in their communities (Department of Business Innovation and

Skills, 2013:1; Glass & Gesing, 2018:313). However, despite the fore mentioned gains, they are arguments that internationalisation of higher education may impact negatively to South Africa, particularly if the local people were to harbour suggestions that international graduates occupy local jobs in exchange for lower salaries readily accepted by foreigners (Department of Business Innovation and skills, 2013:9). Similarly, in the US many international students experience prejudice and discrimination by American students. In a study by Charles-Toussaint and Crowson cited by in Wu et al. (2015:3), findings indicate that Americans are concerned that international students are a threat to their economy, education, beliefs, values and social status from anti-immigrants' preconceptions. When people have the anxiety to interact with people from different cultures they create a negative stereotype concerning the behaviour of foreigners. Wu et al. (2015:3) agree international students are negatively labelled and such findings are worth considering if hosting universities is to have foreign students on their premises. In contrast, Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2018:1335) in one study argue that in the US, internationalisation experiences have propelled some domestic students to develop a greater sense of empathy with foreigners, particularly to nations which send international students.

3.4.2 The benefits of internationalisation to international students

Studying abroad has consistently proved to have a strong impact on international students in numerous aspects of their development (Kuh, 2008:25). Studying abroad as an endeavor is one of the high-impact educational practices that contribute positively to student engagement (McCormick et al., 2013:55). Kuh (2008:25) conveys that educational research has established that high-impact practices have the potential to increase rates of student retention and student engagement. The practice is important and useful because it can enrich the university experiences, promote student involvement, empower students and give students a sense of autonomy in life (Covington, 2017:5). Perhaps this is the reason why international students are said to be more engaged in their college experiences (Wawrzynski et al., 2012:107). They are hard-working, enthusiastic and show a great wish to excel in their work (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822) than host students.

Through literature and by the support of research findings, the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2013:10), identifies several other gains of studying abroad. For example, international students are at an advantage to career opportunities because of the wider networks they are exposed to during their studies abroad and the inter-cultural understanding they experience above the academic studies. The illustration given is that of foreign language(s) proficiency provided by the experience of being a visiting student. Quaye and Harper (2014:6) confirm that interaction with diverse peers inside and outside the classroom is positively linked to outcomes such as self-concept, cultural awareness and appreciation, racial understanding, leadership, engagement in social responsibility activities, satisfaction with college and readiness for participation in a diverse workforce. Additionally, international students get access to the supposed superior education on a wide variety of courses and qualifications that may not be offered in countries of origin (Mda, n.d: 13).

3.4.3 Benefits of internationalisation to countries with students studying abroad

Overall, the representation of students in studying abroad is not only important for the international student development or the host nation but the sending nation tends to benefit as well (Covington, 2017:4). This is obtained through the "developmental and transformational impact" of the supposed high-quality education from abroad (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013:12). Developing countries such as Africa stand to gain when international students apply the new experiences, skills and knowledge acquired abroad to develop their own countries (Mda, n.d:14).

Hanassab and Tidwell (2002:306) appreciate that the benefits of internationalisation of higher education depend on national interest. For example, the US often enrolls international students in programmes that are under-registered by domestic students and thus prevent many programmes from extinction in the host country (Hegarty, 2014 231). Another example is that of Asian countries like Japan that embrace internationalisation to keep their institutions operational as they are threatened by the country's dropping birth rates and the elderly population. Other countries like Mexico and the US are among nations that use mobility programmes for cultural diplomacy and developmental aid. This backs Hanassab and Tidwell's (2002:306) idea that some countries send out students to foreign countries as a developmental intervention. Another example is that of Germany. Wahlers (2018:10) says Germany uses its tax

revenue to educate foreigners as a contribution to global exchange and development. Moreover, Germany holds the respect of international students as important representatives and worldwide partners for the country. Hegarty (2015:231) supports that upon returning home, international students are a great source of goodwill for the hosting nations and universities. Likewise, the US also regards an international student as an indicator of a university's global connection to other nations (Metro-Roland, 2018:1408). Hanassab and Tidwell (2002:306) add that the massive open online courses initiated by some countries have increased the global access to education and it is the developed countries that have benefited more from the innovation. Additionally, offshore cross boarder and borderless programmes including wing campuses established in foreign nations and regional education centers enable international education at home.

3.4.4 Universal benefits of international students

The global world also benefits from internationalisation of higher education. By reviewing several texts, the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2013:9) gleaned several benefits the global community gets from the internationalisation of higher education. The benefits highlighted are that internationalisation:

- allows for an accumulation of qualified graduates for the global knowledge economy.
- also, allows for the establishment of trade and research and development collaboration between countries and regions.
- impacts on economic development via skilled migration and skills development for specific sectors of the labour market.

Wekullo (2019:321) adds that international students help in building a global society. Additionally, "with xenophobic opinions growing, internationalisation in higher education institutions can open horizons of our ethic of care beyond the narrow confines of nationalistic narrowness" (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018:1335).

Overall, Choudah (2016: iii) acknowledges the benefits of international students by suggesting that host nations should desist from treating international students as a form of fund-raising but to put up-front the anticipated values of international students. Keeping with the trend, the phenomenon of international students should be

encouraged and best practices that make international students abroad feel welcome should be simulated universally. Hegarty (2014:225) assures the benefits provided by international students exceed those of challenges of hosting the students.

From the above accounts of the benefits of international students, it was befitting for this study to investigate barriers that may impede IPGS from engaging in their studies and thus missing out on their contribution to the global world. Therefore, this study believes that unless a student is engaged in a supportive environment, internationalisation maybe a pointless effort. Owusu-Boateng, Acheampong and Oteng (2015:350) support that the key to investing in education is in the learners' desire to learn with an increased effort and time for academic work. Hence, the fit of this study which recognises student engagement as mediation for international students who are at risk of failure due to the challenges experienced.

3.5 Student engagement in universities

"Student engagement is dynamic and is dependent on many factors both within and outside the institution's sphere of influence" (Abubakar et al., 2017). For this study, student engagement in the university of the study was informed by what IPGS experienced when participating in educationally purposive activities, the challenges they encountered, the decisions that they made about their experiences and what universities had to offer in terms of professional services and resources for their engagement.

3.5.1 IPGS engagement experiences

The importance of positive student engagement in learning has been in educational debate for a while now (Dary, 2916:10). However, the current upsurge in the mobility of students who cross borders in search of higher education has resulted in student engagement gaining significant attention as a retention strategy for both the student and the institution, especially in the US (Kahn, 2014:1016; Kim et al., 2017:395). The growing interest in engagement is also attributed to its presumed malleable nature because proper intervention may abate student disengagement (Fredricks et al., 2004:61). These observations have resulted in contemporary studies coming up with definite education practices that promote student engagement. Best practices are marked by active collaborative teaching, reciprocal interaction between student-staff

and student-peers, high expectation of academic work, enriching educational practices and supportive campus environments happening at the national sector and institutional level (Kuh, 2003:26).

Student engagement is described as participation in educationally purposive activities inside and outside the classroom that represent two critical features (Covington, 2017:4; Quaye & Harper, 2014:2). First, it is the students' commitment of the time and energy into their studies and other enriching educational practices to achieve educational goals. Secondly, it is how the institution deploys its resources and organises curriculum, other teaching opportunities and support services that contribute to satisfaction, persistence and eventually, graduation. Additionally, engagement is the range of perceptions that accompany the practice (Quaye & Harper, 2014:2). The student engagement constructs used in this study is consistent with the description of student engagement that features the interplay between student commitment, institutional deployment of resources and perceptions and values of the student and the institution with the goal of academic achievement. Accordingly, this study targeted engagement challenges IPGS experienced as they committed their time and effort into their studies facilitated by interaction between IPGS-staff and IPGS-peers. The study also examined how the institution deployed its services and resources for IPGS to engage, to get positive individual and institutional outcomes.

Kahu (2013:766) believes students are central to student engagement and engagement is defined by behavioural participation, affective attachment and cognitive devotion to their studies. It is through the multi-dimensions of student engagement that Kahu (2013:766) ascribes to the state of being engaged. As IPGS engage, it is the three dimensions that can influence the level of engagement. Li and Lerner (2013:30) in their study about the inter-relations of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement, agree that the positives of the dimensions can predict future academic ability and outcome of students. This current study sought to articulate the types and nature of IPGS engagement experiences with their peers as well as staff by relating the three dimensions of student engagement as a tripartite interplay.

3.6 The tripartite dimensions of student engagement

Hu et al. (2012:71) appraise that dimensions of student engagements vary contrastingly based on the approaches used in studying student engagement. Prior, Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004:60) and still later Derek (2013:2) integrated different thoughts and definitions encompassing engagement and consolidated the term into three primary classifications of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. The dimensions distinguish student engagement in terms of the diverse ways of realising how students engage (Hu et al., 2012:71). Since then, several researchers have embraced the possibility that engagement ought to be conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct of behavioural, emotional and cognitive experiences and examined concurrently other than independently (Li-Lerner 2013:21). Having endorsed the tripartite conceptualisation, findings can then be analysed based on these main features. These assertions made it important for this present study to investigate IPGS engagement experiences in the same multi-dimensional way of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. For the same claims, data for this present study was analysed based on Kahu's conceptual framework which also uses the conceptualisation of student engagement by Fredricks et al. (2004:60) and defines the state of engagement by the behavioural participation, affective attachment and cognitive devotion to studies (Figure3.2).

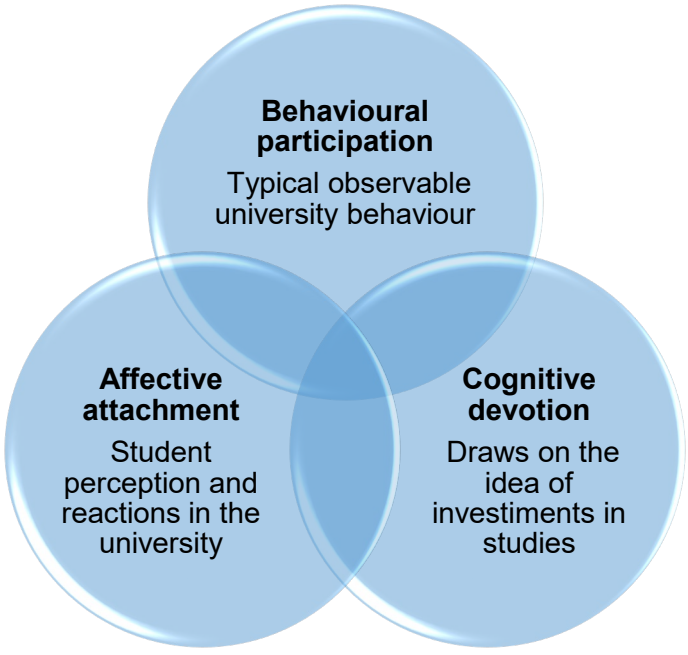

Figure 3.2 The tripartite types and nature of student engagement.

The types and nature of IPGS engagement for this study were articulated by their behavioural, emotional and cognitive state at the time of the study. Every one of the components of engagement can each have a positive or a negative pole, which speaks to each type of engagement, isolated by a gulf of non-engagement (Trowler, 2010:5). The indication is that IPGS can engage either positively or negatively along the behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions. Trowler (2010:5) further states that it would be perfectly possible for a student to engage emphatically along at least one dimension while connecting contrarily along at least one dimension simultaneously.

Like Kahu's conceptual framework, several other scholars describe the three broad dimensions of student engagement based on the conceptualisation of the state of engagement (Hu et al., 2012:71; Pagar, 2016:7; Ndudzo, 2013; Willms et al., 2009:6; Derek, 2013:2; Olson & Peterson, 2015:2; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009:3). Most of the researchers similarly draw from the works of the three dimensions of student engagement by Fredricks et al. (2004:60). Although the conceptual definition addresses mostly the K-12 Education System (American Education from Kindergarten to 12th grade), Derek (2013:3) has the conviction that the conceptual definitions have implications for HEI. Below are how the mentioned scholars identify the three observable dimensions of student engagement.

3.6.1 Behavioural engagement

Behavioural engagement is given as typical observable university behaviour standards indicated by diligent pursuit in studies, interaction, perseverance, time and effort devoted to studies, consulting with supervisors, preparedness, compliance to college regulations and participation in academic discussion forums. In addition, engaged learners are seen by their active involvement in other organised enriching educational experiences such as conferences, *indabas* and student council, internship, use of appropriate technology, community service or any other formal university organisation. These complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the university are perceived to expand the academic programme (Kuh et al., 2005:556). Behavioural engagement draws on the idea of participation and is viewed as essential for accomplishing positive scholastic results and averting academic failure.

3.6.2 Emotional engagement

The emotional engagement dimension refers to how students perceive their position in a university and how they respond to the ways and workings of the university and the people within the university. Considering that a university is a social as well as an academic environment, the socialising agents become the staff and peers (Kim, 2017:398). Therefore, emotional engagement creates ties to an institution and influences a student's desire to work. Emotional engagement also pertains to college identification and importance within the institutional environment and the value of education and its academic-related outcomes. The kind of experience a student goes through, feelings and perceptions towards academic outcomes are also identifications of emotional engagement.

3.6.3 Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investments. It is the concentration students apply into their studies, the longing to go past fundamental academic necessities, self-controlled learning, reflection and energy about taxing work. Cognitive engagement also involves rationalisation and consideration about academic work. This dimension of engagement involves going beyond simple remembrance to self-controlled learning strategies that advance profound comprehension and aptitude. Cognitive engagement also emphasises the degree to which students invest in education and the value of it.

Despite the multi-dimensional concept of student engagement, the preferred way by most researchers is that the student's behavioural, emotional and cognitive experiences in higher education should be comprehended as multi-lateral and they ought to be examined simultaneously as opposed to stand-alone characteristics (Li & Lerner, 2013:21). Fredrick et al. (2004:61) contend that "defining and examining the components of engagement individually, separates students' behaviour, emotion and cognition… yet in reality, these factors are dynamically interrelated within the individual and not isolated processes". Accordingly, Li and Lerner (2013:21) put forward that:

> Active participation with great concentration and effort, positive emotions or feelings of excitement and sense of connectedness and cognitive processes such as commitment and values, are all necessary ingredients for students' engagement…

Considering that this study targeted IPGS, the behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement dimensions were regarded as important because the dimensions correspond with the IPGS' needs for participation, connectedness, self-controlled behaviour and self-determination that are essential in conducting research work (Fredricks et al., 2019:4). Thus, the first objective of this study was to articulate the types and nature of engagement experiences between peers as well as staff in behavioural terms and utilise the developmental needs for engaging students at risk of academic failure. When Li and Lerner (2013:30) studied the inter-relations of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement, they concluded that the positives of the dimensions can predict future academic ability and outcome. These observations led this current study to examine the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement which may permit or impede engagement experiences among IPGS at one South African university. In an attempt made to articulate the nature of student engagement, this study drew much of the interview items from the understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement. Another attempt was made to treat the three dimensions as occurring simultaneously other than separate events. Hence, this present study supports the multi-faceted preference of viewing the problem of student engagement experiences in an institution. By so doing, this study as well attempted to expand research on engagement experiences of IPGS in HEI in an all-inclusive way.

3.7 How South Africa has embraced student engagement in universities

Earlier, Korobova and Starobin (2015:74) observed that despite ample literature on international students, little is known about how they engage in universities. The aim of studying student engagement is to characterize what students do during their studies (Hu et al., 2012:73). For example, when students leave their countries to study anywhere abroad, they are likely to come face to face with interaction challenges with people and places that do not make them feel integrated into the new university (Metro-Roland, 2018:1408). Research has established that a substantial number of students in higher education at any given time have thought of abandoning their studies because of the unanticipated challenges (Thomas, 2012:12). The threat is even greater for international students who are entering the host country for the first time. That way, Thomas (2012:12) argues that creating a sense of connectedness for international students should not be regarded as a choice by all institutions,

departments and programmes in higher education because students who harbour thoughts of leaving because of lack of connectedness are vulnerable to departure before completing studies. The established observation is that students:

> …who consider withdrawing are less engaged with the institution, staff and fellow students while those whose thoughts do not hover around leaving are likely to have established positive relationships on campus. In other words, students who do not establish strong social networks with no real relations with the university staff, begin to feel alienated and dejected and lack connectedness and eventually decide to drop out (Thomas, 2012:12).

Likewise, Astin's theory of student involvement supports that student determination is linked to levels of student activity and interaction on campus (Astin, 1999:528).

The general understanding is that students enter South African universities from different positions of nationality and academic experiences (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138). To address the diversity, universities need to identify the various factors that impact student engagement in the universities (Pather et al., 2017:163). Because of the diversity, earlier studies of Kuh (2003:26) observed that student engagement varied more within a given institution than between institutions, translating to diversity within students in each institution. On the same note, a study by McCormick et al. (2013:72) revealed that student engagement will also vary from those who take full advantage of available opportunities to engage to those who fail to engage to the available opportunities of the enhanced campus experience. These observations suggest institutions need to detect students who disengage and bring them back on track by involving them in organised, enriching educational activities to improve education in higher education institutions (Kuh, 2003:27). These acceptable findings strengthen the choice of a case study to deeply understand student engagement experiences. As such, the diversity of international students and engagement on campus was embedded in this current case study research.

In 2010 the South African Council for Higher Education (CHE) was tasked to advise the Ministry of Higher Education and Training on the desirability of a 4-year undergraduate curriculum (Strydom and Mentz, 2010: v). To better understand what it was that students did while in a university and how this might impact their success, the CHE grounded the project on student engagement because the curriculum does not only include the syllabus but it is also about "the process and practices of

undergraduate education". Thus, for the CHE study, student engagement was defined in two parts as adopted from Kuh's definition of student engagement (Strydom, Kuh & Loots, 2017:3). The first part defines engagement as what students do in terms of the "time and energy they devote to educationally purposive activities". The second part refers to engagement as what institutions can do in terms of "the extent to which they employ effective educational practices to induce students to do the right things".

The South African study, in Strydom and Mentz 's (2010: v) words, was significant to South Africa to:

- give a national picture of how students spend their time and what institutions do to provide a rich learning environment.
- help identify the conditions and drivers of success among undergraduate students
- help institutions to identify interventions that will impact students' throughput and success.
- assess the extent to which students interact with other people of other races and the extent to which institutions are supportive of all students against the backdrop of discrimination in South African universities.

The intentions of this present study mirror the CHE study which was undertaken as a reaction to SA universities' low pass rates of around 15% of the students who graduate on time. Jaffer and Garraway (2016:63) similarly note that despite the significant increase of black students entering higher education in post-apartheid South Africa, still, very few black students graduate on time. The urgent need for improved retention and graduation rates in the South African HEI provides a strong rationale for this current study which explored the engagement challenges of IPGS whose success has a contribution to the success rates in South African universities. The difference with this study was that this present study was a case of one institution with a focus on IPGS who face unique experiences and needs during their temporary stay in a foreign country (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002:155) while the CHE study was a survey of all South African public universities with a sample of seven universities which focused on 13 600 undergraduate students as participants in the study.

Since the pilot study by the CHE, 19 other South African universities have repeated the survey (Schreiber & Yu, 2016:160). The results of the national surveys are used by institutions to assist students to engage in education-related behaviour and to assist higher education institutions to motivate students into engaging in behaviour that corresponds to a range of desirable outcomes (McCormick et al., 2013:64) such as productive adult life (Kuh, 2003:25), ability to critical thinking, cognitive development, self-worth, moral and ethical development, student satisfaction, persistence and productive gender and racial identity formation (McCormick et al. 2013:64). Quaye and Harper (2014:3) add skills development, college adjustment, practical competence, skills transferability and accrued social capital as some of the desirable outcomes. Persistence in behaviour has drawn the most attention as it is well proven and documented that students who are actively engaged take their studies to fruition (Dary et al., 2016:6).

To carry out the pilot study CHE used the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) with a sample of 13 600 undergraduates from seven selected universities in South Africa. The SASSE instrument is based on the American National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) but adjusted to suit South African expressions and terminologies. This present investigation, however, was a qualitative case study of one university and interviews were employed to collect the data from IPGS. The interview protocols were not standardised like the NSSE or the SASSE but interview items were designed specifically for this current study based on literature gleaned on IPGS engagement experiences which sought to highlight the unique engagement challenges confronted by IPGS.

Of interest to this study were the results of the study by CHE that revealed significant differences in student engagement within institutions between domestic and international student sub-divisions. Also, the experience of the students was as divergent as the sub-groups of races and gender in each university (Strydom and Mentz, 2010:26). The divergence of the students was viewed positively by this current study. First, the divergence of student engagement in sub-groups of students could stimulate positive and dynamic student experiences on-campus environments. Also, since international students come from different countries, the experiences may also

be as divergent as the students, which may further indicate differences in IPGS engagement challenges.

Pather et al. (2017:167) carried out a quantitative study on first-year students at a university of technology in South Africa, with the aim of understanding issues and complexities of student engagement experiences, university support structures and challenges faced in the university. The highlight put forward by the researchers was "the historically unequal distribution of economic, social and cultural capital in South Africa which created disparities in the way students access and engage within the universities". The authors' position was for the challenges to be confronted from a multi-faceted approach to identify factors that influence student engagement practices. This affirms earlier research by Fredrick et al. (2004:61) and Li and Lerner (2013:21) who likewise validate the adoption of a multi-dimensional description of the concept of student engagement. However, the study by Pather et al. (2017:167) unlike this current study, disregards the nationality of the students but rather focused on the effects of the residual historical apartheid era that saw the unequal distribution of resources within South African universities based on the racial discriminations of that period (Wawrzynski, et al. 2012:107; Schreiber and Yu, 2016:171).

A study by Mokhothu and Callaghan (2018:1) correspondingly investigated the contribution of cultural intelligence to socio-cultural adaptation and academic performance of international students in one of the large South African universities. The findings show that socio-cultural adaptation is positively linked to international students' performance. The results suggest that socio-cultural adaptation can influence academic performance and the study recommends that universities should be proactive in affording support for the socio-cultural adaptation of international students in the form of programmes that seek the student's voice. This current study saw the relevance of the recommendation that highlights students' voices and thus strengthened the choice of interviews for this current study and the use of excerpts during analysis to power the participants' perspectives on the problem investigated.

Chinyamurindi's (2018:209) qualitative study in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa sought to understand how international students perceive and experience a sense of belonging. The results were meant to be useful for the provision of high-quality institutional service. Chinyamurindi's research narrowed its focus to the

emotional dimension of engagement and further singled out the sense of belonging to understand international students' experiences. The observation is that Chinyamurindi's context of study fell short of addressing the tripartite dimensions of the student engagement but this current study examined the student engagement experiences as a multi-dimension of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. This current study let the dimensions emerge from the data collected, thereby taking an all-inclusive approach of measuring student engagement challenges as suggested by Pather et al. (2017:163). Despite this difference, Chinyamurindi's study became a point of reference to this study as this study also sought to understand elements of the sense of belonging in the university under study. The other difference to the current study was that Chinyamurindi considered all the international students on campus while this current study zeroed in on IPGS. However, the similarity to the present study lay in the attention to international students. Thus, this current study attempted to expand a profound contribution to literature. In that way, this present study built on Chinyamurindi's study to expand research on engagement experiences of international students.

Further, the study by Chinyamurindi (2018:215) revealed through focus group discussions that international students felt alienated because they were not integrated into the host population. The discussion also mentioned the lack of support services from the international office. International students also said they had no input and representation in the curriculum and they felt alienated. This lack of connectedness in a foreign country triggered home-sickness among international students. Thus, the concerns in Chinyamurindi's study made for the interview questions for this current study for further inquiry into the issues. This situation is an indication that challenges still exist in higher learning institutions of South Africa regardless of the interrogation in earlier studies. Therefore, this current research intended to fill a void in challenges faced by IPGS from a perspective of a different university which might have its unique challenges to explore current situations of the phenomenon.

Mda (n.d:9) also carried out a study in several South African universities and in the study, one of the domestic students indicated that international students were favourites to staff over local students. The assertion was that international students were preferred because of their visibility in academic gatherings such as fieldwork,

indabas and conferences compared to domestic students. Significantly, international students enrolling in foreign countries is typical of their global visibility, high achievement and resourcefulness. International students are also viewed as high achievers who developed survival skills given the challenges and limited resources at their disposal. These indications in Mda's study heightened the need for this present study to further probe into the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of student engagement and coping mechanisms of IPGS regardless of the unique challenges they encountered during their study period.

Some scholars have positively linked student engagement and academic success in higher education (McCormick et al., 2013:65). In response, Schreiber and Yu (2016:159) undertook to investigate the relationship between student engagement and academic performance at a university in South Africa. The study collected data from undergraduates through the SASSE online questionnaire survey. The results mirror the pilot study by Strydom and Mentz (2010:26) that engagement patterns in the university studied "are different across race and gender… and are highly correlated to academic performance". The most considerable engagement indicators in the study were high-order learning and collaborative learning. The study concluded that student engagement can be used as a framework for improving retention and success rates in South African universities. The results of that study motivated this current study to investigate the engagement phenomenon and come up with recommendations for engaging IPGS as an integral sub-group of a larger population, to improve individuals and the overall institutional academic performance as guided by IPGS' voices.

Wawrzynski et al. (2012:107) conducted a similar study to Schreiber and Yu (2016:159) which focused on student engagement as a predictive factor to student performance and outcomes at a different university in South Africa. The purpose was to assess student engagement by measuring students' characteristics and their insights into learning outcomes. Data were compared for the different groups of students. Of interest to this study, international students emerged as the most engaged among the various groups identified. The findings corroborate with the later studies of Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1822) and Mda (n.d:9) who concluded that international students are the most hardworking and keen to learn of all identity groups in higher institutions of learning. The study by Wawrzynski et al. (2012:107)

rationalised that international students were the most engaged because they intentionally made the undertaking to go and get the education from South African universities at the expense of the education back home. More so, they sought and adapted other educationally related opportunities to boost their connectedness to the institution in comparison to their indigenous counterparts. Mda (n.d:2) supports that the partiality for non-South African black students in South African HEI over domestic students is that international students "tend to be more academically prepared and stronger than the domestic students which save resources through the remedial and academic development of the less engaged domestic students". The other foundation for international students being more engaged is because they did not experience the historical apartheid of South Africa and therefore, international students do not bring along that lingering burden on campus which weighs heavily on South African students (Wawrzynski, et al. 2012:107; Schreiber and Yu's, 2016:171).

Mda (n.d:3) from the Human Research Council, South Africa, conducted research that explored international student experiences in South African universities. The study's focus is comparable to this current study as it had its attention on graduate international students but deviated by narrowing to only those on the African continent outside South Africa whereas this study sought diversity by encompassing all international students in the university, this was despite that the sample unintentionally had students from the African continent only. The major finding of Mda's study was that language was both a negative and a positive influence on international students' sense of connectedness to South African universities. For example, students from neighbouring countries to South Africa like Zimbabwe, Botswana and Lesotho, felt more "at home away from home" because of the similarities of the indigenous languages shared. However, international students from other parts of Africa who could not speak or understand the local languages felt secluded. Nevertheless, because all the respondents for this study were postgraduate students, the language barrier was overcome by students' proficiency in the English language which is widespread in most countries on the African continent. Apart from using a common language, African international students have a sense of belonging among each other because of the community nature of being foreigners in a foreign university, therefore, shared common experiences of being international students (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013:1335). Aaron et al. (2018:1317) concur that international students in

most learning institutions are found to socialise among themselves than with domestic students. These accounts were related to behavioural dimensions of engagement in this current study.

Several other factors made international students from the African continent have a feeling of connectedness to South African universities. For example, the similarities of colonial history and cultural practices coupled with the shared borders in the case of neighbouring countries Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho (Mda, n.d:1). Zimbabwean students always came up highest of the international students in South Africa, followed by Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland because of their proximity to South Africa (Mda, n.d:1; Mokhothu & Callaghan 2018:5). The figures are that in 2016, 37% of the international students were from Zimbabwe while a smaller group of 2% were from Kenya and 2.1% were from the US (Higher Education and Training, South Africa, 2016:18). Another factor is the case of students from Lesotho who by sharing the Sotho language with their South African counterparts, attach themselves to the people of South Africa. The same study confirms Mda (nd:1) and Mokhothu and Callaghan's (2018:5) findings that international students from Mauritius, Zimbabwe (excluding those who could speak IsiNdebele) and Nigeria felt disconnected as they could not converse in the local South African languages. These findings of the connectedness of IPGS to a South African university were also embedded in this present study as part of the emotional dimension of student engagement experiences.

3.8 IPGS engagement with staff

A supervisor or promotor is very significant in an IPGS' academic engagement experiences (Cekiso et al., 2019:13). The authors are certain that post-graduate students at some point in their studies feel let down by the relationship with their supervisors. Their study concluded that the relationship between postgraduate students and staff is instrumental to how the student will get along with their studies. Precisely, for students to persist and succeed with their studies, relationships between staff and students at universities must be prioritised (Hardy & Bryson, 2016:10).

A supervisor can be an enabler of a barrier to student engagement. A reciprocal relationship needs to develop between the student and the supervisor (Dary et al.,

2016:7; Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2009:167) In the absence of that relationship the student will find the academic experience a challenge (Hardy & Bryson, 2016:15). Fry et al. (2009:167) suggest that the relationship necessitates an agreement between the two parties which must be discussed and decisions made to a unified understanding to prevent future challenges. As such, any engagement challenges international students may face can be determined by the kind of relationship between student and supervisor (Perry, 2016:194).

Student-supervisor relationships can be a challenge for students to maintain (Fry et al., 2009:165). It has been established that many students who find it tough to approach academic members of staff to have a greater chance of not completing the dissertation on time. Thomas (2012:32) advises that sound relationships of the two parties are based on easy relationships and therefore, should be treated accordingly since positive relationships are a source of motivation and encouragement to work harder and achieve high on the part of the student. Fry et al. (2009:165) vie for a supervisor who;

- includes sensitivity to the diverse needs of students,
- connects students to each other,
- reads drafts produced by the student,
- avails time for the student,
- gives constructive feedback on the student's work and
- updates the overall progress with the study.

Fry et al. (2019:237) further advocate for feedback that supports the learning process that incorporates elements of assessment. The more students get feedback, the more skilled they become and the quicker the feedback, the more the students will learn (Kuh, 2003:28). Thomas (2012:36) laments that feedback which takes long and is not substantial breeds frustration and anxiety on the part of the student. Further, feedback needs to be supportive of the student's work and it should guide the student on how to use the feedback to inform future assessment tasks (Cekiso et al., 2019:18). Positive verbal and gestural feedback has been associated with better academic engagement and student outcomes (Cage et al., 2018:304). However, Cage et al. do not dispute negative feedback where necessary, but caution that the manner and frequency in which the negative feedback is delivered will determine the type of

engagement. Additionally, repeated negative feedback for a given behaviour is an indication that the feedback is not operative which may cause despondency on the part of the student.

Fry et al. (2019:237) prefer formative assessment to help students estimate their progress through proper project management skills of scheduling, action planning, time management and monitoring until delivery of the dissertation. It is emphasised that a supervisor should be proficient in project management skills for proper supervision.

George Kuh, founding director of NSSE, regards the notions of time on task, quality of effort and involvement as constructs that contribute to the conceptualisation of student engagement (McCormick et al., 2013:50). Correspondingly, Alexander Astin, in his theory of student involvement hypothesised that the more involved the students are, the more successful they will be in college (Astin, 1984:519). In the same vein, dissertations offer a unique learning opportunity because they are sufficiently time-bound to offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their project management skills (Fry et al., 2009:165). The time frame makes dissertation writing student-centered and the supervisor assumes the role of a facilitator whose duty is to encourage and guide the student to understand and make sense of the research and seek solutions and strategies that culminate to the submission of the dissertation on time. Fry et al. (2009:165) further allude that steering the student to timely submission is a result of a cordial supervisor-student relationship. It is this collaborative role of the student and supervisor that make a dissertation such an authoritative learning strategy. McCormick et al. (2013:55) agree that dissertations are among the high impact learning practices as they require intensity on students' time and effort in ways that involve friendly interaction with the faculty and colleagues. This kind of interaction demonstrates the need for an unassuming relationship between the student and the supervisor. But then, it is up to the supervisor's skill to foster that relationship for the research to progress (Cekiso, 2018:22). Herewith, it became apparent for this study to expand knowledge on the nature of the relationship between the supervisor and IPGS to describe the tripartite engagement dimensions of behavioural, emotional and cognitive which are all entrenched in the student-supervisor relationship. Borrowing from Cekiso et al. (2019:10) data about student experiences regarding their relationship with

supervisors provided important information about student experiences and expectations.

3.9 IPGS engagement with peers

There is a strong association between a student's relationships on campus and decisions taken to continue or drop studies (Thomas, 2012:59). Thomas sees the relations on campus as pivotal to social networks for emotional support and the development of cohort distinctiveness and fits into a programme. Hardy and Bryson (2016:15:13) assert that all it needs is face-face, small groups, or one-on-one interactions to get the full benefit of relationships among students. Thomas and Esse (2016:874) in their study in Canada established that international students who create relationships with host students experience better socio-cultural adaptation in a space of one and a half years after entering Canada and such students are more likely to persevere in their studies. Hence, the call for scholars to consider innovative ways towards building meaningful relationships between domestic and international students in and outside campus (Rose-redwood and Rose-redwood, 2018:1267).

Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2018:1329) in their writing on fostering successful integration and engagement between domestic and international students state that the efforts that close the gaps that span the diversity of students on university campuses are key to creating shared engagement between the sub-groups of students. They argue that social engagement bears significant consequences for student experiences and determines their social systems and professional opportunities in their future life. The authors lament that it would be unfortunate for domestic students not to interact with international students as they will only limit their cultural literacy at the same time reducing potential "to socially and professionally interact with people from different backgrounds and different geographical contexts".

Equally, several studies have proved that international students usually interact more with students of their nationality or with other international students than they do with domestic students (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018:1329). Aaron et al. (2018:1317) sense that this situation is a cause for concern because that void stifles the conceptualisation of internationalisation. Aaron et al. (2018:1317) together with Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2018:1329) suggest that university strategic

development plans should come up with explicit programmes designed to close the gap between international and domestic students. Aaron et al. (2018:1317) further advise that universities should not expect automatic relations between international and domestic students due to their co-existence but rather should create and foster opportunities for the networks to materialise and prepare them for the priceless attribute of today's universal workplace and social environment.

Following their study, Dyer et al. (2018:38) highlight that friendships with cohorts at university best define an engaged student and are critical to enabling engagement and in turn a consequence of engagement. This means that "friendships reportedly allow students to have someone to get engaged with, share information about events and encourage their engagement". This study proposes that the advancement of student-student and student-staff relationships is important to student engagement.

3.10 International students' engagement challenges in foreign universities

Most studies that focused on international students found that international students are likely to encounter many difficulties during their study period. Likewise, Ammigan (2018:1295), Fass-Holmes (2016:935) and Perry (2016:714) maintain that while all new students must adjust to new university environments, international students bear the most brunt of the experience. Nonetheless, this has not discouraged students from opting to study abroad (Titrek et al., 2016:148), which means that by studying in a foreign country, international students represent a highly motivated group of students (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:560) but the high motivation does not come with ease (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1828). The challenges international students encounter often incapacitate them academically laments Covington (2017:4). The author says even if supporting services and resources were put in place, the challenges many times dominate and the result becomes the underutilisation of the available services and resources due to frustration. Consequently, all international students at any given institution require services that are unique to them (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:986). The authors caution that it is important to also realise that the needs or challenges for international students will differ with the duration of the study or the length of stay in the host country. For example, the language barrier could be a challenge to new international students but as time passes, the challenge fades when students become proficient in the host nation's language (Gautam et al., 2016:514).

Such observations support the inclusion of master and doctoral students and former and current students to determine the effect of duration of stay and study on challenges experienced by IPGS.

Since much is known about challenges faced by international students when studying in HEI abroad (Bamford, 2008:2; Titrek et al., 2016:148), the concern by the academic community, including this present study is on the diversity of the challenges. The challenges become a perennial concern because any IPGS' academic struggles can compromise a university's output which may affect the graduation rates. Graduation rates are known indicators of student success, retention and institutional accountability (Fass-Holmes, 2016:934). Similarly, like the intentions of this study, it is essential for the university to be aware, understand and address the challenges that IPGS face during their study time (Hanassab and Tidwell 2002:315; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015:2). It is also important to recognise that the diversity of the institutions and students creates a challenging situation and therefore "requires a well-articulated and collaborative programming and outreach" to overcome the challenges (Ammigan & Laws, 2012:1296). Quaye and Harper (2014:8) also suggest that the decisions made for international students must embrace what students say about their experiences to examine the challenges that they experienced in foreign countries. This necessitated the use of interviews for this study that would capture excerpts to explain the experiences by IPGS.

It is a fact that international students come from different countries with diverse backgrounds and experiences (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138). Thus, the challenges for international students as suggested by Titrek et al. (2016:154) and Ammigan and Laws (2012:1296) may differ with individuals, from one institution to another and from one nation to another and from object to object. Literature, therefore, highlights a variety of challenges encountered by international students. For that reason, researchers have categorised the challenges faced by international students to the context of the studies conducted in different regions and different institutions. From the literature, it is also evident that some challenges overlap the categories. For example, the challenge of language can be an academic or a social challenge. The challenges will be discussed in the framework of earlier studies.

Talebloo and Baki (2013:141) conducted a literature search for their study on challenges encountered by international students in institutions of higher learning. The results were categorised into:

- curriculum,
- general living,
- socio-cultural,
- personal psychological,
- academic and
- language

However, Talebloo and Baki (2013:140) then carried out their own study on challenges faced by international postgraduate first-year students in a university in Malaysia. Their findings were categorised as:

- Facilities (accommodation, transportation, food and library)
- Social environments (cultural, communication, and English difficulties)
- Academic difficulties (academic system, lectures and methodology, faculty supervision)
- International office programme (lack of entertainment activities)

Chinyamurindi's (2018:215) investigation focused on international students' sense of belonging at a South African university. The study exposed insecurity triggered by xenophobic attacks, feelings of alienation, stereotyping, lack of integration of the global perspective in the curriculum and immigration issues as challenges faced by international students. These difficulties affected students' sense of belonging to a South African university which became risk factors for withdrawal from studies. Other challenges were related to high crime rates, medical insurance, study permits, discrimination, distance from their family, student work permits, limited access to financial resources and housing.

Rawjee and Reddy (2012:198) narrowed their study on communication challenges international students encountered when studying at a university in South Africa. This group of students was on an exchange programme from universities in Europe and the United States of America. Only a small number of the students interviewed had

ever lived in a developing country. Such a situation presented its own exclusive challenges to the international students from Europe. The challenges involved unacceptable student housing and living conditions. Students complained of noise from local students. The international students were likewise not happy because they were made to share residence with people who were not students at the university. They correspondingly found it difficult to understand the South African dialect written on the brochures. This group of international students also complained of the quality of orientation programmes, insecurity in the presence of university security personnel, homesickness, inadequate social programmes and a lack of communication between the institution and international students.

Khodabandelou, Karimi and Ehsani (2015:169) conducted a study of Iranian international students pursuing their postgraduate studies in Malaysia. The study investigated challenges postgraduate students faced during their studies. Data from the interviews sighted governmental issues such as inconsistent migration rules and regulations, long procedures for extension of visas, police harassment and limited coverage of health insurance. Institutional challenges included a lengthy waiting period to graduation after completion of studies. Financial struggles were also a challenge causing the most stress among the postgraduate students. Other problems encountered were cultural differences and lack of communication and relevant information about university procedures.

As for this present study, IPGS challenges in HEI were the cornerstone of this study. This literature made it essential to understand how struggles manifest among international students at national and institutional levels which made it a basis for comparisons with the findings of this present study. Literature provided several recommendations to the challenges experienced by international students. The suggestions are relative to the studies reviewed. Peters et al. (2018:1) put forward that “institutional context has a great influence on student engagement and what works well in one institution is no assurance for success in another.” Nonetheless, it can be very helpful to learn from institutions with a history of strong student engagement.

Specific challenges will be discussed next. It is important to acknowledge that the international student challenges discussed are not limited to the ones outlined but rather to those that were found in the literature reviewed for this study.

3. 10.1 Academic difficulties

Wu et al. (2015:2) accept that international students are highly regarded in their countries of origin but they must meet the academic and language requirements of the host country. It has been observed that there are differences in study methods among nations which present a difficulty for international students. For example, it was noted that visiting countries to the UK emphasise less on independent study compared to UK universities (Bamford, 2008:4). In Malaysian universities, international students complain of the lengthy process of graduation which extends their stay abroad resulting in a strained budget, worsened by family responsibilities back home (Khodabandelou et al., 2015:170).

Academics and language are closely related (Perry, 2016:715). International students who are non-native speakers of English face spoken and writing difficulties (Williams-Middleton. 2010:3). Issues include grammar, vocabulary, plagiarism, linguistic fluency and accuracy (Raviechandran et al., 2017:765) and terminology for a specialist subject area. These academic concerns can be quite stressful for IPGS as thesis and dissertation writing require language proficiency and intensive writing expectations (Bamford, 2008:2). Further, language limitations may hinder academic achievement and participation in education-related activities as well as cultural understanding of the host nation.

Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1831) suggest international students should be assessed individually and remove anxieties about the new place to guide them to successful academic achievement. Also, academic staff should be aware and sensitive to international students' academic needs and introduce international student advisory service boards on campus to help students cope with their academic struggles (Titrek & Nguluma, 2016:154).

3.10.2 Linguistic barriers for IPGS

UNESCO (2018:17) and Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2018:1330) notice that people who seek higher education in the US encounter linguistic barriers to communication. Students who suffer the most in the US are those from East Asian countries, including South Korea, China and Taiwan (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:567). Mahmud et al. (2010:289) suggest that international students must initiate interaction,

understand the culture of domestic students, discuss with university staff members and settle down in the host university. That way they will learn the local language through practice because lack of proficiency in the English language intensifies communication and academic challenges. “The sooner the language barrier is broken, the quicker the students assimilate into college life and this command of the English language must be aggressively pursued” (Hegarty, 2014:231). This is the reason the US, UK and Australia remain top options for international students because English is a universal language (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:562).

Research has proved that the mere co-existence of international and domestic students will not guarantee effective student-student communication. Hence, spontaneous interactions between domestic and international students will just not occur without intervention (Amos & Rehorst, 2018:1348). The authors note that in some instances, domestic students will avoid interaction with international students due to the language barrier. Thus, international students who understand the locally-spoken language(s) have the possibility of feeling at home in a foreign country and conversely feel alien if they cannot communicate in the local language (Mda n.d:9). Failure to communicate in a new university environment can cause international students to experience psychological symptoms such as feelings of inferiority, confusion, homesickness, loneliness, anxiety, anger, isolation, loss of identity, low motivation and a lack of focus and self-confidence (Tseng et al. in Mahmud et al.2010:290). Hence, the language barrier contributes negatively to socialisation and relations on campus. For example, students with lower levels of English proficiency, in an English-speaking nation, are likely to face higher levels of discrimination (Perry, 2016:715). Isolation may also result when international students fail to find new friends who can speak their language (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1825).

Language challenges can hinder effective engagement in the local community as well (Wu et al., 2015:3). Knowing the native language helps international students to interact with local people in everyday problems such as assistance in directions and prices from the locals. In this case, the more the interaction, the more language and communication skills are developed leading to better adaptation to the local nation (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1829; Wu et al., 2015:3). Being capable to speak a local

language also helps international students to initiate dialogue with academic staff and speed the settlement process in the new university (Mahmud et al., 2010:289).

International students may be able to speak English but communication may fail because of differences in accents or pronunciations (Bamford, 2008:5). Wu et al. (2015:7) confirm that language difficulties can emanate from diverse accents, speed of speech and articulation. A study in America by Sullivan, Jr. (2018:987) reveals that host students and professors struggled to understand a Nigerian student due to accent differences. The Nigerian student had to adjust to slow speaking to facilitate any dialogue. Challenges intensify when international students can not adjust to the different dialects and jargon words spoken by local staff and students (Mahmud et al., 2010:289). Another observation by Bamford (2008:5) is that if the population of international students is large with great diversity on campus, it creates another dimension to the challenges of communication which then affects all students on campus.

Upon probing on how international students cope with the language obstacle, in one study, participants said they choose to cohabit with a native English-speaking student to improve their English proficiency (Wu et al. (2015:3). In the same study, some international students joined a variety of organisations on campus to help improve their English language skills.

3.10.3 Social challenges to IPGS

It is well-conceived that international students face challenges not only in the classroom but also with social life inside or off-campus (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1827). When students go to study abroad they leave their well-established friendships back home. So, as soon as they reach their new destination, establishing friendships becomes a priority to earn membership in the new university community (Hardy & Bryson, 2016:12). If friendships are not formed, international students begin to feel depressed and less connected to the institution leading to contemplations to drop out. For friendships to develop between international and domestic students, respondents in Chinyamurindi's (2018:215) study recommend inter-cultural activities to celebrate the diversity on campus thereby closing the imaginary gap that exists between the two co-existing groups of students

In most studies that sought challenges for international students, most respondents voiced the experiences of social isolation and loneliness as they found it difficult to engage with the local students. For instance, in Russian universities, social challenges manifested in international students who did not have relatives or friends in Russia (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:182). This is also a representation in London universities where domestic students do not socialise with international students (Bamford, 2008:9). The background is that most London students are non-residents, therefore, their social networks are outside campus. They are only on campus during lectures and leave soon after. This creates a situation where domestic and international students are not familiar with each other, let alone intermingle. Bamford (2008:4) advocates for institutions that consider the social context of student adjustment to address the isolation challenges among international students in London universities. However, despite IPGS socialisation having its positive academic outcomes, Perry (2016:717) argues that extreme socialisation may be detrimental to learning. Thus, institutions should create programmes that enhance student socialisation in the new environments without compromising their studies.

3.10.4 Culture shock encountered by IPGS

Culture shock is experienced when one arrives in a country they have never visited and begin to face unfamiliar experiences in their day-to-day living, in the process, they fail to acclimatise (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1825). Entering foreign cultural contexts can be an overwhelming cultural experience as the new culture can be strange and confusing (Mokhothu & Callaghan, 2018:3). Titrek and Nguluma (2016:153) confirm that many international students are likely to experience culture shock in a new university. An example is the study done in Russia where some respondents had difficulty with communication patterns during social events (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1825). Another example is from a study in China by Wu et al. (2015:6). One respondent from China did not make sense of tutors who did not keep time. In China wasting time and tardiness is considered inconsiderate. The same was shared by a Korean who gave an example where a student was kept waiting to get a driver's license because, in Korea, systems are well organised and coordinated in such a way that no one is delayed or kept waiting.

Wu et al. (2015:6) suggest that to have a culturally universal campus, university management should “develop ways that facilitate the development of international students’ cross-cultural competencies which can improve the academic performance of international students”. Zhou et al. (2008:63) and Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1825) are certain that culture shock will always manifest among international students hence the call by Titrek and Nguluma (2016:154) for advance information on cultural issues of the host nation and immediate support systems as soon as the students enter the host nation. Therefore, institutions must not wait for challenges to manifest before providing vital information such as culture, language and other pertinent information to students (Perry, 2016:719). The information should also include places of worship. In addition, universities should seek international students’ input to determine what they perceive to be important to their engagement. The need for church information is supported by a study in a Turkish university that reported that some students had challenges in finding other places of worship in a Muslim dominated nation because students were not informed (Titrek & Nguluma, 2016:154).

3.10.5 Financial constraints for international students

Financial constraint is the source of academic stress experienced by international postgraduate students. Therefore, international postgraduate students are susceptible to perceive stress in the academic environment due to the process of survival in maintaining good academic performance, social interaction and work. (Gaol & Lin, 2017:179

Perry (2016:718) states that there are many hidden costs that international students incur which they never anticipated when they arrived in American universities, resulting in frustration among international students. As such, the author advises host universities to relay the costs and fees prior to their arrival to prevent frustration.

The study by Khodabandelou (2015:170) found that financial struggles were the most serious challenges which result in a lot of anxiety and uncertainty among IPGS. The financial setbacks were triggered by high tuition, subsistence costs, medical insurance premiums (Gautam et al., 2016:503) and residence (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:140). For some students, it was worsened by the responsibilities to support families back home (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2014:1078), particularly for IPGS who are breadwinners.

To worsen the financial challenge, some governments like Malaysia do not allow students to be employed while on a study programme despite the presence IPGS families in the host country (Khodabandelou et al., 2015:170). Thus, the study suggests Malaysian universities "consider international students' needs, including scholarships and any other financial support such as grants, fellowships and research assistantship…" Choudah (2016:iii) considers it an institutional breach of responsibility to continue increasing tuition fees for international students without comparable reinvestment.

3.10.6 Health challenges encountered by IPGS

A study by Khodabandelou et al. (2015:171) confirms international students in Malaysia do encounter health challenges. The results of their study specify that medical insurance provided for students has limited coverage to hospital fees with a certain waiting period after payment coupled with the ever-changing service providers. This study also indicated that, although all students on campus had similar issues, international students were more likely to be hospitalised for mental health problems. Additionally, failure to adjust to the local weather conditions can cause health problems among international students. For example, international students studying in Turkey are easily afflicted by flu, back pain, and skin diseases, especially during the summer and winter seasons (Titrek & Nguluma 2016:153). These challenges are said to intensify the social support need as students seek medical service and attention (Perry 2016:718).

3.10.7 Amenity challenges when studying abroad

Sometimes international students struggle with incompetence issues to available support services found in the American education system which domestic students are competent in (Perry, 2016:718). An example cited is that of the utilisation and application of technology which many international students struggle with and yet domestic students are adept to. This breeds insecurity and anxiety among international students who must create extra time to get skilled in technology or other issues in which domestic students are already skilled.

Other facility struggles were reported in a study by Talebloo and Baki (2013:140) at one university in Malaysia. The study exposed that international students had to deal with expensive accommodation, insecure and poorly maintained accommodation with no hot water supply. Students also complained of unreliable transport systems for those who stayed outside the campus. In the same study, accommodation arrangement was not relayed to international students as advance information. Still, some respondents struggled with campus food which they were not familiar with. Besides, they had no information of the whereabouts of the food outlets and when the outlets were located, the quality of food did not meet their expectations in terms of excellence and sanitation.

The challenges discussed above in different contexts exhibit evidence of the existence of engagement struggles IPGS must contend with together with the rigours of academic work when studying across borders. This current study attempted to expand on literature by investigating experiences of IPGS in a South African university context hoping the outcomes will stimulate further debate on engagement challenges in the different universities to ameliorate the challenges.

At the same time, the challenges can be viewed from a positive perspective. Challenges inspire international students to develop strategies to cope with the problems but international students will need adequate support from universities that enroll them to cope with the challenges (Wu et al., 2015:8). These support services are discussed next.

3.11 University support services and resources for international students

Perez-Encinas and Ammigan (2016:986) recommend that while programmes may be developed for all students, there is a need to have programmes specifically designed for international students. “International students are preoccupied with challenges of being in a foreign country, therefore to retain international students, universities need to understand the challenges to provide the right kind of support they need” (Talebloo & Baki, 2016:139). This is the reason why Tinto (2014:17) observed that:

> Effective student support does not arise by chance. It is not solely the result of good intentions. Rather it requires the development of an intentional,

structured, proactive approach that is coherent, systematic and coordinated in nature.

Due to the valuable resources that international students bring along, Hanassab and Tidwell (2002:306) also believe the needs of international students cannot be overlooked. Surviving in a new community is the first experience international students must deal with such that support systems are needed as soon as the students arrive (Wu et al., 2015:3) and they should feel the support around them to allow for truly emotional, social and cognitive engagement (Dary, 2016:6). Chinyamurindi (2018:209) concurs that, with the increase of international students in South African universities, policies are needed that make international students get connected to South Africa. One respondent in a study by Wu et al. (2015:7) corroborates that service and support centers which include the library, laboratories and counselors allow for ease of stress management, collective support and gain inspiration to cope with the struggle of studying abroad.

There is evidence that international students are lured to a university by the professional supporting services that are offered by the institution to students (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:985) and the supporting services offered have a bearing on the experience and engagement level of a student (Kahu, 2013,760). McCormick (2013:65) believes it is rested on the universities to mould student experiences and the environments to enhance increased student engagement. International students enrolled in a university with supportive services and a fully integrating academic system are more satisfied with studying abroad and are more likely to complete their studies (Korobova & Starobin, 2015). Considering the high regard and the value of completion rates and persistence in higher learning institutions, supportive environments are worth taking seriously (Perry, 2016:718). However, the literature says international students are barely aware of the existence of the supporting services and let alone utilise them (Thomas, 2012:18). Thomas professes that services can only be utilised when they are visible and easily accessible to the student. This suggests that professional services can only contribute to the development and identity of students if the students know what support services are available to them.

Universities need to understand the level of satisfaction of international students in comparison with support services offered (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:985) because international students deserve more in terms of academic and career support weighing on the benefits they offer (Choudah, 2016: ii). Tinto (2014:31) adds that "promoting college student success requires more than enrolling students; higher education institutions must also provide the support that students need to persist and progress to degree completion". Quaye and Harper (2014:1) also accept as true that international students deserve unique services through strategic and intentional conditions that compel students to the maximum potential of university life. Trowler (2010:44) and Thomas (2012:7) recommend that international student affairs offices must be at the forefront in monitoring students' engagement ineffective education experiences and team up with academic administration and the faculty to create enough prospects for every international student to be engaged. Therefore, this study realised the need to include the office of international affairs representatives as respondents to issues presented above. This was meant to establish an international student policy on supporting services against the practice of the office of international affairs at the university under study.

Literature referred to many important options of professional services HEI can offer international students. A literature review by Perez-Encinas and Ammigan (2016:987) referred to orientation, integration activities with local students, career and internship guidance, language support, and assistance with visa and other administrative procedures as some of the support services which must be offered to international students. Thomas (2012:18) proposes the library, pre-entry information, financial advice and guidance and counselling, chaplains, disability service, writing skills and a mathematics centre as part of the services. Additionally, universities should also consider mentorship services where international students are systematically paired with domestic students as an integration strategy (Thomas & Esse, 2016:873). Some other crucial services embrace accommodation and an information desk for international students (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:986). More still, an international office can offer advice on immigration procedures, family support, finances, scholarships and security (Fry et al., 2009:155). In a study by Leach and Zepke (2011:198) most students proclaimed the library, computers and health

services as the most used support services offered by their institution. Some of the said services were well supported by literature as illustrated next.

Examining professional support services and resources was integral to this present investigation. It was important to collect the data from both the professionals and IPGS to triangulate responses to get a comprehensive understanding of the specific services earmarked for international students at the university under study. The ensuing support service and resources discussed are not exhaustive of those provided by different universities. But the next section aims to appraise, through literature, some of the services and resources offered in HEI that support the engagement of international students.

3.11.1 Student orientation

It is proclaimed students are likely to face difficulties when they enter a new environment for which they have not been prepared (Kim, 2017:399). Hence, Hegarty (2014:231) advises it is important to ensure international students are well received and integrated as soon as possible in the university to enhance retention. The office of international affairs is the primary and main host which welcomes international students by providing the specialist orientation programme for international students (Fry et al., 2009:155). Orientation is essential for preparing students for what experiences to expect at the university. Fry et al. (2009:172) suggest it is the role of a supervisor to ensure that every international student, including latecomers, gets oriented. Therefore, orientation becomes the initial service international students receive on day one of the new life in a university (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016:984). The orientation can be college-wide orientation programmes for international students only or it can be run at schools or departmental level (Perry 2016:719). Wu et al. (2015:8) encourage universities to organise a special orientation to inform international students about the university and the overall academic culture of the university. The same authors recommend activities such as seminars by professionals with former or present international students to give accounts of their experiences at the university. Hegarty (2014:231) suggests “international students need to be aware that there is support in adjusting to a new country and that other students have experienced the same challenges and have been successful”. Likewise,

the orientation should also advise international students on where friendship ties can be developed with local people.

As guided by Metro-Roland (2018:1408), to achieve a successful orientation institutions must invest well in campus readiness. Some institutions offer pre-arrival orientation through welcome letters with details of accommodation, on-campus orientation, local transport and arrival arrangements using welcome representatives for the new students (Choudah, 2016: iii). To create a community for international students, some UK universities organise events such as lunch for the new international students and faculty, community projects and an officially organised group to gain leadership experience and access to university resources that would facilitate some interactive events during the year (Metro-Roland, 2018:1408).

Telbis, Helgeson and Kingsbury (2014:338) further guide that before international students leave for their new destination, institutions should have a contact person who is of the same nation as the international student to assist the new students to get as much information as possible before arrival. Once they arrive, international students should partner with the host student as a support service. This advice is sound because, in a study by Wu et al. (2015:3), one international student opted to share living quarters with a domestic student as a coping strategy. The partnership also opens for more dialogue between host and visiting students thereby allowing sharing of cultural values (Perry, 2016:717).

Tinto (2014:14) worries about the practice of not making orientation programmes mandatory for all students. More so, they are a once-off event which occurs at the beginning of the programmes leaving international students to navigate on their own for the rest of their studies with no one to provide the answers to new encounters and struggles during the duration of the programme. However, some universities extend some intermittent orientation activities into the first semester.

3.11.2 Counselling and advisory services

Counselling, therapy and a host of student advisory services are part of student affairs in most universities. The problem is that students sometimes avoid counselling services because in the African culture, for example, it is not manly to seek this kind of treatment (Madambi, 2014:45). Madambi goes on to advise that there is a need for

awareness on these entrenched cultural sensitive issues for better acceptance of counselling and advisory services “if we are to achieve the goal of nurturing global citizens through education”. Tinto (2014:15) laments the lack of professionally trained advisors for the unique challenges of international students and if available, they are rarely adequate to meet the demand. Perry (2016:716) agrees that there is a need for improvement in advisor and counselor presence to benefit all students but the problem is that the mainstream staff is already overwhelmed with the present workload to include advisory services. One respondent in a study by Wu et al. (2015:7) confirmed the need for counselling and advisory services because at one point she sought counselling services when she faced academic pressures and interaction problems with a supervisor.

3.11.3 Library and laboratory services

It is a requirement that HEI provides library services. It is ideal for library staff and student-affairs professionals to create supportive learning environments that enhance international students’ academic experience (McCormick et al., 2013:56). This is because many international students rely on the library to borrow books and study in a quiet environment (Wu et al., 2015:7). Trowler (2010:39) advocates for a library that has enough space not only for reading but also for students to engage in collaborative activities within the library.

3.11.4 Educational enrichment activities

One behavioural manifestation of student engagement is participation in college events and activities (McCormick et al., 2013:58). As evidence to this, a study by Wawrzynski et al. (2012:119) established that respondents who devoted the most time to educational enrichment activities reported again in their academic and leadership skills and, hence, the study recommends that institutions must make international students aware of the benefits of the educational enrichment activities to encourage student participation.

Group activities in an HEI allow old and new international students and academic staff to come together as a team (Thomas & Esse, 2016:875). Group activities, teamwork, collaborative projects or assignments are a form of high-impact educational practice that increases the likelihood that students will experience diversity through contact

with people who are different from them (Kuh, 2008:21). Additionally, groups allow international students to connect to people who have similar interests, beliefs, and backgrounds to them (Perry, 2016:718).

Still, Thomas (2012:19) advocates for group activities that encourage teamwork and engagement. "Working in a team with students is an immensely rewarding experience as it gives coordination of tangible skills in preparation for the workplace and an introduction to civic engagement that can change lives" (Aaron et al., 2018:1321). Further, a collaboration between peers and staff and community service is an enriching experience where students apply high order skills such as project work (Dary et al., 2016:2; Strydom & Mentz, 2010:21).

Other lessons learnt from studies reviewed is that engaging with plural groups is important in HEI (Aaron et al. 2018:1321) as the situation creates cross-cultural interactions among students (Aaron et al., 2018:1322). Moreover, "providing students with opportunities to apply and test what they are learning through problem-solving with peers inside and outside the classroom … and capstone experiences helps students develop habits of the mind and heart that promise to stand them in good stead for a lifetime of continuous learning" (McCormick, 2013:55). However, it is disturbing that most group activities for international students exclude domestic students (Thomas & Esse, 2016:875). An investigation in American universities revealed that international students were more involved in college group educational enrichment activities than their American counterparts (Perry, 2016:718). The reason is that the activities are organised based on religious or ethnic backgrounds. Wawrzynski et al. (2012:119) advise South Africa and other countries to take an active role in encouraging and supporting student involvement in educational enrichment activities for better learning outcomes. Nevertheless, proactive international students take active roles to engage in different campus activities to broaden their social networking (Wu et al., 2015:7).

3.11.5 Financial support to international students

Several empirical studies have proved that international students are confronted by financial struggles during their stay in foreign nations (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1830). They experience financial challenges because they pay higher tuition

fees than local students, lack employment opportunities due to visa restrictions, lack of financial assistance in terms of scholarships and research grants and lack of awareness of financial assistance opportunities, (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Bilas, 2016:5). A study cited by Khanal and Gaulce (2019:568) revealed that "all the students in their study reported facing anxieties about finances and 91% were worried about how they were going to pay their tuition fees". England, to preserve its share of the international student pool, has allowed graduates to remain at most two years to increase international students' ability to pay back loans owed by international students (Hegarty, 2014:229). Another way is to avail scholarships, particularly for international students to ease their financial situation. Without access to research funding, international students may fail to complete their studies on time, thus adding to more financial demands. In a study in Turkey, several indications were that students got a fellowship from The Department of Turks Abroad and Related Communities but it was not adequate for them. Thus, this group of students either got a job or lived within their means. Students suggest discounts on services that may provide for a bearable life abroad (Titrek et al 2016:161). Another way would be to avail scholarships which would benefit international students too (Bilas, 2016:5). If students do not access funding, many international doctoral students cannot complete their degrees or could potentially take much longer becoming a costlier undertaking at the end of it (Bilas, 2016:6).

3.12 Principles that inform the approaches to service delivery

International students need specific support services during their provisional stay in the host nation (Armos, 2018:4) which should be guided by principles such as monitoring mechanisms (Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016, 986) and timing of services (Thomas, 2012:19) to allow for the provision of informed best support service delivery (Perry, 2016:719) that would help ease international students out of their challenges (Tinto, 2014:15).

3.12.1 Monitoring mechanisms

Perez-Encinas and Ammigan (2016:986) posit that for the application of support services to be meaningful, there is a need to seek feedback from international students to learn if their needs and wishes are maintained to allow for the provision of informed best support services to the students' fulfilment. International students feel more

comfortable with their academic experience when universities provide the necessary information and receive feedback concerning their desire to learn (Perry, 2016:719). Thomas (2012:19) agrees that monitoring mechanisms through feedback should be put in place to assess the quality of students' engagement so that for any sign of disengagement timeous intervention may be implemented. Tinto (2014:15) agrees that for services to be effective, warning of students' difficulties must be early. He adds, students who struggle early during their studies or have problems in residence halls, will tend to get discouraged and begin the dropout process. Thomas (2012:19) also proposes for "proactive action that seeks engagement with students rather than wait for a crisis to occur or the most motivated students to take up opportunities. This is against the background that students who need the support most are the least likely to proactively come forward. Also, when the campus environment is not supportive, the negative outcomes for at-risk students manifest as maladjustment, disengagement and late submission of projects or abandonment of studies before completion (Quaye & Harper, 2014:7).

3.12.2 Timing of services

The theme of the timing of services and resources was recurrent in the literature review. Thomas (2012:19) succinctly laid out that support services should be well-timed. The sooner one responds to their needs, the more likely it is one can help them out of the struggles (Tinto, 2014:15). Thomas (2012:19) extends that services will depend on the need. It is said other services may be needed better later while some activities benefit from taking place over time rather than one-off opportunities. Additionally, while most students will need support sometime during their studies, it is not always clear when support is needed. That is why universities today are developing early-warning systems to detect when students need support (Tinto, 2014:15). So, Tinto recommends "it would be helpful for institutions to learn how to identify the problem in time and to get acquainted with the strategies to overcome it".

3.12.3 An institution as an agent to support services

Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1823) propose that if universities are to continue enrolling international students, they should project the struggles and address them. Perry (2016:719) believes if addressing the challenges cannot be attained university-wide, then it should be taken at the departmental level to allow students to be welcome

by the department and peers. Additionally, it does not matter what form the support takes, but what takes precedence is that students feel connected as a worthwhile group on campus (Tinto (2014:15). Perry (2016:719) further suggests the department can be informed by current research to come up with ways of helping the student to cope with the challenges. Perna (2014:31) recommends for the provision of necessary support services by universities that promote student opportunities to engage in high-quality educational experiences. Likewise, Thomas (2012:19) advocates for provisions that are educational and applicable to students' current interests and future ambitions and should be embedded into the mainstream. Accordingly, this current study fills in that gap by letting an institution aware of what IPGS do and experience while they study in the university and what they need to positively engage in their studies for timeous success.

3.13 Chapter summary

Chapter Three presented literature that informed this present study of student engagement challenges encountered by IPGS at one South African university. The main concepts discussed were: global perspectives of international students, benefits of international students, and internationalisation of higher education in South Africa. The construct of student engagement of international was reviewed to explain the experiences of IPGS in universities and how South Africa has embraced student engagement in higher education institutions. The literature also covered engagement challenges faced by international students and student coping mechanisms as studied in different university populations. It was also important to review researches that looked at support services and resources aimed at international students in HEI. The next chapter discusses the methodology employed to explore IPGS' experiences during their studies abroad.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

> *Qualitative research is not arrived at through statistical procedures or other means of quantification but deals with research about people's lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings as well as about organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena and interactions between nations* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:10)

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three presented and discussed applicable literature to the problem under study. The literature was gleaned from related journals, reports, briefs and policies. The topics under review focused on the global perspective of internationalisation of education, the conceptualisation of student engagement, and challenges faced by IPGS during their studies. Chapter Three also outlined professional supporting services and resources expected for international students.

This present chapter essentially discusses the systematic procedure that was followed in carrying out this study that investigated IPGS experiences during their studies at one South African university. This purely qualitative study was situated in the interpretive paradigm. The research was a case study of one South African university which employed qualitative methods of data collection. The choice for the paradigm and methodological aspects was influenced by reflecting on the phenomenon of interest and its setting, the purpose for carrying out this research together with the objectives and the research questions. To set clear the above considerations, Chapter Four opens by restating the research questions that streamlined the data to be collected, leading to the understanding of the phenomenon studied.

4.2 Research questions

This study was qualitative; hence the main research question was broad and allowed for an investigation of the central phenomenon of the study (Mason, 2002:19). To narrow the focus of the study, the main research question was followed by sub-questions (Creswell, 2009:129). Ritchie and Lewis (2003:48) advise that research

questions also necessitate the address of policy or practice. Likewise, the research questions formulated for this study were based on IPGS engagement experiences and policies employed by the university that facilitate the engagement leading to positive academic performance.

Mindfulness of Silverman (2013:82) and Al-Busaidi's (2008:12) advice, research questions for this study also helped towards:

- organising and directing the study
- developing a coherent study
- setting the boundaries of the study
- keeping the research focused
- pointing to the methods and data that were needed
- providing a framework during the writing up of the report

With the above outlines in mind, below are the research questions formulated for this study.

4.2.1 Research questions for this study

The main research question: What are the engagement experiences of IPGS which affected academic performance at a South African university?

This central question incited the study to unlock the understanding of the experiences of IPGS at a selected South African university driven by their goals to succeed despite the unique challenges encountered. The general understanding of these processes was made possible through the more focused research sub-questions stated next, which in turn guided the specific questions for the interviews, observations and document analysis (Creswell, 2009:130). Former and current IPGS and a representative from the IRO provided answers supported by a policy document analysis in response to the main research question.

Sub-questions

Sub-question 1: **What are the types and nature of IPGS engagement and experiences between IPGS and their peers as well as staff at one South African university?**

Since "student engagement has become both a strategic process for learning and an accountability outcome itself" (Taylor & Parsons, 2011:4), this question was key to understanding behavioural student engagement dimensions prevailing in the university of study. The reason behind this was to understand the state of being engaged among IPGS that could enable or form barriers to academic achievement.

Sub-question 2: **Which are the professional services and resources provided to support IPGS at one South African university?**

The second sub-question was focused on understanding approaches and policies the university implemented as a way of enhancing the engagement of IPGS during their studies. Through literature reviewed by Taylor & Parsons (2011:7), the understanding was those common strategies to improve student engagement and consequently, university retention is centred on university best practices. It is because institutional supporting services influence the engagement levels of a student (Kahu, 2013, 760). Further, students enrolled in a university with supportive services and resources and a fully integrating academic system are more satisfied with their university life and will remain students of that university until completion (Korobova & Starobin, 2015). Therefore, understanding the university's support service procedures and policy for supporting IPGS helped to identify those processes that promoted or hindered student engagement meant to influence individual and university retention and success.

Sub-question 3: **What are the challenges faced by IPGS in their engagement with their peers as well as staff at one South African university?**

Although students studying abroad represent a highly self-driven subset of students in an institution (Khanal & Gaulce, 2019:560), the high motivation, posit Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1828, does not come without any challenges. Adeyemo, in Dev (2016:70 says, any institution and everyone else concerned with education has a

vision of academic excellence. Hence, by formulating the third research question for this study, the purpose was to examine the unique challenges that may incapacitate IPGS' academic performance in a foreign university setup. Barriers identified and abated, and the positives enhanced could mean IPGS retention and success at an individual, institutional and national levels.

Sub-question 4: Which strategies are employed by IPGS to cope with their studies at one South African university?

The concern for understanding how students cope with the challenges encountered by IPGS was driven by the assumption that if IPGS do not cope under given struggles, individual and university output may be compromised. Moreover, it is deemed essential for universities to understand and address challenges faced by IPGS in the institutions (Hanassab and Tidwell 2002:315; Wu et al., 2015:2). On that account, the fourth question had to be formulated to identify how IPGS coped under the given strains that could have impacted their academic studies.

By guiding the study with the said questions, it was, therefore, made possible to guide the specific interview items to collect relevant in-depth data for the qualitative study that sought to explore engagement experiences of IPGS that may otherwise affect academic performance at one South African university.

4.3 PARADIGMATIC REFLECTIONS FOR THIS STUDY

This study was positioned in the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive approach guided the generation of knowledge on student engagement as a retention strategy based on existing learning experiences in the university. The paradigm also informed the researcher's perspectives to interpret what was observed, heard and understood about IPGS at one South African university.

The next section focuses on the interpretive paradigm and explains how the methodological aspects of this study were influenced by this worldview.

4.3.1 Interpretive approach

By being integral to the object being studied, the subject matter and the methods in pursuit of understanding social reality, this research became all interpretive (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2012:257). The interpretive paradigm assumes “a subjectivist epistemology, a relativist ontology, a naturalist methodology and a balanced axiology” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). To support the adoption of an interpretivism paradigm’s assumptions, its characteristics that relate to this study are contextually explained next.

4.3.1.1 Subjectivist epistemology

Subjectivist epistemology means that researchers make meaning of the data through their own thinking and cognitive processing of data, which is informed by the researcher’s interaction with participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). Hence, the interpretive research becomes more subjective than objective as it is shaped by the perceptions of the participants as well as the values and aims of the researcher (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). The core idea was to work with the meanings already there in the social world, accept their existence, construct them and make understanding to avoid misrepresenting the meanings (Goldkuhl, 2012:5). That way, the above-mentioned expectations of the interpretive approach became applicable to this study as it explored IPGS engagement challenges experienced through the interaction of the researcher and IPGS at one South African university. Wherefore, the knowledge gained was constructed based on the existing learning experiences in a university from the perspectives of former and current IPGS and representatives from the IRO. The data was collected and made meaning from the point of view of the participants. The role of the study was to subjectively interpret the existing meaning and make sense of it, informed by interaction with the participants. Taylor and Medina (2012:4) support that:

> Applied to educational research, the interpretive paradigm enables researchers to build rich local understandings of the lifeworld experiences of teachers and students and of the cultures of classrooms, schools and the communities they serve.

Likewise, interpretivists use flexible approaches to seek for answers and confront the reality from subjects, who are typically people who own their experiences and belong

to a social group (Elshafie, 2013:7; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). Further, the epistemology of a paradigm describes how we come to know something or how we know truth or reality and how the researcher can acquire it to deepen understanding in the field of research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27). This position, taken to the study, required an epistemology that allowed for the interpretation of the participants' perceptions of their realities in their context (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24). Therefore, this was achieved by carrying out the study of a university setting with a subset of IPGS' deep understanding of the engagement experiences and challenges of the participants.

The subjectivist epistemology also accepts that the social world cannot be understood from the standpoint of an individual because interpretivism can accommodate multiple perspectives and versions of truths (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). Here, the conviction is that realities are multiple and socially constructed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). Hence, gathering data from varied groups of former and current IPGS together with representatives of the office of international affairs allowed for more diverse and multi-faceted information (Creswell, 2009:9).

Again, the epistemology of the interpretive paradigm is subjectivist in that meaning is the product of the interaction process between the subject and the object, thus, meaning is constructed from events and interactions (Elshafie, 2013:7). The assumption is that the researcher and the researched engaged in interactive processes in which they intermingle, dialogued, questioned, listened, read, wrote and recorded researched data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). Correspondingly, by the researcher engaging in dialogue with participants and listening attentively, the meaning was given to what participants did and said, and what meanings they gave to the experiences and people around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). That way, the researcher and participants engaged in an active collaborative process where they merged and conversed to get the meaning of the data (Blumberg et al., 2011:17). The strength was that the inquirer and the inquired fused into a single entity that created a bond that led to the generation of knowledge (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2012:257) concerning the experiences of IPGS which exposed the challenges that they encountered. This means the researcher and IPGS became interpreters and co-producers of meaningful

data (Goldkuhl, 2012:6). Also, the experiences sought were a product of the IPGS's narrated experiences.

Additionally, conducting this research from the interpretivist viewpoint allowed for viewing students as social players (Hoff et al., 2015:4; Dupere et al., 2018:109) whose engagement behaviour could have resulted from a subjective reaction to events as they interacted with the university environment. Therefore, an empathetic researcher standpoint with participants had to be taken by appreciating the reasons and causes that inspired IPGS' engagement. For this reason, in this study, relationships on campus became integral to this study to understanding the nature of student engagement at the university. The researcher also regarded the interactive and dialogical nature of interviews to gather multiple viewpoints from multiple participants' points of view (Taylor & Medina 2013:4) and viewing students as social players. Similarly, the idea of the use of documents and the encompassing of former and present IPGS permitted for creating a reconstructive understanding of the social and past context of the studied university to perceive how the present circumstances emerged (Goldkuhl, 2012:6).

4.3.1.2 Relativist ontology

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:27) explain that:

> …relativist ontology is the belief that the situation studied has multiple realities and that those realities can be explored and meaning reconstructed through human interactions between the researcher and the subjects of the research and among the research participants.

This study sought engagement experiences of IPGS to reveal the unique challenges the students faced during their studies and how the students and the university managed the challenges to attain the perceived goals in the presence of the struggles. So, the meaning was derived from the point of view of several IPGS experiences and each student was treated as exclusive to their own experiences at the same time accepting that external reality was open to modification (Willis in Thanh and Thanh, 2015:25).

Elshafie, (2013:7) echoes that the interpretivist ontology accepts that situations studied have multiple and complex realities with multiple meanings and various interpretations to it. The assumption, as understood by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:33),

> …helps to orient ones' thinking about the research problem, its significance and how one might approach it to answer research questions, understand the problem to be investigated and contribute to its solutions. It helps you conceptualise the form and nature of reality and what you believe can be known about reality.

Therefore, for this study, relativist approach helped shape and align the problem of IPGS engagement challenges because the idea was to understand how student engagement affects individual and college retention rates. That way, research questions were best answered by accepting multiple views of the participants and the complex realities of a university environment. To seek answers to the research questions, the experiences of the participants were used to construct and interpret understanding from data collected (Thanh &Thanh, 2015:24).

Using interpretivist approach, contextual factors need to be taken into consideration in any methodical pursuit of understanding meaning. The acceptance is that an understanding of the context in any form of research is critical to the interpretation of gathered data (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). A qualitative case study of a university in South Africa facilitated a deeper understanding and interpretation of IPGS engagement and performance in its distinctive environment from the point of view of a small sample of participants unique to that setting. In compliance with the WHO COVID-19 protocols, engaging in an interactive telephonic interview, without having to go to the site due to COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions, allowed the few participants to describe in-depth their views of the reality of student engagement challenges at a university setting.

Shah and Al-Bargi, (2012:257) believe that interpretivists do not believe that reality is out there but rather it is socially constructed. They say people make their own sense of social realities that emerge through contact with objects. For that reason, meaning does not exist outside the mind but the mind interprets experiences and events. Goldkuhl, (2012:5) also considers that, ontologically, interpretive research assumes that social relationships are not prescribed but somewhat produced and reinforced by humans through interaction, and the cognitive elements of beliefs and intentions are

crucial to understanding the actors. This study relates to these ontological viewpoints as advised by Amineh and Asl (2015:10) that:

> … if what learners encounter is not consistent with their current understanding, their current knowledge can change in order to accommodate new experience… thus, learners cannot be passive …learning is an active process in which experience has an important role in understanding and grasping meaning… individuals' knowledge of the world is the interpretations of their experiences … and conceptual growth is the result of various perspectives and simultaneous changing of individuals' internal representations in response to those perspectives as well as through experiences.

The same authors further advise that, "knowledge is constructed through different experiences. Therefore, educators who follow this approach must "build their…curriculum around the experiences of the learners" p10.

4.3.1.3 Naturalist methodology and methods

The methodology of a paradigm is how the enquirer goes about finding whatever is believed can be known (Kivunja & Kuyini (2017:28), seeking an understanding of phenomena from individuals' perspectives, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit (Creswell, 2009:8). The implication is that ontology and epistemology influence methodology, therefore, the interpretivist paradigm has a hermeneutical and dialectical methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:111; Elshafie, 2013: 8; 2012:258; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2012:258). Guba and (Lincoln, 1994:111) in their own words, explain that "individual constructs are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of one or a few constructions of which there is a substantial consensus."

Whitehead, (2004:513) says that hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on the subjective experiences of individuals and groups. It refers to the theory and practice of interpretation where interpretation involves an understanding that can be justified. Thus, researchers cannot eliminate the preconceptions that they bring to the study which influences the research process. "Often the subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically and researchers recognise that their own backgrounds shape their interpretations" (Creswell, 2009:8). For this study, data was gathered through dialogical telephone interviews with reflective sessions to allow for interpretation of the

collected data by the researcher from participants' standpoint (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). Open-ended questions were utilised to allow free dialogue which opened to a wide-ranging understanding of what IPGS said and did at the university (Creswell). Likewise, open-ended questions allowed participants to share their experiences freely with no pre-set responses to bias their views and at the same time eliminate investigator bias (Kumar, 2014:186). However, Kumar argues that researcher bias during analysis and interpretation is brought in by participants' response patterns. For the same reason, flexibility in design, data collection and analysis was strongly utilised to gain insights and effective representation of the participants' viewpoints. Data, gathered in this manner attempted to unveil the engagement challenges as experienced by the students through their narrations and the engagement challenges were understood through the subjective experiences of the students.

Although this study was not largely phenomenological, it also borrowed some phenomenological aspects. The study sought to understand, describe, and interpret human behaviour and the meaning individuals made of their experiences (Creswell, 2009:231). Phenomenological key data collection methods of interviews and document analysis were utilised in the process. During data analysis, the focus was on what IPGS and representatives of the office of international affairs determined by how they defined their world in relation to the interaction experienced at the university (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:36).

Case studies are among methodologies used in an interpretive approach (Elshafie, 2013:8; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2012:258). Understanding student engagement and challenges required the researcher to treat the university as a unique entity to represent the complexity of the phenomenon. This current qualitative study was a single case of one South African university. Thus, the process of the research was often inductive with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected (Creswell, 2009:9) using the researcher as the primary instrument (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2012:258). Semi-structured interviews, attentive listening, document analysis, reflective journals and purposive sampling all allowed for the domination of the researcher as the instruments for data collection (Elshafie, 2013:8). The more open-ended the questions were, the better it was to facilitate careful and attentive listening to what participants said (Creswell, 2009:8). The diversity of the methods opened to the varied

understanding of the voices and the meaning of the words that the individuals assigned to the phenomenon under study.

Dialectical interpretive understanding is grounded in an interactive field-based inductive methodology in a specific context (Elshafie, 2013:8; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2012:258). Individual constructions are equated through dialectical interactions to reach a more informed and sophisticated better agreement construction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:111). The aim of the inquiry as Guba and Lincoln (1994:113) put across was:

> …understanding and reconstructing of the constructions that people …initially hold, aiming towards consensus but open to new interpretations as the sophistication improves. The criteria for progress is that overtime, everyone formulates more informed and sophisticated construction and becomes more aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions.

For this study, the back-and-forth dialectical methodology was the lens through which raw data and findings were perceived and interpreted. The aim was to produce more profound knowledge achievement by repeated reconsiderations (Mittwede, 2012:27). The dialectical understanding was achieved by:

- returning to the object of study repeatedly and each time with increased understanding and substantial interpretations obtained,
- data collection is an ongoing process of data analysis,
- data transcription and organisation of transcribed data into meaningful categories and themes that emerged during thematic data analysis and
- organising data either by individual responses or grouping answers together across respondents to understand and establish the truth through reasoned arguments.

4.3.1.4 A balanced axiology

With balanced axiology, the assumption was that the outcome of the research was to reflect the values of the researcher when trying to present a balanced report of the results (Kivunja & Kikuyu, 2017:34) by defining, evaluating and understanding concepts of right or wrong behaviour during the research process which required constant negotiations throughout the research process (Owen in Elshafie, 2013:8).

Trustworthiness and authenticity criteria are the two sets of criteria for judging the goodness or quality of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:114; Taylor & Medina (2013:4).

Interpretivists need to resolve the quality issue in a study to ensure the reader that precautions were taken to confirm that the data collected from participants were meaningful, manageable, provable and anchored in real-life situations from which they were derived (Guba and Lincoln (1984:114) through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability measures (Shah and Al-Bargi, 2012:257). Generally, the quality measures are ensured through a prolonged stay in the field, verifying interpretation made with the participants, engaging in emergent inquiry and by way of rich descriptions (Taylor & Medina, 2013:4). The specific criteria related to this study are discussed later in section 4.7 of this chapter. This section explains the authenticity criteria.

The authenticity criteria for this study focused on the consideration of the ethics as borrowed from Taylor and Medina (2013:5) and Guba and Lincoln (1994:114):

- the researcher established relationships with the participants and with fairness on the representativeness of the informants
- educationally, the participants stood to benefit from the study by becoming aware of their social world
- strategically, the university was empowered by the awareness of IPGS experiences in college that could either hinder or enhance the academic performance of the university and IPGS

As proposed by Elshafie (2013:8), the interpretive paradigm, with its respect for the identity of the participants, additionally compelled the researcher to:

- preserve privacy and confidentiality of the participants during the research process and reporting of the findings
- seek for consent from the participants throughout the investigations due to the emergent nature of the interpretive research

4.4 Research design

Creswell (2009:3) and Kumar (2014:123) define a research design as a plan through which decisions are made about methods of data collection, selection of respondents, data analysis and communication of findings. The research problem, research questions, the researcher's world view, assumptions and personal experiences determine important guidelines for the researcher in selecting the appropriate design from either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods designs (Creswell, 2009:3; Devetak et al., 2010:77). What is critical for researchers is selecting a research design from the three that is most relevant or applicable and implementable to achieve one's research objectives. In view of this study's research objectives as stated earlier on, the qualitative approach was utilised to its relevance.

Antwi and Kasim (2015:218) suggest that each research design should be supported by a research paradigm that informs the methodological approach for the study. Positivists employ quantitative research designs, interpretivists believe in the qualitative design while the critical paradigm researchers may accept either qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods, to design their research studies (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2015:258; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). The research design for this study fitted more easily in the qualitative approach to the enquiry as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

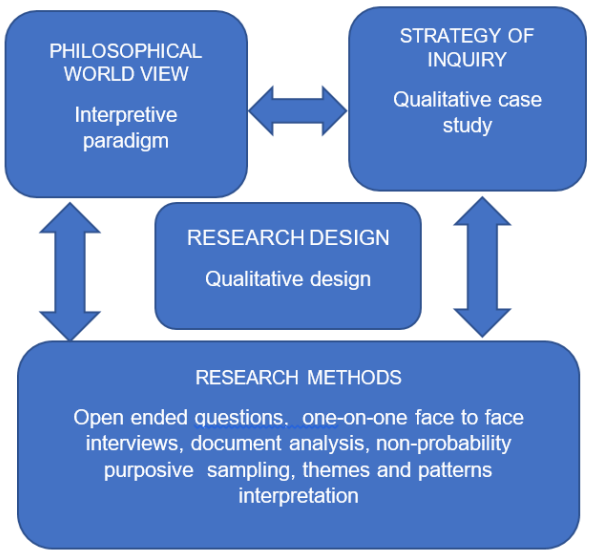

Figure 4.1: The research design for this study (Adapted from Creswell, 2009:5).

Considering the interpretivist stance taken by this study and the intuition to have insight and comprehensive information, this research took a purely qualitative approach, to help discuss in-depth experiences and perceptions of IPGS and representatives from the IRO at one South African University. Additionally, figures and statistical computations with graphs of the quantitative approach, would not capture the behavioural aspects and perceptions of the participants under study and so were not utilised in this regard. Instead, patterns and themes from evidence and thick descriptions best represented the findings of this study. In accordance, Silverman (2013:123) supports that most qualitative researchers believe comparably, qualitative data provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than purely quantitative data. For this reason, the qualitative research design approach was adopted as it allowed exploring the different perceptions in understanding the engagement experiences and challenges of IPGS who participated in this study.

4.4.1 Qualitative character for the study

Qualitative research design is described as a systematic means for exploring and understanding the significance of meaning individuals or groups assigned to a social or human problem within a natural setting (Creswell, 2009:4; Mason, 2002:2; Szyjka, 2012:111; Tracy, 2013:5). Therefore, traditionally, for many qualitative researchers, the best way to understand what is going on is by moving into the culture or organisation being studied and becoming engaged in their activities and experiencing what it is like to be part of the setting (Creswell, 2009:16; Krauss, 2005:761). These arguments of traditionalists are based on ethnographic studies which require researchers to build a good understanding of the participant's natural environment (Sturges &Hanrahan, 2004). Arguably, there is a lesser need for contextual data in non-ethnographic qualitative studies but one needs to examine the unique requirements of their study and assess if collecting contextual data is critical to achieving research objectives (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017:7). Based on this study, the objectives set did not necessitate collecting contextual data of the university but sought exploration and understanding of students' engagement experiences in a university setup. Thus, telephonic qualitative interviews did not provide the researcher with contextual data but rightfully insights into the engagement experiences of IPGS (Chapple, 1999). Thanh and Thanh (2015:36) also think the qualitative approach is most appropriate for those who seek in-depth information into understanding the

experiences of a group of people. Furthermore, the qualitative aspect of this study presented the researcher as the central research instrument who personally collected information to understand the context of IPGS at the university (Creswell; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013:258; Tracy, 2013:25).

The sudy took cognisance that for many qualitative researchers the best way to understand what is going on is by moving into the organisation being studied and becoming engaged in the activities to experience what it was like to be part of the setting (Creswell, 2009:16; Krauss, 2005:761). However, this study represented insider research as opposed to outsider research (Fleming, 2018:310). Hence, the researcher was already immersed in the university and with previous "knowledge of the setting from being an actor in the processes being studied" (Coghlan 2007:336). The researcher was thus already native to the site of research and familiar with some of the potential respondents (Green, 2014:3). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic which prevailed at the time of data collection caused restrictions of movement and proximity to the participants. However, these suggestions were nowhere a limitation to the study as the study did not need contextual data but the opinions of the respondents. This study was instead advanced by getting close with the participants through telephone interviews which allowed for an attentive listening to the subjective magnitudes of the participants and likewise, it helped understand the shared participants' perspectives of their experiences (Kumar, 2014:132; Antwi & Kasim, 2015:221).

Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2009:18), which stresses verbal descriptions (Devetak et al., 2010:78) and pictures other than numerical data (Antwi & Kasim, 2015:218; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). This idea is stressed by Silverman (2013:6) who presumes that voice and subjectivity are characteristic of qualitative research. Similarly, data analysis was understood not only in participants' words but the meaning of those words as understood and used by individuals (Krauss, 2005:764). With this assertion in mind, thick narrative descriptions with excerpts were used to describe the process of this research, thus producing a detailed report. That kind of report was meant to give readers sufficient comprehension of the context of the study through participants' voices (Creswell, 2009:18). Similarly, Yilmaz (2013:313) considers direct citations as profound communication of participants'

feelings, experiences and thoughts about occurrences and meanings at the personal level.

Further, rather than approaching measurement with the idea of constructing a fixed instrument or set of questions, this researcher opted to allow questions to develop and evolve as she became conversant with the study content (Kraus, 2005:761). Because of the developmental nature of a qualitative study, the complexity and unpredictability of behaviour and the diversity of viewpoints and values of the researcher and participants, an inductive data analysis was employed building from specifics to comprehensive sets of themes, with the researcher interpreting the data (Creswell, 2009:175; Tracy, 2013:22).

Qualitative researchers view human behaviour as fluid and their studies are contextually bound, therefore, they are not in favour of generalising beyond the group under study (Antwi & Kasim, 2015:221; Thanh & Thanh, 2015:25). Similarly, this study explored behavioural aspects of student engagement as a predictor to perseverance and academic success of a specific group of students at a specific university, so there was no intention of generalising findings to other universities in South Africa or any other university for that matter.

Creswell (2009:11) believes researchers do not just select the design of the study, but decisions must be made on the type of study within the design of choice. The frequently used examples of designs for qualitative studies as given by Creswell (2009:11) are narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory studies and case studies. With the consideration of the problem that was investigated and the purpose of the current study, the study employed a case study approach to enquiry.

4.4.2 Positioning this research into a qualitative case study

The study was a qualitative case study that investigated and explained the engagement experiences and challenges of the IPGS, coping mechanisms with the challenges faced in the university and the institutional support services and resources for the students. This case study approach within the qualitative design made the understanding possible, as case studies are particularly suited for building extensive and in-depth descriptions of a complex social phenomenon in its context (Harrison et

al., 2015:12). Baxter and Jack (2008:544) acknowledge the rigour qualitative case studies affords, which opens researchers' opportunities to explore and describe a phenomenon in its setting. The recognition of a qualitative case study design for this study was, therefore, based on its strength to focus on a university and more importantly, to hear the IPGS perspectives on their engagement and experiences which could not have been possible by any other approach (Zainal, 2007:1).

Baxter and Jack (2008:546) suggest that, after determining the case, one should then set parameters to the study for it to remain reasonable in scope. Harrison et al. (2015:12) recommend that:

> …binding the case is essential to focusing, framing, and managing data collection and analysis. This involves being selective and specific in identifying the parameters of the case including the participants and location and the process to be explored and establishing the time frame for investigating the case.

On that account, binding this study became significant as it helped the researcher to reliably check if it was operating within the scope of the intended study, and accordingly, keeping within the limits of the study.

First, a case cannot be thought out without the context (Baxter & Jack 2008:545) and more specifically to this study, the case of one South African university. Going by Zainal's (2007:1) idea, the qualitative case study facilitated close examining of data within a specific context. The goal was to hear IPGS' thoughts about their actions based on a particular university (Silverman, 2012:125).

Second, besides the location, the study was also bounded by time to investigate the case (Creswell, 2009:13; Harrison, 2017:13). This study, being a doctoral thesis, had a time frame within which it had to be completed and submitted (Baxter & Jack (2008:551). To increase the feasibility of completion, the data had to be collected and analysed within a specified time frame. To that effect, data was collected in the time that coincided with the approval of this study by the Research Ethics Committee to allow for adequate time for the data to be analysed within the intended time frame of the study programme.

There are three types of case studies described in Baskarada (2013:2), Baxter and Jack (2008:547), 1997: and Zainal (2007:3) namely, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. The various authors outlined the following aspects to characterise the three case studies:

- exploratory case study as one which is used to explore situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes and may be undertaken to precede the definition of research questions and hypotheses. Accordingly, it is mainly used for theory building.
- descriptive case study as the one that attempts to completely describe the natural phenomenon or intervention its context. This type of case study is also used for theory building.
- the explanatory case study investigates causal relationships answering questions that seek to explain the presumed causal links in real-life, that is too complex for a survey or experimental study. It aims to gain an understanding of specific cases.

Based on the above descriptions, this study saw its relevance in all three types of case studies. The exploratory nature of this research was applied through a pilot study to determine and decide on the feasibility of the data collection instruments and procedure (Kumar,2014:13). This study also saw its relevance in the explanatory case study as it explained student engagement and experiences unique to IPGS. Therefore, to best explain the phenomenon, the participants were asked questions of a “how” and “why” nature that sought for the understanding of specific cases, as advised by Yin (2009:6) and Baxter and Jack (2008:545). The reason was to understand why IPGS faced challenges where services and resources must have been available for them to cope with the challenges. Explanatory case studies also exposed prevailing variables and inductively observed any unexpected aspects that activated the causal mechanism (Starman, 2013:35). In that case, student engagement challenges and experiences that predicted dropout or failure for at-risk IPGS were exposed as emergent during data collection. Equally, this case study also fits as descriptive because the study methodically described the phenomenon of study (Kumar, 2014:13).

In the pursuit for a methodical in-depth investigation for knowledge generation, a case study research intentionally focused on a specific case or entity (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007:451; Kumar, 2014:155; Rule & John, 2011:3; Silverman, 2013;155). South Africa had 23 public universities at the time of the study. This study took the turn of a holistic single case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008:550) at one selected South African university which allowed for credible results. Further, given the minority nature and unique circumstances of IPGS, a case study was befitting to capture individual standpoints and make inferences that captured the experiences and challenges of this sub-group of students existing in a wider population at the university (Horne et al., 2018:355; Sullivan, 2018:780).

More so, a literature search revealed a dearth of studies focusing on IPGS and challenges encountered in South African universities. Therefore, using a case study allowed for a comprehensive explanation of the challenges resulting in knowledge creation that may contribute immensely to the body of literature on IPGS engagement experiences.

A case study also provided an overview and in-depth understanding of interactional student dynamics within a unit of study (Kumar, 2014:155). Harrison et al. (2017:4) likewise concede that a case study is an effective way of investigating varied and multi-faceted concerns in real-life environments, particularly when human behaviour is central to the understanding of the topic of interest. Additionally, Njie and Asimiran (2014:36) view a case study as a way of gathering in-depth data about an event (interaction), person (IPGS, peers, staff) or process (academic student engagement). Hence, this case study approach helped understand the interaction between IPGS and peers and between staff and IPGS during their studies as a dimension of student engagement.

A case study research is also represented by using multiple sources to enhance the credibility of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008:55) and more “synergistic and comprehensive” interpretations of the issue under study (Harrison et al., 2017:12). Kumar (2014:155) advises that, when one wants to study a case, one should take effort to gather information from all possible sources of evidence for an all-inclusive and wide-ranging understanding. This proposition ensures that the phenomenon is explored from a diverse point of view, allowing for revelation and understanding of

plural sides of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008:544). In a university setup, multiple sources of data were generated through current and former IPGS and a representative from the IRO as well as the international student policy document, as all-encompassing to permit an adequate understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by IPGS. Similarly, Kumar (2014:156) proposes for multiple data collection methods as integral to a case study but advises that the multiplicity should be considered as addressing a single case at the analysis stage. For that reason, interviews for IPGS and international relations office and document analysis techniques were converged and triangulated during data analysis and across respondents in a triangulation form leading to the comprehensive and holistic understanding of a complete case (Baxter & Jack, 2008:554). Borrowing from Baxter and Jack's (2008:554) words, "the convergence added strength to the findings as the various strands of data was braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case".

However, using a case study design had its shortcoming of generalisability (Elshafie, 2013:8; Starman, 2013:39). Kumar (2014:155) explains that:

> …a case study provides an overview and in-depth understanding of a case within a unit of study but cannot claim to make generalisations to a population beyond cases like the one studied.

This study did not allow findings to be generalised beyond the university studied. Nevertheless, since findings produced evidence of the challenges of IPGS by exploring a specific context with individuals, it is expected that readers of this report will see likenesses to their situations and judge the significance of the information produced against their settings.

From the accounts of a case study approach told above, it is evident that a case study made it possible to investigate, explain, describe and examine the diverse issues of student engagement and experiences encountered by the IPGS at one South African university.

4.4.3 My role as the researcher

This study represented insider research as opposed to outsider research (Fleming, 2018:310). This is because the research was conducted within the university at which I was a student. This positioned me within an institution in which I was one of the IPGS (Green, 2014:1; Saidi & Yaacob, 2016:849). Also, being an IPGS, I was placed as an insider researcher within my own social group (Creswell 2012:208). This stance was typical of the expanding professional doctoral programmes where presently, many academics are exploring their own institutions of learning (Green, 2014:1) as case studies (Fleming, 2018:312). Thus, dual roles were undertaken simultaneously in this study: that of being a researcher and the researched (Coghlan, 2007:338; Green, 2014:2). This two-fold role played made the doctoral study undertaking stimulating as I became integral to the phenomenon being researched.

I maximised the insider researcher status to the best advantage. More importantly, I developed a passion for the study area and hence was more devoted to the research despite the obstacles modelled by insider research (as stated later). My commitment was strengthened because I understood the topic as I shared the same experiences with the respondents (Saidi & Yaacob, 2016:851). Additionally, being native to the setting created the ease of conveniently finding the participants and documents, making appointments for the telephonic interviews, as well as getting consent from the university and the participants (Bonello, 2021:1; Fleming, 2018:312). There was also no worry about orienting with the research environment or the participants, because was already native to the site of research and were familiar with some of the potential respondents, as mentioned already. This also side-stepped culture shock which normally outsider researchers may experience (Green, 2014:3). Similarly, having prior background knowledge and understanding of the context of the study became more useful in the period of COVID-19 pandemic, which was the period the study was conducted because travel to the site fell off and social distancing and isolation were maintained for my safety and the participants. Correspondingly, the insider position made it possible to have prior knowledge and understanding of the setting and thus questions were developed based on the rich understandings of the issues needing enquiry whose insights may not have been easily accomplished from an outsider's point of view (Fleming, 2018:312; Saidi & Yaacob, 2016:850). Greater familiarity and prior understanding also meant that lines of questioning could be developed further,

leading to richer descriptions and detail. The status was also assistive in extracting true data from the participants as I could relate to IPGS experiences which led to attentive listening (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017:5), engaging in the reflective and reflexive process (Coghlan, 2007:336) and integrity when narrating the participants' experiences (Green. 2014:1; Saidi & Yaacob, 2016:850). As a deduction, the participants developed a passion for the dialogue as they welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues with someone who dared to undertake a study in issues that related to their own experiences.

Again, being an insider researcher meant I had easy access and acceptance by the institution and the respondents, because of the familiarity with the site (Saidi & Yaacob, 2016:850) and hence, the gatekeeper gave full backing for the research to be conducted in the university. Moreover, being an insider researcher also meant that the participants and I understood the university values, organisational dynamics, the lived experiences of our own organisation and discussed the same experiences which enabled a deeper understanding of the issues under study which translated to rich in-depth data.

Likewise, a level of trust and rapport was easy to establish as I was not a stranger to many of the participants and they felt like they were talking to one of their own and, therefore, were very open and free to dialogue (Saidi & Yaacob, 2016:850). The familiarity also influenced the participants to be comfortable thereby opening and giving detailed accounts of their experiences (Fleming, 2018:313). This helped immensely in the collection of thick descriptions of the phenomena studied.

However, by being an insider researcher, there were issues which I had to negotiate to manage the dual role I held as an insider researcher. Mostly, my role was to be aware of the potentials of bias and subjectivity which were likely to be influenced by my own views, motives and understandings (Bonello, 2021:1; Green, 2014:4; Fleming, 2018:313). From that position, a certain procedure had to be employed to alleviate any likeliness of bias and subjectivity that would compromise the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data gathered. Accordingly, as an insider researcher, while building on the familiarity with the university, I was also cautious not to project personal interpretations onto the participants, and during data analysis (Green, 2014:4). To do so, I had to remain truthful, neutral and I refuse to be swayed by personal experiences

(Fleming, 2018:313). In the same manner, the other role was to take it personally and be attentive to the data and be reasonable and responsible in judgement by detaching from the subject matter and the views of the participants but instead I viewed issues at hand critically from the participants' perspectives (Coghlan, 2007:341; Green 2014:11). Above all, I also opened to Bonello's (2021:3) idea of giving a detailed audit trail of the data analysis process to help the reader understand how the conceptual conclusions were arrived at.

4.5 The study research methodology

This study utilised qualitative methods, which were heavily influenced by the main research question as well as the specific sub-research questions that needed to be answered (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:34). My personal choices and capabilities (Tracy, 2013:25) also influenced utilisation of qualitative methods. The qualitative methods provided data which was the portrayal of the social behaviours in a real-world setting with an attempt to make sense of, or interpret IPGS engagement challenges in terms of the meanings ascribed by the participants (Creswell, 2009:232; Szyjka, 2012:111). Thus, data were qualitatively collected through interviews and document analysis (Olson & Peterson, 2015:4). Other methodologies adopted included qualitative population and sampling procedures.

4.5.1 Data collection approach and instruments

Being a qualitative study, I was open to the use of multiple techniques and sources of data collection because pluralism and triangulation of the techniques resulted in meaningful truthfulness of the individual characteristics in this study (Devetak et al., 2010:78). Tracy (2013:25) acknowledge the strength of research that combines multiple methods of data collection. Accordingly, this qualitative study was grounded in the combination of interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2009:181; Silverman, 2013:189; Yilmaz, 2013:315). In other words, qualitative research methods are the umbrella concepts that cover interviews of multiple sources and document analysis (Tracy, 2013:25). The combination of the techniques added rigour, breadth, richness and depth to the enquiry (Kumar, 2014:157). The choice of which methods to use depending on which type of data was best in highlighting the research subject (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:56). Likewise, this qualitative study employed structured one-

on-one telephone interviews and document analysis as collaborative techniques to explain the engagement experiences of IPGS.

Interviews are guided questions that answer conversations with a purpose (Tracy, 2013:131) of gathering descriptions of the experiences of the interviewee (Kvale, cited in Alshenqeeti, 2014:40). Adhabi and Anozie (2017:88) describe an interview in qualitative research as to when the researcher consults an individual for getting opinions on an issue. There are four types of interviews identified by Adhabi and Anozie (2017:89), Alshenqeeti (2014:40) and Edwards and Holland (2013:3). The explanation is that a structured interview is mostly organised around a set of pre-determined questions which are asked in the same way and sequence for all participants with minimum flexibility from the researcher**.** The open-ended or unstructured interview has flexibility, with the freedom that allows interviewers to follow up on questions and interviewees to elaborate on answers. The semi-structured interview has a basic checklist and it is said to be the flexible version of the structured interview because the interviewer can probe to get to the depth of information required. The focus group is composed of a group of participants who engage in a group discussion on the same topic as the one-on-one interview to utilise the dynamic nature of a group discussion. Based on this study which required a free flow and adaptable structure of a conversation to allow the interviewer and the interviewees to develop unexpected themes (Mason, 2002:62). This study employed the one-on-one semi-structured interview that will be explained next.

4.5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews applied in this study

The interview protocol was designed to find answers to the research questions. Since this study intended to get thick quality descriptions of the IPGS' experiences to arrive at the explanation of the challenges faced, and interactional exchange nature of dialogue was preferred to solicit as much information as possible to answer the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were administered to former and current IPGS and the representative of the IRO as the primary techniques of generating the data. The interviews took the form of one-on-one, semi-structured telephonic interviews (Creswell, 2009:179).

Per Adhabi and Anozie (2017:89), semi-structured interviews are the most popular forms of interviews among qualitative researchers. They allow for the collection of in-depth information on people's opinions, thoughts, experiences and feelings in a study (Kumar, 2014:192). To that effect, this study opted for semi-structured interviews to generate qualitative data on the challenges and experiences of IPGS. The interviews took the form of a one-on-one qualitative telephone interview (Creswell, 2009:179). One-on-one telephone interviews allowed for a conversational nature of dialogue, accommodating flexibility, probing, clarity and elaboration (Alshenqeeti, 2014:40; Kumar, 2014:192; Block & Erskine, 2012), control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2009:179) and rich and detailed accounts (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:219; Tracy, 2013:139) that encouraged participants to speak freely during the proceedings of interviews.

Several authors (Kumar, 2014:192; Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:89; Creswell, 2009:179; Alshenqeeti, 2014:40) agree that qualitative interviews are by tradition conducted on a face-to-face mode. However, in recent years, interviewing has transformed in response to the proliferation of technology as researchers seek alternative methods to reduce costs and increase the reach of their data sources (Block & Erskine, 2012:429). One way that researchers have approached this is through increased use of telephones in the collection of interview data (Block & Erskine, 2012:429. Moreover, Farooq and De Villiers (2017:5) feel that the selection of an interview approach depends on the objectives of the research. Similarly, Ritchie and Lewis (2003:34) stress that the use of a qualitative methodology is heavily influenced by the aim and the specific research questions that need to be answered in a study. For this reason, of late some studies as well as this study employed a semi-structured telephone interview methodology (Block & Erskine, 2012:432).

From the inception of this study, the choice of the most conventional method for producing qualitative data was through face-to-face interviews with the respondents. However, Novick (2008) advises that when the face-to-face interview is unlikely, qualitative data can be collected via telephone. On March 11, 2020, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (Muniyappa & Gubbi, 2020:736). Consequently, for this study, to help control the global COVID-19 pandemic which at the time of data collection called for a lockdown, social isolation and social distancing (Di Gennaro, 2020:7; Muniyappa &

Gubbi, 2020:739), it was not possible to collect data on a one-on-one face-to-face interview. This agrees with Farooq and De Villiers (2017:4) who in their study observed that the quality of data was not compromised by telephone conversations as the lack of visual cues forced both the interviewer and interviewee to articulate clearly the messages they wished to communicate. This is because effective listening and clearly articulating a message in a conversation improves the quality of the communication process, resulting in fewer misunderstandings. To compensate for the lack of visual cues I had to articulate clear questions and listened attentively (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017:4). The action allowed for the telephonic interviews to equally provide rich data for the current qualitative study (Block & Erskine, 2012:424; Novick, 2011:4). More so, just like a face-to-face interview, with a telephone interview, I gained a deeper insight into specific answers by treating the interview like a meaningful discussion thereby inferring the rationality of each response. More importantly, Block and Erskine (2012:424) in their study entitled 'Interviewing by Telephone: Specific Considerations, Opportunities, and Challenges', conclude that data quality through one-on-one face-to-face and telephone interviews, put on a scale, were comparable.

Although gestures such as handshaking and eye contact help to reduce the power gap in a face-to-face interview (Holt, 2010) for the present study, telephone interviews created a more balanced distribution of power between interviewer and interviewee as the telephone afforded greater control over the conversation to the interviewee (Volg, 2013). The interviewee's power control encouraged me to talk openly and freely and more importantly allowed for more control to IPGS by directing the conversation to areas that IPGS and IRO perceived as being important. Also, the telephone interview made interviewees comfortable by creating privacy and anonymity for the interviewee, thereby opening for detailed IPGS engagement experiences over the telephone and increasing researcher-control of their social space and enabling a far greater degree of control for the participants (Holt, 2010:117; Novick 2011:4). Seemingly, the respondents were relaxed on the telephone and willing to talk freely, and in the process, discloses guarded information (Novick, 2008:3) which might not be disclosed in any other form of an interview.

Again, for the present study, structured telephone interviews had the critical advantage of the ability to conduct interviews across geographically dispersed IPGS, currently studying in a South African university but isolation in various places due to the COVID-

19 pandemic. This idea resonates with Block and Erskine (2012:430) who say that telephones give researchers access to varied resources and experiences without the need to endure the expense and travel. Harvey (2011:435) enhances that telephone interviews are less limited by geography and, therefore, help increase participation. In response to these points, telephone interviewing permitted the current study a much more exhaustive sample because of "the reduced concern about low response rates because of an increased availability of potential participants which telephone-interviewing offers" (Holt, 2010:115). The telephone mode also made it possible for interviewees to schedule or reschedule interviews at a lower cost than excluded travel and at times that suited both the interviewer and interviewee (Harvey, 2011:436; Holt, 2010:116).

Traditionally, with qualitative face-face interviews, non-verbal communications and reactions are observed and documented to back and enhance transcription data (Alloh et al., 2018:5; Tracy, 2013:131). However, with telephone interviews, there was "the need to explicitly direct the conversation because of the absence of non-visual cues" (Holt, 2010:115). Furthermore, the lack of non-verbal communication meant that, unlike in face-to-face interactions, everything was articulated by both the participants and the interviewee. The need for full articulation meant that a much richer text was produced from which to begin analysis. Again, in the absence of facial expression during telephone interviews, non-verbal reactions such as pauses and verbal communications such as laughs, *and other* sounds were captured and taken into consideration and documented to complement and enhance research data during transcription. The sounds, silences or hesitations also revealed issues or topics that IPGS were either uncomfortable or excited about. On my side as the interviewer, encouraging words such as *ok*, yes, *alright* and other acknowledging sounds were frequently used during the telephone interviews. The action proved to be motivational to the respondents as it demonstrated recognition and capture of their responses. More importantly, the encouraging words also confirmed attentive listening by the interviewee which encouraged respondents to volunteer more data.

Semi-structured interview questions were used for this study and the same set of questions were asked in a predetermined specific way but allowed to explore each respondent accordingly (Rivers et al., 2018:687; Wu et al., 2015:4). More so, the

researcher got to use ingenuity to explore emergent issues significant to solicit for high quality and quantity of data (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:91). Similarly, semi-structured questions allowed for interruption where necessary. Where the respondent did not seem to understand the question, I could rephrase the question over the telephone.

Tracy (2013:131), encourages introducing note-taking to interviewees at the beginning of the face-to-face interview to increase the interviewee's trust and level of disclosure. However, this was not a cause for concern in the telephone interviews as notes were taken with the interviewee unaware of the action (Novick, 2011:4) and note-taking was essential to serve the function of reminders to emergent issues and prompts during the conversation.

Conversely, administering semi-structured interviews was relatively expensive and required a lot of time (Al-Busaidi, 2008:1; Kumar, 2014:157). The study was conducted in South Africa while the researcher was on fulltime employment in Zimbabwe, which took a toll both on time and the estimated budget. Correspondingly, a considerable amount of time was spent interviewing each respondent which also required more time to transcribe the immense and sometimes inaudible data from audiotapes. At the analysis stage, a substantial amount of time was consumed sifting for themes and patterns from a massive collection of data and colour coding it in preparation for analysis and interpretation. However, these observations did not compromise the quality and quantity of data as the time and financial budget were well accomplished. Also, as the interviewer, at times I suspected that the opinions of respondents were subject to change over time and the information was distorted because the respondents were not able to articulate their views (Kumar, 2014:157) in the English language used in the interview. For that matter, respondents could use vernacular during the interview.

The framework for the one-on-one interviews was based on a literature review with a focus on understanding IPGS challenges in relation to student engagement. Furthermore, the principles of the social and academic integration theory by Vincent Tinto and the engagement conceptual framework by Kahu were central to the development of the instruments. Borrowing ideas of Edwards and Rolland (2013:3), with room for flexibility an interview framework was pre-structured to guide the interviews. The one-on-one interviews gave a direct narration of IPGS experiences

when students interacted with academics and peers, IPGS' value for education and professional support services and resources at the university.

Since it was not possible to capture all data through note-taking, it was found essential to voice record the interviews using a digital voice recorder (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:92). A mobile phone and laptop were used as backup recordings to prevent any loss of raw data. As informed by literature (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:92), audiotape recordings were used with permission from the participants. The recording of conversations had several advantages.

Tape recording, as observed by Adhabi and Anozie (2017:92), became handy in that:

- everything that was said by the IPGS was captured without distracting the flow of the conversation of the interview.
- the recording gave room for attentive listening during the interview process.
- recording allowed for reflections and prompts or follow-up questions to be jotted down as reminders during the interview.
- more importantly, audiotape recording together with written notes was a way of capturing and storing interview data safely.

Audiotape recording also gave "the opportunity to replay data uncontaminated by one's assumptions at the time of recording" (Silverman, 2013:212). Before the interview, each participant was assigned a pseudonym in the order of the interview sessions.

4.5.2.3 Documentary analysis

The present study also relied on data from secondary sources as an additional qualitative data collection strategy that complemented interviews (Flick and Procedures and the IPGS enrolment list for 2021 as documents of interest for analysis. The Internationalisation Policy and Procedures was a useful tool in telling practice at the university against its policy. The Policy document and the 2021 enrolment list proved to be an unobtrusive source of information and very convenient to analyse because it was possible to analyse it in between scheduled interviews (Creswell, 2009:180). However, as Creswell (2009:180) hints, it was essential to extract information that was only relevant to this study.

The following characteristics by Mason (2002:108) and Flick (2009:225) were factored in to support the use of document reviews for this study. First, document review importantly supported interviews because it was more evident and easy to trace than the verbal data. Also, document review was employed to examine the data which was not available in any other form. Some interview items which solicited for services that support IPGS emanated from the policy document analysis (Mason, 2002:108). Still, the policy document served to verify, contextualise and clarify data from the interviews. The university international policy document and the enrolment list proved to be a modest source of information and very convenient to analyse because it was possible to do so in between scheduled interviews (Creswell, 2009:180). However, as Creswell suggests, care was taken to extract information that was of value to this study. Such information included aims for internationalisation by the university, the provisions of services for international students and enrolment figures for IPGS (table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Documents analysed for the study

Document	Information obtained	Source
The university internationalisation policy and procedures	The policy statement Services for international full degree students Admissions of international students Registration and orientation	International relations Office
IPGS student enrolment 2021	Current postgraduate enrolment by country name	Quality insurance institution (IQPA)

4.5.2.5 Analytical memos

Writing an analytic memo was a critical aspect of critically analysing qualitative data for this study obtained from interviews and document reviews. The researcher found it essential to generate analytical memos to capture and record data that was heard during the interview and was of interest to the study. The memo was used to record

cues and potential codes or themes for the study. This also allowed me to reflect and record coding processes and choices. The records captured became vital to data analysis and hence notes and memos became techniques for generating data (Givens, 2008:190; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:132).

4.5.2 Study participants and sampling approach

This study selected IPGS and a representative of the IRO as respondents to the study. The respondents were purposively selected within the reasoning of Etikan et al. (2016:2) that the participants were chosen because of the qualities they held. Further, Etikan et al. (2016:2) substantiate that:

> In nonprobability sampling, subjective methods are used to decide which elements are included in the sample. Researchers decide what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge and experience.

The choice of IPGS was based on the conviction that they were a subset of university students widely accepted to have a unique set of challenges which may affect academic performance negatively. The students are comprised of former and present IPGS. The inclusion of former and current IPGS allowed for the dynamics of experiences in different cohorts (Dyer et al., 2018:33). Cipriano et al. (2019:2) confirm that student engagement should be a matter of concern across time and the development of the students. With this perceived situation, the IPGS provided the anticipated relevant and rich information that best answered the research questions. It was also anticipated that because of the maturity and literacy level of the IPGS, they could understand the questions and express themselves well in a reflective manner and give well-reasoned out information to provide in-depth and meaningful data that addressed the purpose of this study. I also considered the students from various schools and areas of specialisation in the institution. The criterion was a reaction to Burch (2015:227) that “student engagement research should consider student engagement at …course level to directly identify antecedents, moderators and outcomes associated with learning”.

It was also vital for the study to include a representative from the IRO. The rationale being that the IRO is the primary host to international students, therefore, it had the obligation to make students have a sense of belonging through its supportive services

and resources. Similarly, the IRO position placed it in the best situation to interact the most with IPGS.

Besides the criteria for participation, the unit of analysis for the study had to be defined (Kumar, 2014). The unit of analysis was where participants of this study were selected from. International students at the university under study formed a WhatsApp group which they used as their interactional channel. It was from this WhatsApp group that the participants were selected from. I sent to all the group members an introductory letter which identified the researcher, specified the research topic, stated the intention of the study and indicated to the participants that consenting to the study was voluntary and they had the right to refuse to participate at any time with no explanation required. The WhatsApp group composed of both under and postgraduate students. Since the research had a focus on IPGS only, it meant the undergraduates were not eligible to participate. Wherefore, it was from this WhatsApp group that some of the IPGS indicated their willingness to respond to telephone interviews. After IPGS had indicated their interest, I then phoned each to further explain the study and seek for consent. Appointments were then made for the telephone interviews. As a way of snowballing, it was from this interesting pool of IPGS that I asked them to recommend other IPGS whom they thought could be interested to be part of the study. Contact detail was then obtained and appointments were then made. The process continued until the data saturation point was arrived at (Kumar, 2014:243). That way, both convenience and snowballing techniques were employed to select participants from the unit of analysis.

To narrow the focus and determine who exactly was to be interviewed, demographic data of the participants were collected prior to the recorded telephone interviews. Some of this background information about the participants was controlled for the determination of the representativeness of the sample (Baklashova and Kazakov, 2016:1424). The study tried to ensure representativeness in terms of countries of origin. The sample was also heterogeneous which comprised of both males and females across a range of different fields of study. The demographic data provided for a broader understanding of the different characteristics of the respondents to give meaningful and actionable results to assist in making better analysis and interpretations of the findings.

4.5.3.1 Sample size of the study

Mason (2002:134) relents that in qualitative research, the question of sample size is insignificant because the aim is to understand and explain the study in a rounded way rather than representing a population. Although there was a predetermined sample size at the proposal stage of the study, at the data collection stage the final number of cases was determined by the data saturation point of a purposively selected sample. Several researchers including Etikan et al. (2016:4) believe purposive sampling does not require a specified number of participants. Kumar (2014:229) appraises that in qualitative research, the sample size is not predetermined, but when one is collecting data and realises that no new data is coming forth, it means that a saturation point has been reached and the researcher should stop collecting additional data from other participants. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:83) add that qualitative samples are usually small because:

- if data is properly collected it comes to a stage where very little new evidence is obtained from each additional participant
- in qualitative research, it is not a requirement that one comes up with estimates or precise statistical significance
- the size of information that qualitative studies produce is rich in detail from the few individuals who are purposively selected

More so, this qualitative research was flexible enough to change the size of the sample within the scope of the study. A sample could have increased if the evidence produced was inadequate or a sample could have reduced from the predicted if no evidence was coming forth from additional participants (Silverman, 2013:146). Further, Willing (2001:17) suggests that in qualitative research a relatively small number of participants is easier to work with because data collection and analysis of such studies becomes time-consuming and labour intensive if the sample is large. Besides, a carefully selected sample of the study gave the diversity and accuracy which was based on the information obtained rather than the sample size (Kumar, 2014:234).

One South African university was the site for the study. Participants encompassed eleven (11) current and eleven (11) former IPGS. Of the eleven (11) current IPGS, three (3) were on the masters programme and the other eight (8) were pursuing their

doctoral studies. Out of the eleven (11) former IPGS three (3) had completed their masters and the other eight (8) were doctoral graduates. For the triangulation of data, one representative from the IRO also responded to the one-on-one telephone interview. The total sample of the study comprised of twenty-three (23) participants. As anticipated, the diversity of including current and former masters and doctoral IPGS and the inclusion of the IRO stimulated the discussion that answered the research questions. The sample was similarly large enough to make meaningful comparisons of data that related to the research questions (Mason, 2008:136). The sample of 23 participants as well helped me to "immerse in the activities of a smaller group of people to obtain an intimate familiarity with the social worlds, looking for patterns in research participants' lives, words and actions in the context of the case as a whole (De Vos et al. 2011:320). Al-Busaidi (2008:15) concurs with the sample size because the size in qualitative research usually does not exceed 50 participants but the size may increase or decrease depending on the types of questions asked and the saturation point of data. Hence, the sample for this study was subject to revision as data collection progressed.

Table 4.2 gives a summary of the participants, sampling methods and instruments used for this study.

Table 4.2: Summary of the participants, sampling methods and instruments

Participants	Number	Sampling method	Instrument
Current masters IPGS	3	Convenience + snowball	One-on-one individual telephone interview
Former masters IPGS	3	Convenience + snowball	One-on-one individual telephone interview
Current PhD IPGS	8	Convenience + snowball	One-on-one individual telephone interview
Former PhD IPGS	8	Convenience + snowball	One-on-one individual telephone interview
IRO	1	Convenience	One-on-one individual telephone interview
Total	**23**		

4.6 Thematic analysis of data

Parallel to the design of this study, a qualitative data analysis approach was adhered to in a mission to understand the nature of IPGS engagement challenges in one South African university. As mentioned earlier, the case study was not meant to be representative or comparative of the country's situation but the intention was to be illuminative and illustrative to the phenomena under study and how it links or not to other IPGS' experiences (Vandenbosch:2005:26)

Although there was a stage dedicated for data analysis, rather, as a qualitative researcher, the analysis began as soon as the first day of collecting data and ended at write-up of the report (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:199). It was important to start data analysis at the earliest stage to get an understanding that could shape the data

gathering process (Given, 2008:186). The practical task of data analysis was to make sense of the many pages of transcribed data that were collected, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns and construct a framework that could communicate the core of what the data revealed (Best & Kahn, 2006:270). For this reason, audiotaped transcripts together with document analysis data were organised into meaningful themes and categories that emerged from the data collected throughout the study. Figure 4.3 gives a summary of the thematic data analysis process taken for the study

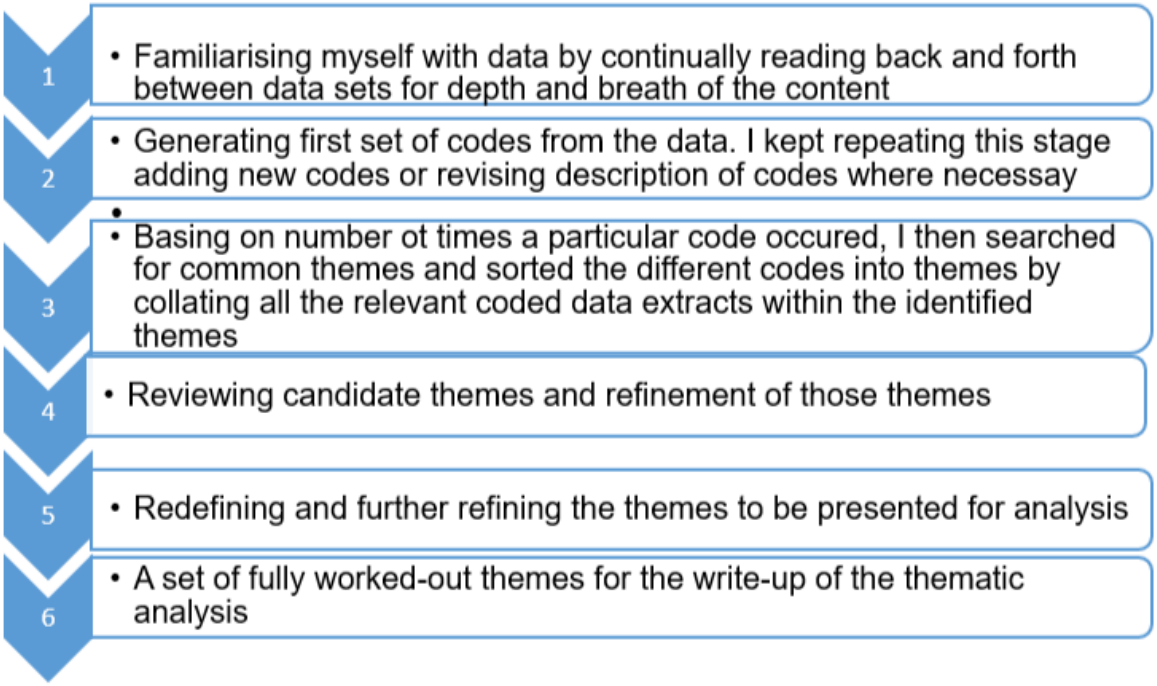

Figure 4.3: A summary of the thematic data analysis process for the study

The data was thematically analysed (Szyjka, 2012:318), which involved identifying and analysing reporting patterns within the data (Braun and Clark, 2006:6). Borrowing from Creswell (2009:184), Silverman (2013:221) and Smith (2002:66), data analysis was a continuous, emerging and non-linear process which started at data collection and involved reflections about the data throughout the study. Transcriptions of recorded data took place as soon as possible after each recording. This was critical in several ways. First, it helped in associating the data with the respondent. It also helped in reflecting on the information recorded, and it was correspondingly helpful in familiarising with aspects of the data. Above all, I got immersed in the data throughout the transcription process. Such benefits could not have been possible if the

transcription was postponed than at the earliest. The data was transcribed by typing texts from audio interview recordings into a word processing document. As the listening to recordings continued during transcription, it also presented another great advantage in searching for meanings and patterns throughout the transcription process.

The process of the thematic data analysis was guided by Smith (2002:67), Silverman (2013:251) and (Braun and Clark, 2006:6). After data transcription, they have browsed through to code the information and decide which of the codes were of interest and most important to the study. I had to immerse myself in the data by continually moving back and forth between the data set several times to make myself familiar with the depth and breadth of data, searching for meanings and patterns. Notably, the coding continued to be developed and defined throughout the entire analysis. Identification of the codes was made easier by colour-coding such that all texts coded with the same colour were about the same theme.

The data was then assigned to recurring themes by bringing several codes together and identifying formal connections between them. This classification of the data was a basic part of analysis which laid the conceptual foundation upon which interpretations and explanations were based. To avoid losing focus of the study due to the overwhelming information collected, classification was guided by the research questions of the study. Further, interview and document analysis data were organised either per individual responses or by grouping answers together across respondents to allow for the understanding of a complete case (Maree, 2016:108; Creswell, 2015:30; Szyjka, 2012:370).

The most powerful verbatim statement from the data was used to ‘voice’ perceptions and views of the participants on student engagement experiences, university processes and academic achievements. The excerpts used were grouped under sub-themes (Braun & Clark, 2006:23). It is greatly accepted that the inclusion of excerpts enhanced conformability as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the views of the study participants. Once the data was classified, regularities, variations and peculiarities were examined. Patterns were then identified in preparation for presenting the results under each objective.

4.7 Presentation of the findings

As discussed earlier, given the qualitative nature of the study, the participants' voices needed to be incorporated in the presentation and interpretation of the findings. To uphold confidentiality and anonymity of the IPGS, pseudonyms and a combination of the letters IPGS (international postgraduate student), level of study (Masters [M] doctoral [D]), status (current/former [c/f]) and numbers 1-22 were used. The pseudonyms adopted were IPGS1cD (international postgraduate student1 current doctoral) for the first interview participant, IPGS2cM (international postgraduate student 2 current Masters) for the second interview participant, up to IPGS 22 depending on the level and status of the student. The international relations officer was represented by an IRO configuration. The research objectives guided the units of analysis and this led to the four themes emerging.

Table 4.5. Reference codes symbolising participants

Participants	**IPGS 1-22**	
Level of study	Masters	M
	PhD	D
Status of study	Current	C
	Former	F

Apart from the analysis methods discussed above, a careful evaluation of verbatim statements of the study participants was applied and the most powerful, but not to be taken as exhaustive, were used in the discussion of the research findings. As generally understood, the inclusion of verbatim statements enhanced the credibility of the study because it provided a greater depth of understanding of the views of the study participants (Braun & Clark, 2006:25). In fact, per the authors, verbatim statements were evidence of the participants' responses for the analysis and interpretation made

in the study. Given the nature of the qualitative research approach, it was inevitable to incorporate the study participants' voices in the presentation and interpretation of the findings in research of this nature.

4.8 Measures of quality control: Trustworthiness of qualitative research

Being insider research it was important to establish trustworthiness in the research design Fleming, 2018:314). Tracy (2015:235) and Maree (2016:123) propose that qualitative insider researchers must determine the trustworthiness of their studies. It was, therefore, perceived important for this study to establish appropriateness, quality and accuracy of procedures for finding answers to research questions (Kumar, 2014:212). The prevailing determinants of measures of quality control for qualitative research are drawn primarily on the works of Guba (1981) who discusses the importance of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability as measures of trustworthiness in qualitative research. The quality criterion measures were applied for this study as outlined next.

4.7.1 Credibility of this study

The principle of credibility of a study involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are believable from the perspective of the participants judged by confirmation, congruence, validation and approval of results by the providers of information (Kumar, 2014:219; Silverman, 2014:433; Kivunja & Kuyini, (2017:34). Qualitative credibility was achieved through thick descriptions, triangulation, multiple sources, use of deep-rooted qualitative research methods, theoretical frameworks aligned to research questions and member checking (Tracy, 2013:235; Maree, 2016:123; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:231). Prolonged engagement and continuous observation in the setting (Creswell, 2009:192; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:231) enhance credibility. For insider research, going native was provided through the direct involvement in the university and the respondents over time and thus built rapport and gave a deeper understanding of contextual factors and influences (Fleming, 2018:314)

To achieve more credibility, the site, participants, methodology processes and activities in the university were thoroughly described for readers to follow. Several data sources that included IPGS both former and current, a representative from the IRO and documents, were triangulated to allow for confirmation, divergence and

congruence of viewpoints. To strengthen the credibility of the study, more than one data collection strategy was employed using interviews and document analysis. To further raise credibility, member checking was performed by allowing participants at some points during interviews and after data collection to verify the accuracy of the data captured (Flick, 2009:392). Audiotapes were replayed to the participants to verify accuracy, addition, corrections or clarity of what was said during the interview sessions. To further enhance credibility, it was also important to have regular debriefing meetings with supervisors and colleagues to have their input into the data collected and verify the interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2009:192; Maree, 2016:123).

4.7.2 Transferability of the study

Transferability refers to when readers believe that the research findings connect to their own situations or settings (Tracy, 2013:259; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:34; Silverman, 2014:433) or how characteristic the participants are to the setting of the study (Maree, 2016:124). Transferability can be realised through a comprehensive description of the process adopted for others to trail and replicate the study (Kumar, 2014:219). In this study, adequate and focused descriptions of the problem, setting, respondents and the design were sufficiently described so that readers could make connections and informed decisions about the findings. Purposeful sampling was also helpful as the participants selected represented the case of study in terms of the phenomenon and context studied (Maree, 2016:124).

4.7.3 Dependability of the study

Dependability is concerned with whether the same outcome may be obtained if observations could be repeated under similar circumstances (Kumar, 2014:219). Kumar admits dependability may be difficult to establish unless one keeps an extensive and detailed record of the process of the study for others to replicate. Maree (2016:124) supports that dependability is achieved through a detailed research design and its implementation. Considering the presented evidence, dependability for this research was demonstrated through audit trail (Creswell, 2009:191). The methodology process was thoroughly described, with explanations to how judgment and decisions may be made by way of rich thick descriptions throughout the study (Flick, 2009:329). Borrowing Maree's (2016:124) suggestion, the analysis process was reported in such

a way that readers could follow the decisions made, how the analysis was done and how the interpretations were arrived at. To enhance dependability, it was critical that I as the researcher acknowledged by describing my position as an insider researcher with the university (Fleming, 2018:314).

4.7.4 Conformability of the study

Conformability denotes the extent to which results of the research can be confirmed by participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:34; Kumar, 2014:219). Maree (2016:125) puts it forward that it is how much the participants' and not the researcher's biases and interests influence the finding of a study. Hence, conformability was accomplished through triangulation of data collection methods and sources to build a coherent justification for themes and through participant verification of the data captured (Creswell, 2009:191). Conformability was also strengthened through audit trail which allowed for tracing of the research process. Excerpts from transcriptions were extensively utilised during data presentation and analysis so that readers could make decisions about what respondents conveyed in the research and not my opinions.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration embraces defining, appraising and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour involving the conduct of research and the value assigned to various aspects of research, the participants, the data and the audience to which results of the research are reported (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28). This study involved people and sites that needed to be respected and protected, more so for the students who were the main respondents (Creswell, 2009:89). Ethical issues started with the research problem which was identified to benefit the individuals and the site studied right up to report writing wherein issues such as acknowledging the authorship of publications and maintaining the privacy of data sources (Creswell, 2009:89). Therefore, ethical considerations as guided by the University of Venda were upheld throughout the study.

4.8.1 The University Higher Degrees Committee Approval

The study was guided first and foremost by the ethics committee constituted by the University Higher Degrees Committee (UHDC) of the University that ensured ethical issues were considered to protect participants from potential risk such as physical,

psychological, social, economic or legal harm (Creswell, 2009:89; Silverman, 2013:154). Accordingly, data was only collected after ethics clearance approval from the UHDC. With the evidence of the ethics clearance certificate, a letter to request permission to conduct research at the university under study was then obtained from the School of Education. The introductory letter from the School in turn was used to request permission to conduct the research at the university. Written permission to carry out the research was obtained from the Registrar of the university of study.

4.8.2 Informed consent

Prior to their involvement, all authorities and participants concerned were given detailed information about the study objectives, methods to be used and the relevance of the study to the university and the community at large (Creswell, 2009:88; Silverman, 2013:155). The research site for this study was an HEI and the participants were IPGS and the IRO. To collect data, the situation necessitated obtaining permission from the university.

After the permission to gather data from the site was secured from relevant authorities, it was then essential to seek informed consent from all the participants (Creswell, 2009:89). It was important to send the consent form to the participants so that they could take time to read understand what was expected of them. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, with an explanation that only those willing to be participants could be part of the study (Kumar. 2014:285). It was also important to let participants know that they could pull out from the study at any time, if they so wished, with no explanation required for the decision made (Silverman, 2013:155: Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:67). Following the consent letter, since the interview was telephonic, confirmation of the consent was obtained when making the appointment date and time for the interview and at the onset of the interview on the appointed day. For clarity, consent was continually sought at several points during the entire study as participants became fully informed about what consenting to the study related to. Since participants were adults, consent was sought directly from the participants. This study used audio-recorded interviews to collect data. Permission was correspondingly sought from participants to audio tape-record the proceedings.

4.8.3 Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants

Before the onset of the interviews, respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the respondents and the assurance was maintained throughout the study. Participants were given assigned codes arranged in numerical order of the interviews as explained earlier. In addition, all data collected was handled respectfully and confidentially (Kumar, 2014:285; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:68). Soft data was stored on password-protected mode and hard copies were always securely stored in a lockable bag (Silverman, 2013:155; Tracy: 2013:243). To gain participants' confidence, assurance was given continually that the data collected was to be used for nothing else except for the present study. It was also thoughtful and profound moral practice to consider private events or interactions not to count as data. Confidentiality was continually maintained if insights and private knowledge in the university were unintentionally gained. For example, the name of the university and other information that would identify the university were obliterated when mentioned in the excerpts.

4.8.4 Safety of the respondents

It was assumed that participants experienced anxiety, stress, low self-esteem or unintended disclosure of information during the study, therefore, a commitment was made to make a better judgement to reduce the discomfort by building rapport, reassurance and treating participants with respect throughout the study (Creswell, 2009:89; Kumar, 2014:285; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:68; Silverman, 2013:156).

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of the study where the interpretive and qualitative nature of the study were discussed. Data collection methods of interviews were explained and justified. How the data was manually thematically analysed was also explained. Measures of quality control to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and the safety of the respondents were considered throughout. Matters of ethical considerations that guided the study were also outlined and clarified. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings that were obtained.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Data that is unused are no different from data that were never collected Mark Twain, American Writer.

5.0 Introduction

Chapter Four presented and contextualised the research design and methodology of the study, which entailed interpretive and qualitative case study perspectives. The current chapter presents findings, analysis and interpretation that involves the discussion.

The study was conducted to explore student engagement and the experiences of IPGS studying abroad. Based on the research questions of the study, four major themes and sub-themes emerged from the data. The themes and categories that emerged from the IPGS responses were narrated through dialogical conversations with IPGS under study. Thick textual descriptions were transcribed to tell the stories of the participants. With the research topic and questions in mind, only relevant data were presented and analysed. The findings were analysed and presented for each objective. These were followed by a discussion where consistencies or inconsistencies of results were compared with prior related research and interpretations were made thereof (Burnard et al., 2008:432). For example, like the findings of the study, it is recurrent in the literature that IPGS is a high achieving and motivated group of the student but who are most likely to encounter challenges when studying abroad (Kozikoglu & Aslan, 2018:701, Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:561; Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138;). Conversely, IPGS were found to be inactively engaged in organised activities while their Asian counterparts in the UK were actively involved. Similarly, such consistencies and inconsistencies of the Social and Academic Integration Theory by Tinto and the conceptual framework of Student Engagement by Kahu were fundamental in this chapter to explain the state of student engagement in the university. For example, the findings were consistent with the Social and Academic Integration Theory which accepts that constructive interaction between staff and peers

and other social systems of a university can affect IPGS' retention or departure decisions (Aaron et al., 2018:1321; Ammigan & Laws, 2018:1295)

The data that was collected helped answer the four research questions as prescribed in the introductory chapter as: (1) *Which are types and nature of IPGS engagement and experiences between IPGS and their and their peers as well as staff at one South African university? (2) Which are the professional services and resources provided to support IPGS at one South African university? (3) What engagement challenges are faced by IPGS at one South African university? (4) Which strategies are employed by IPGS to cope with their studies at one South African university?* The data was gathered using telephonic interviews and document analysis. The main respondents of the study were IPGS. The IRO, as the primary host of international students, was also interviewed to enhance understanding of the problem of the study. The study also utilised the University Internationalisation Policy and Procedures document to enrich interview data. The office of Quality Assurance Institution of the university being studied availed the current enrolment data of IPGS. The multiple data sources which were employed built up the triangulation of the data collected and provided in-depth information to answer the four research questions. Further to data collected from the study participants, relevant documents were analysed as indicated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Key documents analysed

Document	**Relevant information analysed**
Internationalisation Policy and Procedures	• Services for international full degree students • Admission for international students • Registration and orientation, • Procedures for international matters relating to international students
Post graduate enrolment	• Postgraduate enrolment by country name

Borrowing from Burnard et al. (2008:429), the data analysis process was inductive also called open coding where themes emerged directly from the transcript texts about

the nature of student engagement, challenges, institutional support systems and coping strategies employed by the students during their studies in a foreign university. While the interview transcripts provided a descriptive account of the study, my role was to provide explanations and make sense of the collected data by exploring and interpreting them (Burnard et al. 2008:429; Szyjka, 2012:370). To understand IPGS experiences and their meaning, interviews were analysed using narrative analysis (Raby, 2021:633) which involved identifying and analysing reporting patterns within the data (Szyjka, 2012:318; Braun and Clark, 2006:6). The data was presented by reporting the key findings under each main theme and at the same time fitting in verbatim quotes to illustrate the findings (Burnard et al., 2008:430). To uphold the confidentiality of the data source while at the same time linking the excerpt with the respondent, the respondents were identified by a reference code (Table 4.5) at the end of each verbatim quote.

5.1 Participant descriptive characteristics

By considering the advice from Tinto's theory of academic and social integration, which it suggests that students enter a university with preset attributes (Chrysikos, et al.,2017:100), it was necessary to characterise the participants of the study to pave way for the understanding of the inherent attributes IPGS tagged along into the new environment which could otherwise influence their engagement experiences. The study, therefore, sought the sex, programme enrolled and nationality of the respondents.

5.1.1 IPGS enrollment in the university under study

In this study, it was necessary to present the 2021 enrolment of IPGS in the university. The enrolment reveals the size of the unique subset of the university population, countries represented and the number of students representing each country. The enrollment was obtained from the Office of Quality Assurance Institution of the university under study. The data was received on excel, hence a pie chart (Figure 5.1) was generated to present enrolment by country of origin.

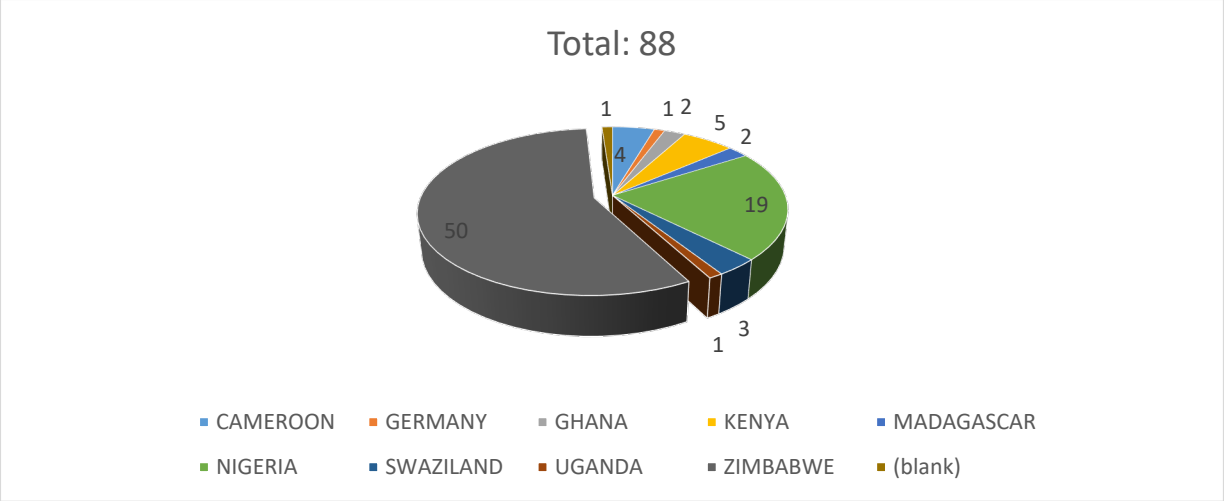

Figure 5.1: 2021 IPGS enrolment in the university by nationality

The university enrolment of IPGS at the time of study stood at 88. The trend, as narrated by the IRO, indicates that enrolment of IPGS has been dropping since 2015. The downward trend was attributed to a lack of funding for IPGS as a support service by the institution. The IRO shared:

> At the moment, I can say the numbers have dropped from 2015 up to now. … I think the main purpose would be the funding. I could say most students were using … the work study…, so after that it resulted, when the work study was removed, so the numbers dropped I think most students didn't get more funding to continue with their studies … because remember most of the numbers that we had at [name of institute] were mostly postgraduates more than the undergraduates, yes so that would have resulted to the decrease of international students towards postgrad (IRO).

Berker and Kolster (2012:10) suggest that international students go through a decision-making process before they can decide their destination abroad and emphasise it is important for institutions to understand the motives behind coming up with "more effective recruitment policies". As reflected in Figure 5.1, the 2021 enrolment of IPGS stood at 88. The depiction is that Zimbabwean students had the highest enrolment in the university (50) followed by Nigeria (19), Kenya (5), Cameroon (4), Swaziland (3), Ghana (2), Madagascar (2) Germany (1) and Uganda (1). From these figures, I developed the impression that, while the university may attract IPGS from all over Africa and beyond, chances were that Zimbabweans were the most attracted to study in the South African university because of proximity. In concurrence with these findings, Mda; Mokhothu and Callaghan (2018:5) established that the

SADC countries provide the most students in South Africa and Zimbabwe tops the list, followed by Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, in that order. At the national level, the same observation was made by OECD (2019:2) that South Africa is a popular destination among students from neighbouring countries. Out of 45 000 foreign students enrolled in tertiary institutions, 81% were from Africa and more than half of those students were from neighbouring countries that share common borders with South Africa, including the rest of the SADC member states. The trend of the findings could be attributed to the low costs of travel coupled with the recognition of the high qualifications offered in South African universities. This further supports the observation by International Briefs for Higher Education (2018) that “international graduate students from within Africa and beyond the borders of Africa find the South African education system attractive”.

5.1.2 Demographic data

Although Burnard et al. (2008:432) suggest that qualitative data cannot be usefully quantified given the nature, composition and size of the sample group, Lynne (2013) says with careful reflection, demographic data can be included in a qualitative study. Based on Lynne’s (2013) suggestion, it was essential to characterise the IPGS before the interviews (Appendix E). Tinto, in his theory of academic and social integration, also suggests that when students enter a university they have a set of attributes that they already possess (Chrysikos, et al.,2017:100) which need to be considered. Tinto says the attributes influence the students’ initial goals and institutional commitment. Hence the description of the respondents helped to understand their viewpoints within the perspectives of the demographics that could affect how they perceived their situations and made decisions then. The study sought the nationality, gender sex of the respondents, programme pursued and country of origin. The illustrative Table 5.2 summarises the demographic profile of the sample studied.

Table 5.2: Summary of the Demographic profiles of the IPGS N=22

		Programme		Status		Area of Specialisation							Totals
Nationality	**Gender**	**PhD**	**Masters**	**Current**	**Former**	**ES**	**AGRIC**	**EDU**	**HSS**	**MS**	**MNS**	**LAW**	
Zimbabwe	Male	2	2	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	**4**
	Female	7	0	3	4	1	0	1	3	1	0	1	**7**
DRC	Male	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	**2**
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Nigeria	Male	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	**3**
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Cameroon	Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
	Female	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	**2**
Swaziland	Male	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Kenya	Male	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
	Female	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Ghana	Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
	Female	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
													22
Totals		**16**	**6**	**11**	**11**	**5**	**4**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**1**	

Key: ES: Environmental Sciences **AGRIC**: Agriculture **EDU**: Education
HSS: Human and social Sciences **MS**: Management Sciences
MNS: Mathematics and Natural Sciences **LAW**: Law

5.1.3 Participants' country of origin.

To ensure greater representativeness, this demographic variable was controlled to include different countries but the number of participants from each country was voluntary. Table 5.1 indicates that most of the participants (11) were Zimbabweans. Three (3) of the IPGS were Nigerians. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cameroon and Kenya were each represented by two (2) IPGS. Swaziland and Ghana

had one (1) IPGS participant apiece. The findings validate the 2021 enrolment of IPGS in the university which shows that most students enrolled in that year were from Zimbabwe (Figure 5.1). Likewise, as a nation, South African international students from the SADC region were dominated by Zimbabweans (Mokhothu & Callaghan (2018:5). When IPGS justified their choice of studying in a South African university outside their native countries, they cited situations such as proximity, financial support and better quality of education or a combination of the factors.

Knowing about your destination and the institution is the maiden step to the application process. Before leaving, international students were aware of the destination structures that would influence their stay in the institution. several of the IPGS were lured to the South African university because of its proximity to their home country. One Zimbabwean unquestionably decided *"Seeing there are limited studies in Zimbabwe I decided to go to South Africa. I decided to go … because it was closer to home"* (IPGS1cD). Another Zimbabweans echoed, "*The … attraction was the location of the university, being in Limpopo, meaning that it was closer home*" (IPGS22fD). One other Zimbabwean concurred, "*it's closer to home. … so this university since its closer to home it offered everything that one could want*" (IPGS10cD). The narratives are an indication that even though international students preferred to study abroad they still opted for destinations closer to home which helped cut on travel costs and the option to visit home whenever the need arose.

The prospects of receiving funding for studies and accommodation was also a consideration alongside the recommendations by friends or relatives and the prospects of being supervised by a renowned supervisor, strengthened the choice of the South African university. For instance, when one student from Zimbabwe secured a scholarship, the decision was:

> I decided to take it up so. Yaa, I think that is what motivated me to have it that way because I had not got any scholarship elsewhere … I asked some friends about the university and they were saying it is ok. And had also read about my supervisor on the research that he had done. He has well-published articles (IPGS2cM).

As a study by Birnbaum, Cardon and Nicholson (2015:3), some students choose to study abroad because comparably, South Africa had a better education system. The university reputations, quality of programmes of an institution and the economy of the

intended hosting nation are a full package of attraction to most students who intend to study abroad inspired by obtaining a reputable foreign degree, having better career opportunities, the possibility of a higher earning capacity and the exposure to the cultural landscape. To that effect, an IPGS from Nigeria provided substantive evidence of how he came to study at the South African university of study:

> I believe there could not have been a better place to study if I am not in my country apart from South Africa. So, I looked around the countries of Africa and I felt SA could be the best for my study, First, it's culturally diverse and the economy is also stable and quite a number of factors such as technology advancement and other facilities (IPGS3fD).

The findings suggest that IPGS were clear of the push and pull factors that influenced their decisions to study in a South African university that would fulfil their aspirations and expectations. Figure 5.2 summarises the push and pull factors as told by the participants of this study.

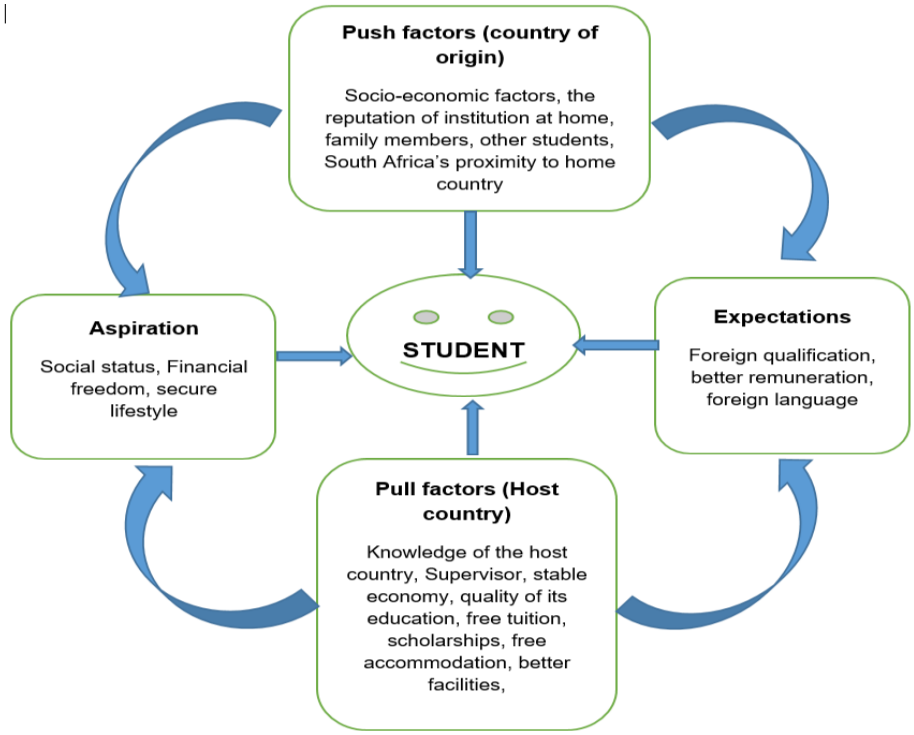

Figure 5.2 The push and pull factors for studying at a South African university

Going to study abroad is a decision that was made by the IPGS that could change and shape the life of the individual, society and nation. The findings indicate that

Zimbabweans and other African nation students made clear decisions to choose a South African University for their postgraduate studies. Literature suggests there are student models specifically for international students, which give explanations to factors that affect the decision-making process that students must make when choosing a study destination abroad. Students are influenced by push and pull factors. Borrowing from Eder, Smit and Pitts (2010:234) and Berker and Kolster (2012:11) the push factors were those based in the home country that triggered IPGS to decide to go and study abroad while the pull factors were within the host country that was attractive to IPGS, as represented in Figure 5.2. From the findings, it can be concluded that the most important pull factors of international students to the institution were the envy of a better South African economy, high quality of education and the provision of scholarships. On the other hand, the most important push factors were proximity to the home country and recommendations from friends and relatives and the prospect of a renowned supervisor. The study confirms Becker and Kolster's (2012:13) observation that the importance of factors depends on the nation of origin, the level and type of study the student is enrolled and whether the student was employed at the time of the study.

Furthermore, considering the results of this study, there was a diverse cultural identity of IPGS in the sample which emanated from the seven nations that were represented. The diversity of international students was an indication of the university's policy adoption where the focus was on creating a diverse atmosphere and prevention of all forms of discrimination based on nationality (Internationalisation Policy and Procedures, 2013:5). In terms of the study, it may be interpreted that the diversity of the students' nationality provided for views from a wide range of international students in relation to their country of origin. To the study environment, the diversity of international students brought additional language skills and learning experiences that helped students and staff become socially well informed (Cole & Zhou, 2014:110) and developed global critical thinking important for universal participation and competence in the university community (Umboh et al., 2015:797). Above all, the retention of IPGS in the host country added workplace diversity (Groarke & Durst 2019:64). For+--- both local and international students "experiences with diversity exposed them to new situations and provided them with the opportunity to resolve discrepancies and reconsider their existing conceptions" (Cole & Zhou, 2014:111). Moreover, Prebble et

al., (2004:53) suggest “student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when the institutional culture, social and academic welcome diverse cultural capital and adapts to diverse students’ needs”. It is hence up to the university to put in place environments that embrace diversity by the inclusion of IPGS (Prebble et al., 2004:53).

5.1.2.1 Sex of the participants. Table 5.1 shows that 22 IPGS responded to the telephone interviews. Half (11) the respondents were male and the other half (11) were female. Despite the equal representation of the respondents, this study did not at any point control the gender of the participants. The balance could be an indication that the gender bias in education has shifted from historical imbalances of education opportunities that supported male than female counterparts, especially in African regions (Aktas et al., 2017:2). Since World War 11, UNESCO spearheaded efforts to address international education for girls and women and since then significant progress has been realised (Myers & Griffin, 2019:430) as shown by the results. It has been noted that if ever there is a gender gap existing, it could be smaller when compared with domestic enrolment trends. Contrarily, America, the top destination for international students, has shown that women are underrepresented in the international student population standing at 43.6% of its international students (Myers and Griffin, 2019:430).

As an insider researcher, I observed that international female students struggle more to adjust to the new environments compared to their male counterparts because of the collective struggles of being female, mothers, pregnancy, IPGS and at the same time trying to fight the rigours of graduate studies. This is the reason why Anh, et al. (2016:132) propose that more considerations should be reflected in the experiences of female IPGS because of the multiplicity of their challenges. In certain regions of the world, international female students must also negotiate multiple aspects of social and cultural gaps because of the different gender norms of the host nation (Anh, LaCost & Wismer, 2016:129). However, from the narratives told in the study, the comparison of male and female IPGS showed consistency in experiences and the responses did not indicate gender-biased experiences, inferring that men and women shared similar experiences when studying abroad. This could be attributed to the similarities of gender norms and values, social and cultural practices in African countries as the respondents were all from the African region, with the majority from the SADC region.

5.1.4 Students' choice of study programmes

The diversity of IPGS correspondently resulted in varied explanations for the choice of the course programmes. Results indicate that a variety of the programmes were represented in this study (Figure 5.1). Although they enrolled in a variety of programmes, most of them were in the field of Environmental Studies (5) followed closely by Agriculture Sciences (4), Human and Social Sciences (4), Management Sciences (4). The Schools of Education and Mathematics and Natural Sciences were represented by two (2) IPGS apiece. There was one (1) participant from the School of Law. The clustered pattern of distribution of the fields of study could have been created by the snowball method of sampling which resulted in IPGS recommending students from their study groups or the social circles of the IPGS. The other indication of the findings could be that there were more IPGS in the School of Environmental Studies who were willing to be part of the study, which could suggest a high motivation and engagement among IPGS in that school. Radloff (2011: viii) suggests the variation of student engagements is greatly influenced by the programmes undertaken which in turn influence many aspects of students' university experience. Comer and Brogt, (2011:11) echoed that "students' field of study is one of the largest sources of variation in the level of student engagement" because "different fields of study have distinctive traditions and customs in terms of student support". The diversity of the programmes provides for different departments to learn from each other in terms of engagement levels. One IPGS from the school of Environments Studies demonstrated that an area of study can be the greatest source of divergences in student engagement levels:

> It's a study (Management Sciences) that requires an open mind and dedication to the work. You have to do a lot of reading and input from my colleagues, where we have weekly presentations. That's where you see some of those challenges. So, I would say with all that support it wasn't all that challenging, because there is a built-in support system here. (IPGS6cD).

In support of the narration, a Malaysian study, whose education system for postgraduates was based on research that is comparable to this present study, observed that an education system that is based on research than theoretical ones might cause problems for those whose research background is limited and supports teamwork as an effective and positive feature of such an education system (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:142). Similarly, one study in Turkey corroborated that students whose

country experiences a different education system from the host institution may find little progress in their studies (Kozikoglu & Aslan 2018:702).

A different level of engagement was demonstrated in another department. The student shared similar concerns about the rigours of academic work but appreciated the challenge which made her a better academic than before, despite the lack of support:

> It was quite challenging for me. I was really lacking in some of the key areas like that, and therefore I felt I needed a lot of support to be able to come up with something which is of acceptable standards … I was forced to read a lot on research methodology … at that particular point or stage, it was very frustrating to me. (IPGS7fD).

The different experiences displayed by the two narrations of the students suggest experiences for international students reflecting that the level of engagement can be improved because departments can learn vital lessons from each other on how international students may fully engage and complete studies on time. The success relies on recognising the unique nature of international students and making their experience satisfying and rewarding.

As reflected in Table 5.1, there were more Doctoral students (16) who participated in the study than the Masters students (6). However, the current IPGS (11 the former (11) were equally represented in the study. The indication could be that PhD IPGS who were on a higher postgraduate degree and those still pursuing their studies understood the significance of participating in the study since they could relate to my need for conducting the study. One current doctoral student narrated the evidence:

> I responded to you positively because I know when someone is looking for respondents sometimes it's very difficult. I said this one is working on something, why can't I just help, so that at least she gets something because if you are interviewing someone then you get a recording like that, at least you have got proof that you had done something, some people end up filling the questionnaires for themselves changing handwriting just to make things go, but I told myself no matter how inconvenient it maybe let me help my fellow. (IPGS1cD).

When transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate programmes, IPGS find the situation demanding and overwhelming as they must secure research funding, the right supervisor, get acquainted with the rigours of academic work, and at the same time try to identify people to study with (Anh et al, 2016:132) above the typical

challenges of the language barrier, adaptation and adjustment (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:571). The challenges compound the situation of international students finding it difficult to adapt and adjust to a different life abroad. Cumulatively, this suggests the participants were a unique subset of a population whose success was exposed to multiple threats but still managed to succeed. Rogers (2018:700) emphasises that since international students regard degrees abroad highly, they get so determined and committed to obtaining that degree. One student admitted her struggles of transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate but decided to embrace the experience positively:

> It was very challenging because you know, this is a new thing you have not done before and you need to do some research, you know you needed to read more for you to be able to understand to be able to write. It was challenging but the challenge was good because it's a learning platform (IPGS17cD).

The findings are demonstrative, as concluded in a study by Rogers (2018:702), of Norwegian students studying abroad, that international students are suggestively more motivated than host students who are on the same programme. The assertion is attributed to the deliberate move made by international students to study abroad. Therefore, they display certain characteristics that involve success despite the struggles encountered. Similarly, for this study, most IPGS, despite the field of study, was for the view that postgraduate academic study had a higher level of challenges. Nevertheless, they were determined to succeed from the moment they entered the institution up to graduation despite the challenges encountered. This is a validation of previous studies that international students are slightly more engaged and likely to be involved in enriching experiences and it is that kind of experience that contributes to their personal development (Radloff, 2011: xiv).

From the above indications, this study realised the importance of putting the participant descriptive characteristic demographics because the understanding of their characters provided insights on how IPGS perceived their situations and made decisions about it. This is in concurrence to Kahu's (2013:13) conceptual framework which illustrates that a student's engagement experiences are entrenched within the social context and influenced by characteristics of the student. However, which factors to set precedence highly depend on the level of the study (Kolster, 2012:10:13). Hence, only the

characteristics of IPGS that could have influenced the findings of this study were sought.

Having described the characteristics of the participant, the next sections focus on themes and their categories that emerged from the data collected, based on the objectives of this study and the theory and conceptual frameworks that the study was aligned to.

5.2 Emerging themes and sub-themes of the findings

Four major themes emerged during the analysis of the collected data. These themes were further subdivided into related categories and sub-categories. The analysis, presentation and discussion were guided by the details of the themes and categories as contained in Appendix F.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Nature of student engagement

The first that theme emerged from data analysis was the nature of IPGS engagement. The theme described the state of IPGS engagement at that time. After further analysis of both individual and cross data about the literature on the construct of student engagement, three categories emerged. The categories that were developed described the tripartite nature of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement of IPGS at a South African university. The behavioural engagement was described through interactive activities with peers and supervisors and participation in educational activities. The nature of emotional engagement was described by their motivation for studying abroad, perception of feedback from the supervisor and their sense of belonging to the institution. The cognitive engagement was seen through their views on the importance of educational activities with peers and supervisors, views on the value of time as IPGS and views on the integration of IPGS as a resource. Figure 5.3 presents the state of engagement described by the participants.

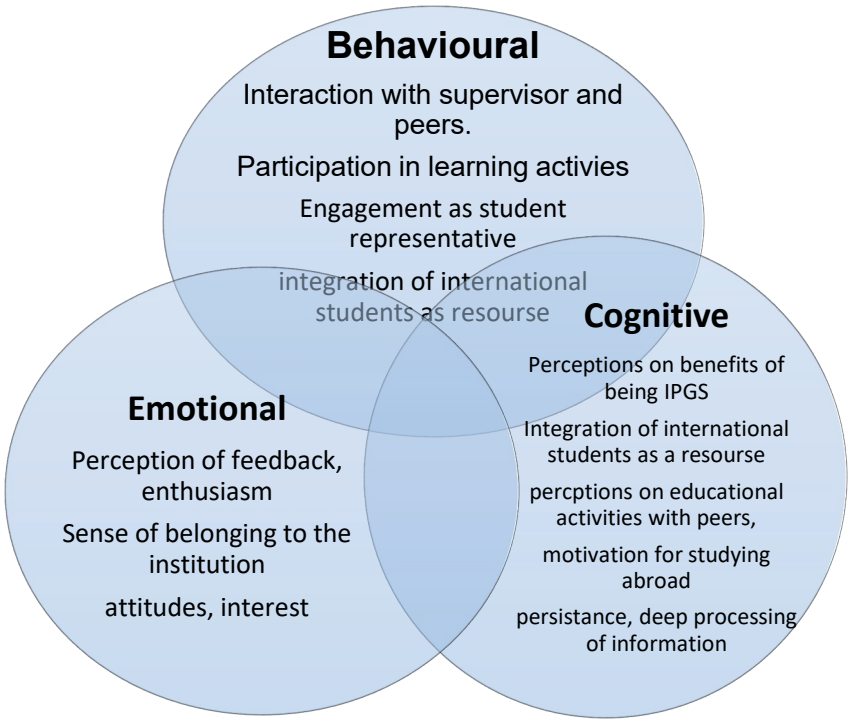

Figure 5.3: Nature of IPGS engagement described by participants.

5.2.1.1: Behavioural engagement

Behavioural engagement defined the typical standards of participation of IPGS in educationally purposive activities in the university which included the interaction with people on campus and participation in intentionally organised educational activities. Six sub-categories were developed from the nature of behavioural engagement. The first described the interactive nature of the student with the supervisor. The second illustrated collaborative activities student undertook with the supervisor. The third was how students reacted to the feedback of the assigned work. The fourth centred on the student-supervisor relationship. The fifth one was concerned with how students behaved with fellow students. The last from this category was illustrative of student-student educational activities.

5.2.1.1.1 Interactive activities with supervisors

The primary behavioural engagement of postgraduate education in the university was the research project. While IPGS often encountered difficulties with the research work which compound the typical challenges of studying abroad, it was interesting to find out that IPGS still portrayed positive behavioural engagement during participative interactions. Most of the IPGS professed a cordial and interactive relationship with

their supervisors. Students showed commitment in knowing what was expected of them, their capabilities and therefore, felt committed to taking their roles as students seriously. The next sections present, analyse and discuss behavioural engagement among IPGS.

Meetings for supervision of research work: Behavioural engagement involves students taking the initiative to participate in what was expected of them during studies. Creditably, the study revealed that both the supervisor and the student took the initiative in organising meetings for supervisory work. Again, upon probing why organising the meeting first, IPGS said that it was subject to the arising need by both parties. However, students confessed supervisors encouraged them to take the initiative. This reflects comments by supervisors in a different study who placed the responsibility on students (Oladele, Idowu & Olubukola, 2013:412). Commendably, students credited their supervisors for initiating the meetings when they took long to respond to the feedback or there was a need for more clarity. This is evident from one student's view who expressed that "*It depends. There are instances where it had to come from me…. while sometimes one of the supervisors could possibly say no this aspect is not quite clear I would like the three of us to meet and clarify that*". (IPGS3fD). Another student reiterated:

> … both of us, but if it's him it's usually after he has marked my chapter and then he tells me that we are going to have a meeting on such and such day and time. But most of the time it's me who just calls him for a meeting. So, both of us have to say something (IPGS10cD).

One other student acknowledged she did not take the initiative and left it to the supervisor to call for the meeting by declaring *"He is the one who initiated the meetings*" (IPGS 21fD).

The data suggests that while most IPGS set the motion to contact supervisors some decided to leave it to the supervisor to make the appointment. One student owed it to the departmental policy, "*the thing is like in my department we have an agreement between student and supervisor or promoter. It's a student-promotor agreement*" (IPGS4cD). This finding implies that each department used its own initiative on how supervision was going to be conducted and sometimes the kind of supervision was left to the supervisor's discretion. The situation suggests the challenges met by IPGS concerning supervision depended on the supervisors who devised their own

guidelines. However, borrowing from Noel, Wambua and Ssenatamu (2021:54), for supervision to be effective:

> Institutions must set effective supportive policies schedule supervision-oriented workshops at the particular time frame, mandatory follow up on the progress of postgraduate students by heads of department. Allocating specific contact hours for postgraduate candidates and their supervisors and tasking heads of departments to ensure that policies are affected.

Abiddin and West (2007:28) support formalised meetings as "an important vehicle for human communication which can be taken for granted unless properly planned and executed". Further, effective meetings are the drive to the timeous completion of graduate research studies. It is from the meetings that the progress or the lack of it is examined to allow for adjustments to be made to meet deadlines. Moreover, the student is the one who will benefit more from the meeting process where a consensus should be reached on meeting schedules, their frequency and making provisions for the next meeting. The understanding is that the decisions made may most probably gravitate the study towards completion.

Collaborative activities with the supervisor: The evidence given in the literature is that people who operate as a team are critical thinkers and they tend to have a greater memory (Laal & Laal, 2012: 492). This confirmed the authors' study that collaborative teaching was an effective way to master knowledge or skills. This is because, per the authors, it allows students to engage in dialogue and they become custodians of their own learning. The findings of this study show that many IPGS participated in at least one form of educational activity in collaboration with their supervisors. While some got involved in one form of activity, some found themselves getting involved in more than one activity. The wide range of activities was an indication of different levels of behavioural engagement determined by the student, department, programme or supervisor.

One student explained how she was behaviorally engaged by co-teaching classes with the supervisor "*Like me helping him to teach. Sometimes I take on classes if he is unavailable let me say for an example a conference, he asks me to take over his classes for that week*" (IPGS10cD). Similarly, one student was appreciative of the mentorship received from the supervisor as it contributed immensely towards her personal growth by saying "*I was a tutor for her module for the first year and third year*

module, so most of the time she would call me to something like mentoring, tell me this is how things have to be done … Just mentoring to build me up in a way". (IPGS13fM). In relation to the findings, way back Denmark took the concept of mentoring a step further by appreciating the contribution of the mentors towards students' personal growth through payment to mentors (Kelo, Rogers & Rumbley 2010:11).

Some IPGS were also grateful for the opportunity to engage in collaborative academic activities with the supervisor. One student responded "*We usually write articles together … I think academically that is one thing that we were doing together apart from my thesis* (IPGS8cD).

Besides collaborative research papers, one respondent explained how they got actively involved in local community activities. The student narrated "*I recall one of my supervisors, no, both, involved me in one of the external projects that had to do with community engagement activities and the like"*. (IPGS3fD).

In corroboration, the IRO was also supportive of the community engagement by IPGS. She acknowledged:

> The fact that they are able to do the projects that they do because remember in those projects mostly we are promoting community engagement because they have to go and find a school outside and do some outreach programmes, … That's where they learn on like how people are living their lives and where they think they can assist (IRO).

The above acknowledgement was indicated in a study by Ammigan and Perez-Encinas (2018:2) noting that "engaging international students with the larger campus can add value and quality to the student's experience and an institution's overall internationalisation efforts". Similarly, IRO echoed the authors' submission that outreach programmes open for both local and international students to grow intercultural proficiencies.

IPGS also shared how at one point they got invited and were allowed to attend educational conferences with supervisors. "… *I just had an opportunity with my supervisor to attend one conference*" (IPGS7fD). Similarly, one participant appreciated attending a conference with her supervisor amid the tight schedule of graduate studies. "*The time together was limited; this is why maybe we couldn't venture into any*

other educational activities but I remember they would invite us to conferences" (IPGS14fM).

With the above indications, I developed an impression that IPGS' behavioural engagement was positive in partnership with supervisors. The social integration of Tinto's theoretical frame entails campus relationships and alliances that students experience with staff and the enriching educational experiences which lead to social integration (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The respondents were appreciative of being engaged in enriching activities availed by supervisors. Arguably, collaborative relationships in research supervision empower and equip students to embrace research more, at the same time allowing the two parties to bond and tighten the shared relationship. Bacwayo, Namphala and Oteyo (2017:32) agree that the best approach to graduate supervision is the hands-on approach where the supervisor constantly interacts with the supervisee. The same authors suggest the approach is enriched by collective knowledge and input activities such as group supervision, supervision panels and peers where the lecturer and teaching assistants are involved as part of the research process. In this case, the supervisor is more accountable for the student's work. The authors, in their study of African universities, commend that African universities of late have adopted this approach instead of the hands-off approach where students are left to work independently and meet the supervisor from time to time. The hands-off practice makes the supervisor less accountable for the student's work. As revealed by this study, some departments in the institution have not been left behind in the collective knowledge input activities due to their initiatives and thus are more responsible for the student's work.

Aside from research work and collaborative activities, IPGS' interactive moments with the supervisors often led to enriching purposefully constructed dialogue. That way, students developed social and academic integration skills in both informal and formal ways (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The topics of discussion centred on updating students with current activities taking place in the department, issues of research funding and available opportunities for the student. The conversations sometimes extended to administrative issues of the university. Students gave their views to conversations that emerged during the supervision sessions by recounting "…*last week, we were discussing about exchange programmes. Like now I am a research assistant in one of the projects that he put me there, it separates research activity*

which is not my own research. (IPGS4cD). One other student highlighted several issues on why he thought the supervisor was indispensable, particularly during the Covid-19 lockdown period:

> The issues of registration, issues of funding and also sometimes I ask him help to get certain information from the institution because it's a really a bit tough to access certain offices, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic it's really a challenge to get even if you want anything from the institution so, sometimes I will talk to him if I need assistance in that regards or give him contacts to offices or numbers of people or emails of people that I can get in touch to access what I will be requesting (IPGS17cD).

The findings are an indication that IPGS engaged conversationally with staff aside from their research studies but it was basically around academic work. The engagement Tinto in his theory postulates that constructive interaction between staff, peers and the social system of a university can enhance the retention of students. The prediction is that low commitment to either academic or social integration can cause students to consider withdrawing from their studies. Hence these assertions propelled Tinto's theory of Social and Academic Integration to explain the possible impact of challenges on IPGS' university experiences and outcomes. In explaining these results, it can be said that apart from the research study, IPGS were positively engaged in fruitful discussions with their supervisors. It can also be deduced that supervisors sometimes played an advisor/mentorship role to the IPGS. The research experience involves stresses and challenges; therefore, such sessions benefit the supervisor and supervisee to establish and discuss negotiations amongst themselves to enhance the progress of the research (Joel, Wambua & Sentamu 2021:49). The findings strengthen the need for regularised meeting sessions, as mentioned earlier, between the supervisor and the supervisee. It is in those sessions that IPGS got to know about the needs and interests of the supervisors and vice versa. This also calls for the need for the university or academic departments to invest in training/orientation of supervisors IPGS because they are seemingly the main support system for students. It has been observed that best practices in an institution are a noticeable result of active collaborative teaching and reciprocal interaction with enriching educational practices (Kuh (2003:26) where the social agents are the staff and students in emotional engagement (Derek, 2013:3; Olson & Peterson, 2015:2). The assertions strengthen Tinto's framework that constructive interaction between staff and the social system of

a university can enhance the retention of students. The guess is, if there is little commitment from students to either academic or social integration, they may disengage from studies.

Student-supervisor relationship: Cordial relationships with a clear purpose of academic work and professionalism existed between IPGS and supervisors. IPGS was also clear of its role in the partnership relationship. While exceptions and variations existed, many students demonstrated satisfaction with the kind of relationship experienced with supervisors such that an understanding of each other was created with some extending the relationship even after leaving the institution. One study summed up the relation which the students desired of a supervisor (Oladele, Idowu & Olubukola, 2013:413). One of the conclusions from that study was that students yearned for a supervisor who was accessible and available with interest in them. IPGS as well described their ideal supervisors as "*we have a good relationship. I really don't know what to say but we have a good thing going on. We understand I understand him*" IPGS20fD). Another student added, "*We had a very friendly relationship like a father and a son. Still today we communicate. … he still has advice even though I am no longer with him and he is very far away from where I am but we still communicate*" (IPGS11fM).

One student's opinion was that while he appreciated the guidance of the supervisor, the onus was on him to create and maintain the cordial relationship that existed between him and his academics. His story was:

> When I was assigned a supervisor, the relationship I established with them was that I was very submissive in that I knew I had to take that role of submission … I wanted their guidance to nurture me and maybe guide me *in the right pathway… because they are supervisors, they have the know-how …* (IPGS14fM).

Although one student was satisfied with the kind of relationship she had created with the supervisor she, however, wished the relationship could go beyond academic work that would focus on social issues too. The student shared:

> My relationship with my supervisor was student-supervisor. It was good and strictly student-supervisor. I didn't like it because there are times when I had personal problems and would want to tell the supervisor … you need someone who understands you sometimes on a personal level than just a student-supervisor (IPGS3fD).

One IPGS separated the social and the academic aspect of a student-supervisor relationship. In telling her story, the emphasis was to balance the social and academic aspects of the relationship. The rationale was that if a relationship is skewed towards the social aspects, the result will be that of a compromised academic aspect. The student recounted:

> On the social aspect, we had a very good relationship. There was respect between us but the most challenging of the relationship was it made it difficult for me to take up my complaints because we had a good social relationship (IPGS7fD).

The findings in a study by Rugut (2019:350) resonates with the feeling shared by IPGS that they expected to have a graduate-studies driven relationship with their supervisors and the one that led to their growth in academic work and skills attainment in research methodologies that would propel the studies to timely completion. The same study, like this study, also revealed students had little clue on what was expected of them about postgraduate studies and therefore they needed leadership and guidance to the processes of tasks to be undertaken. In relation to Tinto's theory, the social and academic integrations influence students' day-to-day thoughts and if conditions are opposing they eventually influence how students make decisions about academic engagement (Archambault et al., 2009:652). The findings from this study suggest IPGS understood that for the sake of the smooth progress of their studies, they needed to have a sound relationship with their academic supervisors. In their study, Abiddin and West (2007:28) also realised that postgraduate studies involved students spending a great amount of time with supervisors and so countless effort should be put by the student to keep the relationship cordial for the whole period of the study. Thus, compatibility and taking cognisance of the roles of the two parties in promoting student goals is the key to supervisory relationships for IPGS, (Abiddin & West, 2007:28), considering that the relationship will last for a considerable number of years. That is why Bacwayo, et al. (2017:32) advise that great importance should be accorded when appointing a research supervisor to an IPGS because poor relations of the two parties will have a significant influence on the student's engagement and consequently the progress. Hence, the IPGS' clear purpose of academic work and supervisors' professionalism was an indication that IPGS engaged well in terms of student-supervisor relationships. The onus rested on IPGS having to manage the effectiveness and guidance of the supervisors and maintain the cordial relationship

created. Moreover, the good relationship ensured students engaged in their university experiences with sound emotions.

5.2.1.1.2 Student-peer relations

What students learn outside the formalities of academic work is considered influential to the student's academic achievement (Songsom, Nilsook & Wannapiroon, 2019:99). As an insider researcher and an employee in a university, I believe university systems do not allow for close monitoring of the student-peer relations and activities in and outside campus hence, their mental wellbeing and societal issues must be understood. The findings reveal that while some students saw value in peer interaction, others viewed peer interaction as a distraction to the progression of postgraduate studies. IPGS linked peer interaction to the company in times of need, partnership in studies, character and capacity building of each other, knowledge and information sharing, socialisation, bonding on the one hand, and as an adverse distracter and time-waster on the other. IPGS believed the institution should also play a role in student-peer interaction which could facilitate peer interaction platforms to enhance behavioural student engagement.

The findings suggest some students utilised peer interaction as a problem-solving platform for academic issues. One student emphasised that "*It's very important … if you hit a brick wall you can always go to somebody else who explains what you are doing and helps you get out of that being and you can go on*." (IPGS6cD). Another student took advantage of peer interaction to share his expertise in statistics at no cost to peers who were otherwise struggling by adding*, "It is important because it gives me the opportunity to assist or share the knowledge that I have so, in a manner that can actually add value to someone's life free of charge"* (IPGS10cD). One other IPGS decided peer interaction was a chance to take a break from studies and relieve stress by recalling "*it was very important that interaction, just to wind up. It was just okay you know, after school you just go and start talking and I think it also relieves that stress that you will be having*" (IPGS9fD).

The rationale from IPGS was that since they encountered similar struggles therefore it meant there was a need to share the struggles and come up with group consented interventions. The IPGS were convinced that together as a subset of a larger

population, they could get along with their studies if they shared and advised each other on problems encountered. Thomas and Esse (2016:874) in their study in Canada also established that international students who create relationships with host students experience better sociocultural adaptation and are more likely to persevere in their studies. One IPGS agreed:

> I think it's very important when you are researching to get your friends when you are stuck on something you might be very stressed if you think that your problems are unique and when you get to talk to your friends you may end up noticing that they also got through the same problems (IPGS14fM).

Contrarily, some IPGS were convinced peer interaction was a waste of study time and remained resolute that they needed to concentrate more on studies by detaching from others. This finding is in contrast with Dyer et al. (2018:38) who in their study found that friendships in universities best defined engaged students as it allows them to share information about events. One student was quick to agree though that there are only a few individuals who cannot afford not to create friendships on campus:

> Friends per se, I wouldn't say I had time for it, as a matter of fact, it is actually a very big constraint because I never had time to socialise with someone who was so much attached to my study … I am not saying that is the best way. To me, it worked for me. It helped me to be very focused. (IPGS3fD).

A comparable comment was also shared by another interviewee who also thought peer interaction was a waste of time that impacts negatively on one's studies. "*Yes, not really important I think, at some point, it steals some time away from my busy schedule*" (IPGS16cD).

The contradiction of the IPGS' value for peer interaction resonates with Kahu and Nelson's (2017) conceptual framework of student engagement which suggests student experiences occur in an educational interface formed by the interaction between students' characteristics (Kahu & Nelson, 2016:56). Hence, the students' behavioural characteristics determined the decision IPGS made. Whatever the case, both categories of students were satisfied with the decisions they made and either way it worked out well for both parties. This could be an indication of the variation of the state of engagement IPGS had. The indication could be that IPGS engaged either positively or negatively along the behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions and

the students could engage emphatically along at least one dimension while connecting contrarily along at least one dimension (Trowler, 2010:5).

Further, it can also be taken that most of the respondents established cordial peer relations in the institution which is regarded as fundamental for students' academic and social engagement (Swai, 2004:9). The findings accept the student integration theory by Tinto whose central idea is the complementary relationship between social and academic integration which entails campus relationships and alliances that students experience together with the enriching educational experiences (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99; Schreiber et al., 2014: viii; Tinto, 2014:20). Taken together these findings submit international students were emotionally engaged during their stay abroad by way of support from a broader range of students (Zinkiewicz 2004:10), although the engagement level differed across individuals.

Educational activities with peers: IPGS valued how they engaged in a variety of educational activities with each other. They valued conferences, scholarly presentations and collaborative learning. Mda (n.d:9) when he carried out a similar study of several other universities in South Africa, similarly established that international students were famous because of their noticeable participation in academic gatherings such as fieldwork, *indabas* and conferences compared to domestic students. Equally, one student remembered **"***There was this training thing ENACTUS we also went for debate and stuff, developmental business plans, anyone had a practical session because we actually had to present step by step your business idea and the funding opportunities"* (IPGS18cM).

Some students reported little, educational activities with peers at that time, but they indicated that they were in the process of initiating article writing for publication. The little work at that time could mean since they were current students they had just started their programmes. This is what one student said, "*I don't think there is any, except for collaboration and article writing here and there which we are only trying. We are only starting now we are going to write and release together*" (IPGS16cD). Similarly, one student shared that "…*we talk about collaborative work…*" (IPGS17cD). One other student saw value in peer interaction by sharing his expertise in statistics with colleagues and stated, "*like conducting data analysis training classes every Friday"* (IPGS10cD).

Community projects, being enriching activities, brought students together, particularly those of the same department. *"I attended some workshops that were organised by the institute and community engagement which is a mandate of the institute (IPGS5cD). When one respondent reacted "We did a lot of community engagement with colleagues in the department*" (IPGS20cD) meant the IPGS were positively behaviourally engaged in the university.

Behavioural engagement draws on the idea of participation (Fredricks et al. (2004:60; Trowler, 2010:5). IPGS demonstrated behavioural engagement typical of postgraduate standards that included peer and supervisor interaction and academic participation. The findings suggest most IPGS were positively engaged. The findings validate the observation made by several studies on international student engagement where students reported greater engagement in peer interaction and enriching activities. Derek (2013:2) agrees that engaged learners are identified by their active involvement in organised, enriching educational experiences such as conferences, community service or any other formal university organisation. The learning opportunities complement each other as they happen inside and outside the university to expand the academic programmes (Kuh et al., 2008:541) of IPGS. This brings us to the fundamentals of social and academic integration theory which emphasises the observable aspects of learners which are in turn stimulated by supportive interactive environments (Astin 1999:519; Hughs, 2015:8). The findings are also consistent with the theory as it accepts that constructive interaction between staff and peers and other social systems of a university can affect IPGS' retention or departure decisions (Aaron et al., 2018:1321; Ammigan & Laws, 2018:1295). From the findings, it can be interpreted that IPGS were positively engaged defined by their behavioural participation in educational activities because behavioural engagement draws on the idea of participation and is viewed as essential for accomplishing positive scholastic results and averting academic failure.

5.2.1.2 Emotional/affective engagement

Four subcategories were developed from this category. The category tells the story of what motivated the IPGS to study in a South African university, the extent of sense of belonging in the university, and introspection about leaving the university. IPGS also narrated what they perceived to be the value of education and its related outcomes.

5.2.1.2.1 Motivation for studying in a South African university.

Evidence of the results indicates that there are key decisions that students must make about studying abroad. Results show that IPGS knew exactly why they wanted to study in a South African university. Some students spoke of the range of programmes that were available in South Africa which they could not get back home. again, since most of the respondents came from neighbouring countries, the drive for them was to be away from home but to still be closer to home. For some, the source of incentive to study in the university came from recommendations made by others such as friends, relatives and academics already in the university One other attraction of a South African university as a destination for most IPGS was the educational support services offered in the university which they could not get from institutions back home. Similarly, Milian et al. (2015:3) in their study cited the perceived status of the university, testaments and referrals by, friends and relatives academic support and international recognition of the degree conferred as reasons to study abroad. It is important to note that while some of the IPGS cited only one motivation, for some it was a combination of several of the factors. For example, one Zimbabwean student had this to say: "*The attraction was the location of the university, being located in Limpopo, meaning that it was closer home*" (IPGS7fD). Another student demonstrated that a combination of the motives influenced her decision to study at a South African university "Because in other institutions they only offered tuition and grant and not accommodation so this university since it is closer to home, it offered everything that one could want (IPGS10cD). These findings indicate that regardless of the interest to pursue postgraduate studies in a foreign country, IPGS somewhat preferred to be closer to home. The reason was "*Like someone who had a family, SA is close I can always come and go*" (IPGS1cD).

IPGS from other African countries gave different reasons on what motivated them to study in a South African university. For instance, a respondent from the DRC perceived South Africa as the best country in Africa in terms of development. The respondent explained, "*I wanted to study in South Africa because it is a leading African country in terms of economy, infrastructure, education-wise*" (IPGS 4). Similarly, an IPGS from Zimbabwe perceived South Africa comparably had a better economy, particularly suited for postgraduate studies. The view was "*It seems like the economy in SA is more vibrant, when we look at what's happening. South Africa for me*

presented a more stable economy as well as the learning facilities they seem to be aaa better equipped as you progress well with the studies" (IPGS15fM).

The above sentiments could mean that IPGS viewed the economy of their native countries as comparatively lagging in development so they decided to study in South Africa with the hope of getting a better quality of education through South Africa's vibrant economy. Ironically for this study, it has been observed that international students are the major contributors to the growth of the South African economy (Glass and Gesing, (2018:3130) due to their financial and critical skills contributions. Hegarty (2014:225) and UNESCO (2018:36) agree that it is for economic reasons that most countries internationalise their education systems for revenue generation from the fees paid by international students. Wekullo (2019:32) supports that with the decline in state funding and the fall of the fees for local students, South Africa has come to rely on international students as its main source of institutional income. From the arguments, clearly, the decision to study abroad benefits both IPGS and the host country (economically), thus creating a reciprocal situation at the institutional and individual level for the university and the student respectively.

For some IPGS, the choice of a South African university was influenced by someone they knew within the university who was either a potential supervisor, relative or friend. The main motivation of such an arrangement was the ease of placement and not having to go through the hustles of the application processes. As an illustration, one student found a supervisor in the faculty who was offering funding and supervisory services to the student. This situation was highly motivating as the student was already better placed in terms of emotional engagement by overcoming finance and supervisory-related struggles. One student highlighted:

> I was looking for opportunities, someone to work with, someone motivational and I found someone to work with who had funding and he was willing to work with me and his research and mine are aligned so, that is why came here (IPGS6).

Along the same line, IPGS recognised relatives and friends as motivating factors to have enrolled at the university. Relatives' recommendations were based on the support services which were offered to IPGS at that time. The recommendations related to support services such as funding for tuition, research and accommodation. Similar stories involving friends and relatives were told by IPGS. One IPGS accounted

how her sister suggested she should join at the university by citing various attractions at the university:

> First of all, my sister studied here, so she found me a place because there were two factors involved, the first thing was fees, by that time (name of university) did not require us to pay tuition and also the accommodation was free as well, so it was a very attractive opportunity. (IPGS13fM).

One other student owed his presence at the university to a friend and a supervisor he admired. The student reflected on the significance of people who influenced the decision to study in the university:

> I think I asked some friends about the university and they were saying it is ok. And had also had read about my supervisor on the research that he had done so he has well-published articles. (IPGS2cM).

Exploring these findings, it is evident that the motivation for studying in a South African university was multi-faceted. There was not a single, but a multiplicity of factors as indicated by the findings. The straightaway motivation could be translated to high emotional engagement among IPGS before even entering the university, which could predict positive academic ability, retention and outcome (Li & Lerner, 2013:30). The high level of motivation could also be attributed to the deliberate choices made by IPGS to study in a foreign country (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Janssen, 2021:690). As gleaned from the literature, motivation and engagement tend to boost each other which could explain the higher level of motivation among the IPGS. The interpretation could be that IPGS was so committed to completing and acquiring that prestigious certificate.

Students' motivation to study in a South African university was also influenced by the programmes offered by the university which they were so passionate about. To that effect, one student provided an insight on how he came to study at the university.

> My vision and passion for studies are within the scope of Africa and my research interest also is within the context of Africa. So, I believe there could not have been a better place to study apart from South Africa (SA). So, I looked around the countries of Africa and I felt SA could be the best for my study (IPGS3fD).

The IRO collaborated these sentiments that IPGS find certain programmes offered in the university more attractive than others, The response was:

> Remember most of our postgrads are at Rural Development and some are at Agriculture, as much we have some at Environmental Studies but our major numbers are on Agriculture. I think maybe they are teachers coming from their sides they want to come and finish this side, and Environmental Sciences and Maths and Natural Sciences, yes we have them, but they are not many (IRO).

Kahu et al. (2016:57) claim that interest is theorised as both a motivation and an emotion and therefore, it is one of the psychological influences that act as a motivation. The academic and social integration Theory also proposes that the extent of the academic, social integration and determination of the students together with institutional goals are all instrumental to student persistence to studies (Karp et al., 2008:2) propelled by the motivation of the student. IPGS demonstrated emotional engagement before even entering the country of study through their interest in the programmes offered. As mentioned earlier, Comer and Brogt (2011:11) documented that one of the largest sources of inspiration for studying outside one's own country is the programmes offered in that country. The same observation was made by Mda (n.d:13) that international students stand to benefit from the assumed superiority qualifications from the programmes which the visiting nation and student needed.

5.2.1.2.2. Feedback from the supervisor

Results showed many-sided emotional responses from the IPGS concerning supervisor feedback. Some of the IPGS were content with the timing of the feedback which yielded progressive research, although more were concerned with the delay of the feedback which in most cases stalled the progress of the study. Some self-motivated IPGS believed they were always ahead of the supervisors as they did not wait for the feedback and, therefore, found themselves ahead of the supervisors. One group of IPGS was appreciative of the promptness of feedback: "*He is quite prompt. You hand in your submission and he is not attending any conference he responds within two or three days*" (IPGS18cM). Another IPGS agreed "*Very prompt otherwise it's me who does not send on time*". (IPGS1cD). Other IPGS showed concern about the tardiness of the feedback where they went for a long period without the feedback. The waiting was worsened when students did not know how to progress to the next stage because of the weak skills they possessed in research work. In a study by Oladele, Idowu & Olubukola (2013:413 students simply described that they aspired for supervisors who were willing to share expertise and give adequate constructive

feedback. Which were the same aspirations when one IPGS voiced her thoughts by saying "*I would go for months without getting feedback and it was very frustrating, especially for me because I felt I was a bit weak in research. And I really needed guidance to ensure that I am going in the right direction*" (IPGS722fD)

For some students, the feedback was conditional to the supervisor's activities and, therefore, turned out to be unpredictable and one IPGS reflected "*I think it depends on how busy he is at that time but most times if he is not in his office with admin work. With a full proposal, it can be done in three to four days depending on how tight the schedule is. Or he responds pretty fast*" (IPGS6cD). One student talked about the challenge of having multiple supervisors. The consolidated feedback took a long to compile a full report because of their differences in responding. The explanation was *"Actually, I have three supervisors, so I would say with regards to one of them … it's the same day response but others they take time maybe a month or two weeks it depends. With one of them, it's usually urgent but the others*" (IPGS8cD). Despite the challenges of multiple supervisors stated, the explanation of team supervision is supported by literature that "it empowers supervisors to work collaboratively in developing networks through which knowledge is shared" (Ngulube, 2012:266).

To demonstrate the high level of engagement in their studies, some IPGS took advantage of the delay in feedback and worked ahead of the supervisor. When the feedback was relayed back the students were quick to respond to the feedback. That scenario meant the studies progressed in the right direction. One student explained: *"With me I am always ahead of them. Normally I don't take much time to send feedback to them*. (IPGS3fD)

The most worried IPGS were those who had supervisors who demonstrated less commitment to supervision. One student explained that the lack of commitment meant the supervisor was not aware of the student was legitimately carrying out the study or relying on unconventional means of coming up with the work submitted. The student felt:

> To some extent I feel like he doesn't pay attention to the work that I would have done but it's just something that he is expecting and if he doesn't see what he is expecting then he doesn't pay much attention to what I have done, be it new or be it something recycled (IPGS12cD).

The need for competence by students is reinforced when the university environment is the best in its structure and students are aware of what they are required to do to enhance their capabilities (Fredricks et al., 2019:5). It appears the progress of postgraduate studies was determined by the timing of the feedback from supervisors. Delving into the findings, several views were shared by IPGS although the views centred on the timing and value of the feedback. Timeous and substantial feedback gave some IPGS feelings of exhilaration while the delay bred frustration and anxiety (Thomas, 2012:36). The nature of feelings that students went through towards the outcome of the dissertation articulated the nature of IPGS' emotional engagement (Kim, 2017:398). IPGS expected timely critically informative feedback from the supervisor that reaffirmed their efforts and or highlighted areas for improvement (Bacwayo, Namphala & Oteyo 2017:35; Fry et al. (2019:237). Positive feedback is associated with positive emotional engagement and consequently positive student outcomes while negative feedback was also necessary but being cautious on the manner and frequency the negative feedback is delivered to determine the type of emotional engagement (Cage et al., 2018:304). The authors warn that feedback that comes repeatedly for a given behaviour suggests that the feedback is not effective which can lower student emotional engagement. Kahu et al. (2017:57) and yet Kahu and Nelson (2018:67) proffer that "positive feedback can lead to higher engagement because it increases the student's self-efficacy … and engagement level". Likewise, dissertations offer a unique learning opportunity because they are fittingly time-bound to offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their project management skills (Fry et al., 2019:165) so unless the feedback was constructive and timeous and the IPGS became emotionally engaged, the results could be late submissions or failure to submit the complete research work.

5.2.1.2.3 Sense of belonging to the university

Unanimously, IPGS had a clear awareness of their weak position in the host university. They felt secluded from the rest of the university community. They all felt their presence was not accepted. The worries intensified when local students made sure to remind them that they were not accepted and should regard their stay in the country as provisional. But IPGS felt that they were fortunate to have support systems through their departments and used their social characteristics to the best of their advantage to belong to the university community in which they were determined to succeed.

Students also showed their clear intent by accepting their position of the temporal stay in the host country.

Despite their insecurities, IPGS recognised efforts made by the IRO to bring together international and local students to foster more interaction and friendships development for local and foreign students. Also, that would make international students feel welcome by mingling with local students through organised programmes such as the Buddy system meant to create opportunities for friendship and support with fellow students from different countries as well as the locals in the host university (Sisavath' 2021:555). However, IPGS respondents figured the programmes were not effective as international students were outnumbered by local students at the events. There were also indications from the results that currently such interactional programmes had since stopped. Further exploration of the findings revealed that IPGS expected more of such events to be held regularly. The timing of the programmes as well as misplaced as it came too late for the fresh international students who already had negotiated the environments with difficulty through their own initiatives.

Also, the general feeling by IPGS was that they were not connected to the university because they felt unwelcome and discriminated against by the locals and hence the option adopted was not to associate with people who did not warm up to them. The feeling was:

> That segregation is always there you could always feel it very heavy on your back that no, to some extent you are not welcome. If I should tell you I belong yes it can be true but to what extent have I been accepted that is another thing you need to consider. There is no international student in the university who would say no, I have been warmly welcomed at any place be it administration (IPGS3fD)

The feeling was echoed by other IPGS who both sarcastically laughed at the idea of a sense of belonging to the university and denied "*we don't belong we are passersby*" (IPGS10cD). The same was told how the connection to the university was weak and the respondent had only persisted because of the need to complete studies and had the intention to leave the host nation soon after completion. The narration was:

> The problem was that I feel I was limited in my connection to the university, It was more like I was an adopted child and every time they would make it known to me that I am adopted. I am not from there. I am only visiting, … so

> I was just saying yes I am adopted. I am coming here for my studies and I am off. Which was a bad thing. (IPGS14fM).

However, despite the feeling of seclusion, IPGS talked highly of some support by the institution and peers. One said, "*I only felt like I connected through my department but not through the international relations office*" (IPGS5cD). Another respondent pointed out, *"I can say the university as a whole I don't think I have a connection but with my group here*" (IPGS6cD). Yet another one concurred "*Yes, the institution funded my tuition, they also funded my project. I feel really connected*" (IPGS20fD). Similarly, one student agreeably chatted "*my sense of belonging came from, first being a student of (university name), secondly, there was this tutoring group so, that was where I felt I belonged and the library, I really felt connected there with the staff* …" (IPGS13fM).

One student accepted that IPGS were secluded by locals but denied that the magnitude of the challenge was a situation that was amplified by international students and shared. "*I would say it wasn't bad. I wouldn't really say there was a lot of discrimination it wasn't as bad as what I have heard other people experiencing*" (IPGS9fD). On the other hand some IPGS argued that connecting to the university was a matter of choice. The decisions made were dependent on the individual's characteristics and social lifestyle.

> I think the issue of being connected to the university now depends on someone's interpersonal skills, like do you go out there? Do you connect? Do you network? Do you talk to people? … I think that matter has more to do with one's interpersonal communication skills (IPGS12cD).

However, IPGS acknowledged the efforts IRO put in place to nurture a sense of belonging among IPGS and the university community but they exposed the ineffectiveness of the organised events. They felt the participation by IPGS was low because the programmes did not focus much on IPGS but the local students due to the poor organisation of the events. One student contended:

> I can't say it was effective because of the programmes that they were using, most international students were not attending because we knew that it will be mostly South Africans who will be there. And the things that they were organising were not attracting us foreigners our interest, our participation. (IPGS11fM).

Other respondents shared ineffectiveness through another angle. While IPGS acknowledged the existence of the programmes for nurturing sense of belonging on

campus for international students, the concern was on the timing of such events. They thought the programmes were misplaced at the end of the year when incoming IPGS had already navigated their new environments through their own ingenuities. One former IPGS who thought the programmes should have been well timed suggested:

> I think they tried to organise one or two programmes in a year and I feel maybe they could have improved by having some of the programmes earlier-on in the year when students are just joining the university because I noticed some of such programmes were later-on in the year (IPGS9fD).

Another student proffered an array of such programmes which were organised by the IRO and added that mostly it was international students outside the African continent who enjoyed the events and tended to mingle more with other international students better than international students from within the African continent.

> … they used to have to hold *intho ezinjenge* (things like) culture week, the Buddy programme there are so many other programmes that they would come up with then it was just up to the students to utilise or not to attend. Even when the university opened they used to hold a function where they are welcoming international students and then take us for a vacation, maybe to *Tshipise,* just for a day and then at the end of the year we also used to have a closing function. So they really tried. I think you would see that they would act especially if its international students from overseas that's when I would see that OK those people are trying to meet and mingle with the rest of the university community (IPGS16fD).

On the contrary, one respondent was not aware of the existence of such programmes organised by the IRO by saying "*to a lesser extent because I have never heard or seen them having gatherings or activities that promote that kind of an aspect*" (IPGS17cD). A former IPGS corroborated that the programmes had since stopped but agreed they were once in existence "… *nothing. Like there used to be something called International Students Day that was the whole gist of it. Various countries came together. But that was then in the beginning … the whole practice stopped*". (IPGS13fD). Another former student was privy to the programmes which were in existence but was concerned about their mandate because international students still grouped per nationality instead of mingling with different nationalities at the gatherings to utilise the diversity of the international students at the venue. The IPGS singled "*but for me, I felt it was more of a calendar thing than something that was really worked on.*

I would only get to interact with my international colleagues when the dates were coming up" (IPGS14fM).

The IRO was also quizzed about the extent to which institutional policies supported or promoted a sense of belonging to international students. The IRO admitted they did not have any policy to that effect but remembered working on a charter aimed at making international students feel they belonged to the university. The IRO hesitantly reflected:

> I think we worked on the transformation charter. We were trying to promote internationalisation within the university so that everyone will be able to integrate with international staff, with international students … and not make them feel uncomfortable. I think that was it, even though we do have an internationalisation policy. (IRO).

The above utterance was an indication that the IRO placed value on the need for IPGS to feel connected to the university but was not aware of an internationalisation policy document that addressed the issues that would otherwise promote a sense of belonging among IPGS. Surprisingly, upon request, an Internationalisation Policy and Procedures document was availed for analysis. Compliantly, the document states clearly procedures that promote a sense of belonging for international students that "measures of internationalisation at (name of university) are understood as core to creating a diverse atmosphere at the university and preventing xenophobia and discrimination the bases of nationality" (Policy and procedure document: p24).

Following the findings, it can be said the first year for non-traditional students such as IPGS in a university is an emotional time (Kahu & Nelson, 2018:65). The authors suggest this is caused by "the gap between their existing identities and experiences and the expectations and requirements of the institution that may result in more negative emotions". Tinto in his theory claims the positive interaction between staff, peers and the social system at a university can minimise the emotions that can result in student attrition. Tinto also points out that students who have a sense of belonging to an institution are more likely to complete their studies. Kahu and Nelson (2018:65) it is the sense of belonging that may also influence retention directly through its consequences. For example, the feeling of disconnectedness to the university may create anxiety which could hamper both behavioural and cognitive engagement. Paralleling Tinto's theory, Karp, Hughes and O'Gara (2008:2) similarly advance that

the preventing integration process may be contradictory to institutional connection. Similar observations were made in a study that investigated the benefits of Asians studying in a foreign country (Sisavath, 2021:555). In the study, contrary to the present study, international Asian students reported active in familiarising interacting with the local students through the Buddy programme for scholarly and cultural proceedings. The findings of this current study are like that of an earlier study in the same area. Both had programmes that created opportunities for students to interact more for friendships development. The difference is that in the Asian study, Asian students were highly engaged in the activities while for the present study the participation was low. The lack of engagement for this study explains why IPGS felt they did not belong because they alienated themselves from the events based on their negative assumptions. Another cause could be that IPGS are mature students hence chances were that they were preoccupied with family life and may not seek the sense of belonging to the institution and the locals (Kahu & Nelson, 2018:66). Paradoxically, the challenges that IPGS encountered may have been a result of a lack of sense of belonging that could have otherwise facilitated the positive emotional engagement (Kahu & Nelson, 2018:67). More so, it is believed “diversity is a fundamental ingredient of global learning” and a notion of inclusivity on campus (Dorscher & Landorf, 2018:5).

One scholar, Zinkiewicz (2004:13), reiterates the arrangement for more social events as a provision for “additional opportunities for postgraduates to relax, get social support and get acquainted with fellow students” to ensure emotional engagement that ties the student to the university and enhance the desire to learn. For the above arguments, I had the feeling that the low turnout was caused by poor publicity of the programmes. This is a reaction to a similar study in Malaysia which concluded that IPGS was not “informed about the events and facilities” and hence the students reported less satisfaction (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:142).

Moreover, it was established that international students who attended events organised by the IRO had a tendency of only mingled with those they already knew, particularly international students within the same nation or African region. This observation an addition to the proof that international students are “less likely to have frequent interactions with students from a different background or a different ethnic

group and their relationships with other students are also regarded more poorly than domestic students" (Humphrey & Simpson 2013: xiv). So, it is up to universities to break that dilemma if internationalised education is to remain the buzzword. The theme of the timing of services and resources was recurrent in the literature review. As suggested by Thomas, (2012:19) support services should be perfectly timed. The sooner there is a reaction to challenges the more effective the intervention (Tinto, 2014:15). These findings suggest international students were not exposed and motivated enough to opportunities for interaction with students of different ethnicities (Van der Meer, n.d: 32).

5.2.1.2.4 Departure intentions by IPGS

The findings suggest that at one point or another, several of the IPGS thought of leaving the institution due to challenges encountered during their studies. This validates Radloff's (2011: xiv) assertion that international students have higher departure intentions than local students. For some reason, the thoughts of whether to leave or not came to fruition but instead, IPGS chose to remain focused on their studies despite the perceived challenges. The option for soldiering-on hinged on their sheer determination and desire to complete their studies without delay. They feared changing the university could mean starting again the whole process that comes with the rigours of becoming an IPGS. IPGS with departure intentions mostly cited greater opportunities in other institutions, supervision relationships and financial issues as the reasons for their intended withdrawal.

Showing their resilience, IPGS were at pain sharing emotions on departure intentions. One IPGS recalled, "*I definitely had those thoughts but then because my options were limited I just had to stay strong and keep focused*" (IPGS14fM). Another IPGS concurred:

> Yes, so many times, especially when I heard you are missing out. There are other opportunities out there …than what we have here. The main problem was finding supervisors and finding a specific supervisor who will be interested in your topic and it's always difficult to uproot yourself from where you really were and not being sure that someone on that side is going to take you. IPGS13fM).

To illustrate the multiplicity of challenges that international students face that make them consider dropping their studies prematurely, one IPGS cited multiple triggers of

stigmatisation, ill-treatment, supervisory issues as key for the contemplation of premature departure:

> At some point, I felt the university is not very ideal place especially to postgraduate students specifically international students. We encounter, the stigma, the treatment you have especially from administrative staff, then there were quite a lot of challenging issues going on that cross my mind. At some point, I was like, even the supervision, maybe I could get PhD somewhere. (IPGS3fM).

Still another interviewee agreed on life as an IPGS had its challenges but still never considered leaving the institution before completing his studies. The narration was:

> At some point, it was getting tough. I was not really thinking of leaving the institution but I knew in life nothing comes easy and I can't just expect everything to be given to me on the porcelain plate so I placed myself in that it would be that I couldn't wait to finish and leave (IPGS20fD).

The findings of this study are consistent with the theory of academic and social integration that suggests the decision to drop out is a process based on the student's institutional environment and background factors (Wu et al. (2018:2). Nevertheless, the model suggests it is the relationship between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether the individual decides to drop out or not (Swai, 2004:8). In this study, the findings that IPGS became committed to their studies instead of following their minds to drop out despite the challenges encountered is a result of the individuals' commitment to the goal of college completion and the commitment to the institution. The establishment of peer relations and the development of role models and mentors were important factors in IPGS integration, both academically and socially. Prebble et al. (2004:3) suggest it is the interactions that constantly alter students' goals and their commitment to an institution in ways that lead to varying forms of determination.

The findings suggest that all IPGS who participated in the study had the intention to leave the university before completion. This made the interesting revelation that most probably all students studying outside their native nations have at one time considered going back home because of the challenges they face. This aspect leads to enhancing the theories on departure intentions for international students. Fortunately, none of the

IPGS entertained the thoughts of leaving but instead developed strategies for overcoming the negative thoughts to see their studies to fruition (see the section on coping strategies for IPGS). The findings on departure intentions intensify the need for monitoring mechanisms if nations must continue recruiting international students. Correspondingly, a study on international postgraduate students in New Zealand made similar remarks that “international students are more likely to have seriously considered leaving their university before completing their studies” (Van der Meer, n.d: 30). The same study also revealed that there is a very slim chance that international students will prematurely terminate their studies. The observations confirm earlier studies that have concluded that challenges international students face motivate them to develop coping mechanisms that help see them through their studies (Wu et al., 2015:8). The findings suggest the more emotional challenges IPGS encountered, the more determined they became and the only way out was to overcome the challenges until they accomplished their studies.

5.2.1.3 Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement in this study drew on the idea of intellectual investment in the institution. It described their integrations of IPGS as a resource in the institution, their self-drive and how they rationalised and considered academic attainment.

5.2.1.3.1. Integrations of IPGS as a resource on research

There was a consensus among IPGS that as intellectuals, IPGS was a valuable pool for postgraduate programmes in the university. IPGS considered itself a great intellectual investment that stood to benefit the university and South Africa at large. This was an indication that IPGS were cognitively engaged in the university They showcased their cultural diversity during national events such as Africa Day. Additionally, IPGS applied themselves to their studies to become an investment for critical skills in the country. But there were concerns that IPGS was under-utilised in the institution thereby missing out on the richness of the divergent nature of international students. Conversely, the locals viewed IPGS as a liability who stood to benefit from the resources of the university and the host nation at large.

One respondent narrated how they got involved in commemorating international events as a way of showcasing their cultural diversity. The respondent demonstrated how they could be utilised as a resource for cultural diversity in the university.

> I attended Africa Day. I even displayed some cultural artefacts from my country. I displayed clothes. At one point I made some food. And then I attended these Buddie things. But I was not very active on the Buddie but the functions like Africa Day I always had something to display for my country (IPGS5cD).

IPGS recognised South Africa as a nation has embraced IPGS as a resource through its immigration regulations even though the institution still had to promote more of that integration of IPGS as a resource. The idea was that by South Africa internationalising higher education, it stood to benefit intellectually as IPGS become a pool of critical skills in the country if they remained in the country after graduation. The reflection was:

> I think South Africa as a nation has done something along the lines of making sure that international students are integrated as a resource in terms of some of the immigration acts that are there. There is immigration act 13/2000 whereby for somebody who has studied in SA at a doctoral level they qualify to apply for permanent res. This means to me as a nation they are trying to grow their own timber. Although I feel at the institution level there is a need to improve on that aspect…They are not making use of the student as a resource to benefit them… (IPGS7fD).

Still, IPGS were aware of the significant role they played as a valuable pool for postgraduate students in the university and they guessed that the university relied on their enterprising nature for the successful running of postgraduate programmes: One IPGS explained:

> The huge number of international students is composed of international students. So, by virtue of that, it becomes probable … for them to be integrated. They are the core of most of the programmes or initiatives that are taken at postgraduate level (IPGS8cD).

IPGS also regarded themselves as a group of students that immensely contributed to the university's research output. They talked about research activities as a resource the university so needed for its financial gains and recognition. One student illuminated that aspect of the cognitive engagement of IPGS and its benefits to the university.

> We are being used as a resource because … postgraduates are the research output that the institution has now. If we are going to look at the

> statistics out of it, like how much of that output is done by international students and compare it to the native… Isn't it there is after you complete, the university gets some funding from the government? (IPGS19cM)

Another response corroborated the idea of IPGS being a major source of research output in the university. The observation the student added was that IPGS produced more than the local students. Hence the dependence of the university on IPGS for the greater research output. The student upheld:

> *When you are looking at the production output, you will find that most of the papers published were done by international students compared to locals, so that also shows that the school made use of international students more than the locals* (IPGS12cD).

Nevertheless, the anxiety was, in as much as IPGS contributed immensely to the intellectual aspect of South Africa, locals still viewed them as more of a liability than an asset. Instead, the locals thought IPGS stood to benefit more from South African resources. At the same time, IPGS experienced discrimination to certain institutional privileges, such as the distribution of funding, which further brought more anxiety among IPGS. The respondents thought that discriminating against international students also negatively impacted the internationalisation of the institution's programmes. The argument was:

> They treated international students as a liability to the university. I will give you an example right now. There was a time when they were offering postdoctoral. Then at some point, they ended up saying no these postdoctoral are not benefiting doctoral students it seems as if it's just for international students. So, they ended up stopping them. So, I always felt like even for the work-study programme you would often hear them say *hayi* (no) it benefits international students. Then I often wonder how the university is going to be on the map if it's not internationalised (IPGS6cD).

Overall the standpoint by IPGS was that they were inadequately utilised as a resource in the university as straight away demonstrated by one of the respondents "No we were not used" (1PGS11fM) as a resource.

The social and academic integration theory of as well pools from the cognitivism traditional theoretical frameworks. The central idea of Tinto's integration theory is the complementary relationship between social and academic integration concerning a student's commitment to the institution (Chrysikos et al., 2017:99). The theory was

found to be the determinant of the observable aspect of the cognitive dimension of student engagement. The prediction is that low commitment to either academic or social integration can cause students to consider withdrawing from their academic studies. Hence, academic integration emerged when students became attached to the intellectual life of the college (Karp, Hughes & O'Gara, 2008:3). Thus, IPGS shared their academic attitudes and values which were influenced by faculty interactions on campus.

What IPGS perceived as their worth in the university under study was in line with previous findings and remarks made in the literature. Hanassab and Tidwell (2002:306) believe educators should not underestimate the resources international students present because internationalisation brings diversity in thinking as well as being a good source of cultural diversity (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1822). Mda (n.d:13), his study on internationalisation in South Africa, like the findings of this study, established that international PhD students desired to stay in South Africa after completing their studies to reciprocally offer the critical skills needed for the growth of the South African economy (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013:9). Similarly, IPGS had the conviction that they contributed to the overall reputational benefit for South Africa as well as a potential boost in national and economic competitiveness due to the existence of an essential pool of talented international students and researchers within the higher education sector. This enables the development of South African research and development capacity as voiced by IPGS for this study. Baklashova and Kazakov (2016:1822) likewise support the findings that international students enhanced the host university's academic excellence because of the rigorous selection of IPGS sent to South Africa on scholarship.

Conversely, despite the gains, as also found in an earlier study, it was argued by local students that internationalisation of Higher Education in the institution impacted negatively on South Africa because IPGS were perceived to come to occupy local jobs in exchange for lower salaries which would not be accepted by the locals (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013:9). Elsewhere, in the US many international students experience comparable prejudice and discrimination by American students. In a study by Charles-Toussaint and Crowson cited by Wu et al. (2015:3), findings indicate that Americans were concerned that international students are a threat to their economy, education, beliefs, values and social status. Hence the present study

propelled that IPGS were cognitively engaged in their studies by contributing their resources to the hosting university and/or country regardless of the fears of prejudice, discrimination and stereotype labels by locals. Also, the presence of IPGS added diversity to institutional environments, thus utilisation of such diversity positively influenced the curriculum, policies, culture and relationships on campus.

5.2.1.3.2 The value for studying abroad

The relevance of cognitive engagement by IPGS was also explained through their thoughts about the value of studying in a foreign country. Students were very certain that being international postgraduate students exposed them to a range of academic and social opportunities (Figure 5.5) that could have been easily missed if they had decided to study in their native countries (Singh, 2014:29).

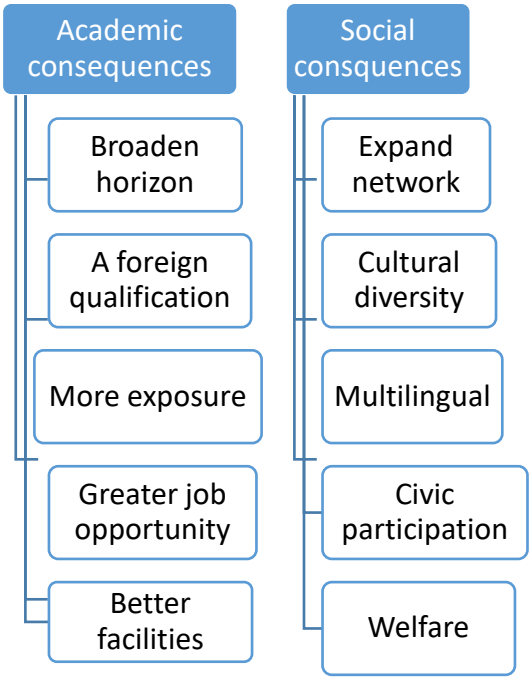

Figure 5.4 The outcomes of studying abroad: Academic and social

IPGS shared a deep sense of appreciation for the opportunity to study across borders. They appreciated the widened network connections as they mingled with the locals and fellow international students from within and outside countries of origin. By so doing they learnt the diverse culture they were exposed to that included multi-lingual proficiency. They also began to appreciate life from a different perspective in and outside South Africa. For some, it allowed them to dedicate all the time to studying

free of home disruptions. One student appreciated that "*it assisted me to meet some wonderful people who are around me*" (IPGS11fM). Another student agreed:

> … it has broadened my horizon to see. Aside from the cultural attributes you get to learn to see what other people are doing. My course has been able to expand my network because the people you interact with from different countries tend to be your connections, as in these networks that might help you develop in due course (IPGS20fD).

Similarly, another student reiterated "*I think it contributed a lot because right now I am doing a post-doctoral fellowship. And I think this fellowship I got to know about it through somebody that I met at the university where I studied for my doctoral degree*. (IPGS22fD).

Some IPGS relished studying abroad as it opened for opportunities to learn the diverse cultures in and outside Africa and thus began to appreciate life from different perspectives. One respondent showed the appreciation of studying abroad by relating "*you travel, you see things and learn how other people behave, or their way of life So, I think it's healthy, you see people … better* (IPGS6cD). Another IPGS agreed and recounted "*I would say that students must get to study out of their countries not only because you want to see people's cultures speak their language or what but it offers you a whole new range of opportunities* (IPGS13fM).

One student reckoned that studying abroad allowed for more time to be committed to studies away from home disruptions. Allowing for more time to study resulted in the earlier completion of her studies. The interviewee admitted, "*for me being an international student and being away from home I was able to do the PhD faster than I would have done at home because at home there is a lot of interruption*" (IPGS5cD). The finding was consistent with Quaye and Harper (2014:2) who related student engagement to how much time and energy a student will invest towards studies to achieve the intended educational goals. The findings indicate that the student was cognitively engaged in her studies prior to departure for South Africa and hence more of that engagement at the university resulted in timeous completion of the studies.

International students are at an advantage to career opportunities (The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2013:10). Undeniably IPGS valued studying abroad due to the prospects of acquiring a prestigious indispensable foreign qualification. The

assumption was that the graduate certificate would open for employment opportunities in the global industrial competitive job market. One respondent answered:

> The good thing is that now I have a foreign qualification. It's going to be easier, it ranks better with my marketability. I am on the market now with a qualification from SA so that makes me more qualified with the requirement that they want in the industry because they are saying they need a qualification from here. (IPGS14fM).

Students linked higher education outside one's own country to an experience of a lifetime that is worth exploring more so with better facilities. Hence they felt they would recommend such an experience to anyone else who wished to study abroad. The recommendation was undisputed by most IPGS. For example, one of them agreed "*I would do that because it is education itself*" (IPGS6cD). Another student reflected: "*I think it's good because it exposes you to different systems and I believe a graduate who is more exposed is a better product than the one who goes through one system of education*" (IPGS21fD). In the same vein, one echoed "*you need facilities. You need services. So, you need to go to the country or institution where they can easily do that. So, yes, along those lines I will still recommend tertiary education in a foreign country* (IPGS8cD).

Studying abroad had a recognisable impact on IPGS' life. IPGS reports resonate with the description that internationalisation of education opens to working with the dynamic nature of international education, enriches learning that supports personal growth for students by bringing the diversity of the world's experiences thereby broadening the scope of learning for students (Scarino, Liddiccoat & Crichiton, 2014:1). Kahu's student engagement conceptual framework groups consequences of engagement into academic and social (Figure 5.4), corresponding to the academic and social integration of Tinto's theoretical framework (Kahu, 2013:767). IPGS valued studying abroad because of the academic impact such as knowledge and academic acquisition, job security retention, while the social impact included satisfaction, welfare, active civic participation and personal development. The findings of the study validate the frameworks and findings of earlier research that identify a range of the benefits of studying abroad. Similarly, studying abroad proved to have a strong impact on IPGS in numerous of those aspects of their development. Studying in a South African university was a high-impact educational practice that contributed positively towards

IPGS engagement that in turn contributed to IPGS retention in the university (McCormick et al., 2013:55). This is because high-impact practices have the potential to increase rates of student retention and student engagement (Kuh, 2008:25). The practice was important and useful because it enriched the IPGS' university experiences, promote student involvement, empowered students and gave students a sense of autonomy in life (Covington, 2017:5).

The IPGS' voices also echoed previous findings in the literature reviewed by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2013:10) that identified the gains of studying abroad such as better career opportunities because of the wider networks created. IPGS were also exposed to the inter-cultural understanding as they mingled in the host country. For example, "*see people's culture, speak their language*" (IPGS 13fM) and "*learn how other people behave, or their way of life*" (IPGS 6) provided by the experience of being a visiting student. Quaye and Harper (2014:6) confirm that interaction with diverse peers inside and outside the classroom is linked to positive outcomes such as cultural awareness and appreciation, racial understanding, leadership, engagement in social responsibility activities, satisfaction with college and readiness for participation in a diverse workforce. Additionally, as found by the study, if IPGS had "*a foreign qualification … it ranks better with my marketability*" (IPGS14) on a wide variety of courses and qualifications that may not be offered in the countries of origin (Mda, n.d: 13). The findings relate to the more recent features of Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework that supports that the long-term consequences of student engagement do not only impact individual content competence but also on student and societal development. The impact parallels the earlier works of Tinto, (1975) which emphasise the complementary relationship between social and academic integration (Chrysikos, Ahmed, Ward, 2017:100). The findings suggest IPGS saw the value and greater opportunities by studying at a South African university, hence the resilience and adaptation despite the challenges encountered.

5.2.2. Theme 2: Professional supportive services and resources for IPGS

This theme was a reflection on IPGS' perceptions about services and resources to support their engagement for retention and success in the university. Four categories were identified from the theme. The first category was the insights about the orientation process of IPGS in the university. The second looked at the IRO as a

support service. Thirdly, it was the resources and services that support IPGS student engagement. Lastly, it was what IPGS' perceived as support needs for engagement. The categories were viewed against the Internationalisation Policy and Procedures and collaborated with narrations from the IRO of the university under study.

5.2.2.1 Insights about the orientation process.

The findings suggest IPGS lacked adequate orientation into the university. Students took it upon themselves to take the initiative to negotiate and familiarise themselves with the new environments. They owed the ability to navigate the new environments to friends and faculty staff. Students mentioned that they only experienced orientation at the undergraduate level and did not go through the process at postgraduate. All IPGS who entered the institution at graduate level did not experience any orientation. Students blamed the lack of orientation on poor timing as it took place earlier before the registration of IPGS and was therefore mainly attended by undergraduates. One IPGS explained "*I didn't have that (orientation), I would say the orientation process was when I was already a student there and navigating my way through my research. I just went to the people I thought were the relevant stakeholders, like my lecturers my HOD* (IPGS12cD). Another student recapped "*I don't think I had any formal orientation per se, … the guys in the lab here showing me the way around how to go about stuff. But the formal orientation I don't think there was any* (IPGS6cD).

One student expressed disappointment about the missed orientation and complained "*to me it was a very frustrating process. I registered in July and there was no orientation at all from the school or the directorate. So, I had to find my way around*" (IPGS18cM). Similarly, one student argued "*I can say except assistance that I got from my supervisor mostly I never got any more assistance from the university as an institution. I wasn't oriented*" (IPGS11fM).

The lack of the orientation process was blamed on poor timing by most of the IPGS and hence suggested that the orientation could have been possible if departments took it upon themselves to have a special orientation for IPGS at their time of arrival. One responded narrated:

> They give in January like when other students come, like when new students and first years come. But I came in April, they do introduce me in January. Probably departments do that but I don't know for every department but for

mine I don't think they do" (IPGS13fM).

Another IPGS agreeably said, "*I didn't attend I came later on*" (IPGS10). One more shared, "*I only did orientation in my first year so, since I have been a student since 2010 today I have not done any other orientation after that"* (IPGS8cD).

Some IPGS professed in any case the orientation they received at the graduate level was a miss-match with practice such that they faced problems accessing services and resources because they did not get the orientation at the postgraduate level. One student shared:

> Sometimes what you are told at orientation is different from what you get on the ground, especially with using internet services and the library services … we had a problem … that thing of the grant, utilising how to claim and stuff. There is no manual on how to go about it (IPGS9fD).

This current study, as previously mentioned, assumes that IPGS encounter a unique set of difficulties that impact their academic performances and the extent to which an IPGS can cope with the challenges is dependent on the support and resources available as well as how the IPGS will make use of the available resources (Kim et al., 2017:400). Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework also considers the immediate psycho-social influences of engagement. Kahu suggests it is better to make students aware of the choices of influential factors available to them and the potential impact these factors have on their engagement and success at university. Thomas (2012:18), on the other hand, bemoans the lack of awareness and utilisation of the supportive services and resources that surround the students which may ultimately impact the consequences of engagement. The university's Internationalisation Policy and Procedures (2013:11) document state that "the directorate of International Relations will collaborate with the directorate of Student Affairs and the Assistant Registrar arrange a designated orientation programme for newly arriving international full degree students". Paradoxically, as presented above, IPGS placed great emphasis on the non-existence of orientation to the institution. Groarke & Durst (2019:46), in their study, recommend the need to provide valuable information to forthcoming students facilitated by the induction and orientation process. The authors suggest the idea is for international students to receive relevant information as well as bring local and visiting students together into one student entity. As voiced by IPGS in this study way back, Prebble et al. (2004:69) also advocated for the orientation process that

recognises the diversity of IPGS diversity and, therefore, should “offer a diverse set of experiences” allowing for IPGS to “establish supportive networks”. Hence, student outcomes are likely to be enhanced when the orientation programmes are provided to facilitate both social and academic integrations. Even the US supports for different schools to host orientation programmes so that local and visiting students can appreciate the diversity from each other (Wu et al. 2015:8). Like IPGS concerns, Groarke and Durst (2019:46) suggest an orientation that is well-timed; the first to be for the incoming IPGS, the second should integrate international students from various visiting countries and the last to be university-wide. Zinkiewicz (2002:14) believes students who go through the orientation process are better prepared for the postgraduate work settings and are less likely to be stressed. More so, the “pre-arrival information reduces the impact of culture shock but strengthen students’ feelings of self-control”. Mindful of the views above, it can be said the lack of orientation for IPGS meant students missed out on the crucial information that would have made it easier for them to navigate the new environments, thus avoiding the stress that could impact negatively on the rigours of postgraduate studies. More importantly, IPGS were deprived of the critical information that could allow them to identify on-campus resources and services and make the most out of them. The lack of organised orientation also meant IPGS missed out on on-campus tours to familiarise themselves with crucial services such as the library, administrative offices, clinic, counselling centres, security tips and recreational facilities which the IPGS would come to depend on as parts of the academic support systems.

5.2.2.2 Resources and services that support student engagement

IPGS were quick to credit the institution for being supportive. There was a level of professional support services and resources that the institution provided which contributed to their positive state of engagement in the university. Although IPGS were privy to services and resources available, the most popular was finance. Figure 5. illustrate other services and resources identified by IPGS apart from financial support. Some IPGS made a deliberate decision to study in a South African university in cognisance of the financial support that the institution offered. However, all the respondents reported problematic issues with the funding. One student spoke on how mid-way during the course the financial support was withdrawn and recalled, “*by the time I came here, there was a work-study. So, I enjoyed that so I had help with fees*

and accommodation. It's now no more there. So, apart from that, I don't know of any [services]" (IPGS 6).

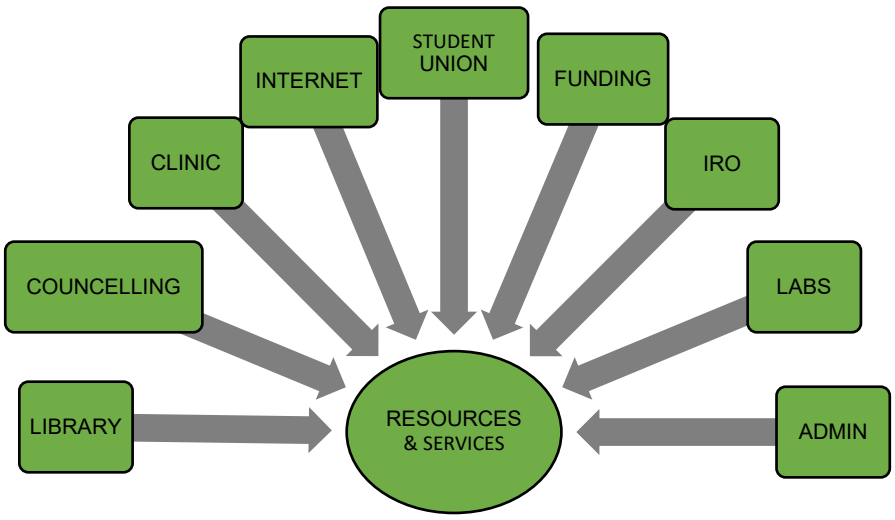

Figure 5.5: Intuitional support on resources and services identified for IPGS

For another student, despite the entitlement to the research funding, the process of accessing the funding proved to be difficult. The respondent recounted *"Yes, I got funding from the university RPC. … even though it was meant for research but for us to claim that research money wasn't easy* (IPGS11fM). One student also complained of the administrative challenges that came with the eligible funding which eroded their study time and energy:

> The only financial resources that I got were in research where they put it in your account. You can only access this money when you spend your own money and you are able to reclaim the money you spent. And it's a very bureaucratic process. It's very tiring and you waste your time. (IPGS13fM).

Although one IPGS was yet to claim the funding, she complained about how policy and practice differed in accessing the available funding. The fact that the IPGS had heard about the challenges of the funding before going through the process, meant the challenge for accessing the funding was not new. The response was:

> I am aware of this RPC thing. But I hear people talking about challenges. I haven't gone to claim mine. But I hear people say that it is very difficult for one to get that research fund. I always hear other students complain that

> the university is adamant on giving or availing resources to the students (IPGS2cM).

Some students were aware of the IRO as a service that oversaw the concerns of IPGS. They were aware that study permits and the registration procedures were some of the responsibilities of the IRO. The narration by one IPGS was *"I only know the International Relations Office assists in obtaining permits but I think basically obtaining that letter that we use at Home Affairs and where they refer us when you are registering"* (IPGS8cD).

Similarly, another student was aware of the existence of the IRO but had limited knowledge of its functions. The reaction was:

> I know there is the International Office and also the student's union they are having a certain organisation which looks into the social life of international students. But from the university I would say besides providing aspects like supporting documents when you are applying for a study visa there is none that I am aware of (IPGS12cD).

Other services and resources to which students had access include the library, counselling, part of the administration, school laboratories, health facilities, and the internet. One student identified "… *the library, the labs, around the schools. I think they are good resources and also the internet among other things"* (IPGS 12). Another student added "*I would say the administration… where there are varieties of services, they get you transcripts and stuff, getting your stuff stamped … it's at the admin where you get attestations …* (IPGS13fM). Further another IPGS added, "… *I know that they offer counselling services*" (IPGS2cM).

Students also shared how they came to know of the available services and resources in the university. IPGS shared a profound appreciation to peers for letting them be aware of the support which was available for IPGS and how to go about the process of receiving the services and resources. Surprisingly, none linked the source to the IRO or the orientation process which accordingly to should be the first point of call for IPGS. Students also said it was sometimes taken for granted that IPGS were aware of the professional services available. Most students credited their colleagues and to a lesser extent supervisors and HOD as sources of support services information. One student stated, "… *the other guy told me about it [funding] before I came and even when I was coming it was also familiar"* (IPGS17cD). Another student also indicated

that "*It was through my peers and the department would inform us. But most of the things you are not told by your supervisor or the HOD or they would assume that you should know*" (IPGS21fD). One IPGS added, *"Mostly my supervisor and other post-doctoral students in my department"* (IPGS13fM).

To support the aspect of the two cohorts in the sample one IPGS who had been in the university for an extended time appreciated how the period of stay in the institution resulted in familiarity with professional services available for IPGS. The student alluded "*with the library, you know when you get to a place the more you become aware of where to get things, who to ask for the things. So, it was due to the effect of time staying in a place for a longer time*" (IPGS12cD).

One IPGS appreciated the efficacy of informative billboards dotted around campus. The student described how by chance he had to be directed to some services by a billboard on campus. Coincidentally, the other source of information the respondent identified was incidentally triggered by an accident that had occurred. The story was:

> About counselling, I read it on a board at the campus gate advertised. … then about the clinic, there was a time when I had a cut on my hand. That is when I got to know that when if you have anything and don't have any help then go to the clinic (IPGS2cM).

Collectively, these findings confirm that IPGS did not go through the orientation process and hence they had to heavily rely on colleagues, supervisors and other departmental members to identify and utilise the available resources and services. Literature suggests that it is necessary to provide support to boost international students' confidence and inspiration for positive student experiences (Fotheringham, 2017:104). Ideally, the initial stage for the support for international students is the induction experience where international students are given details about the new environments that will include information of the host country and what is expected of the postgraduate programme and to enable them to confidently navigate their new environments (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017:105). From the findings, as previously observed by the same authors, when such support is not explicit, students take it upon themselves to find their bearings, possibly resulting in adverse understandings which may impact negatively on student engagement and consequently remain engraved in one's mind.

5.2.2.3 The IRO as a support service

IPGS shared their views on what they thought was the extent to which their primary host, the IRO, was proactive in reaching out to them as a support service. The views were two-pronged; that of inadequate support by some IPGS and that of satisfaction. One group of IPGS felt let down by their primary host. The reason given was that the IRO did not relate to IPGS because the office was composed of South Africans who did not experience the same challenges as they had and may not be aware of the existing challenges. This resulted in those IPGS losing trust with the office. On the other hand, some IPGS got gratification from the support provided by the IRO although it took time for the problems to be fully addressed. However, among the latter, there were some IPGS who maintained they were content without any challenges with the support given by IRO. Comparative views were aired out from those who once experienced life as international students in other South African universities.

Among the respondents, one IPGS compared the institution under study to other institutions and regarded the institution of study as being insensitive to IPGS' needs and complained:

> That office never provided any assistance or help to us foreigners or international students according to what I saw in some other universities. They were not supposed to be employing South Africans working in that office because South Africans don't know the reality of foreigners (IPGS11fM).

One respondent similarly admitted the IRO did put some effort in organising social events for IPGS but suggested the office should have IPGS within its structures. The idea was that fellow IPGS would have a better understanding of the challenges encountered by international students in the university.

> To a lesser extent they try by making the Buddie programme, you know programmes for international student, but no, I can't say they are really doing their best. For example, the people who are working in the international relations office, are not international students. Most of them are South Africans who do not understand the difficulties that we go through (IPGS10cD).

Several other IPGS admitted that their attendance at the IRO was fruitful but still admitted it took long for them to get the service required. Additionally, IPGS felt the IRO should reach out and engage IPGS more. The feeling was "*you actually have to go to the international office for everything, they are quiet, they are in the background*"

(IPGS13fM). Correspondingly, one other IPGS interviewee lamented the failure by the IRO to reach out to IPGS and recalled:

> It's a bit different because you are the one who is supposed to make the follow ups in that department and request what you want. Sometimes it takes a bit of a few weeks to get them. I don't think they are proactive. I think the students are the ones that engage them (IPGS8cD).

There were IPGS who believed that in its capacity the IRO also tried to reach out and support IPGS especially when it came to migration issues. It was the lack of trust by some IPGS that created a barrier between the IRO and IPGS. One IPGS shared "*if you need something you go there, they are going to help as far as in their powers to help* (IPGS6cD). Likewise, one added, "*I think that they tried only that… from my experience, most international students didn't have that trust, they didn't have that kind of trust with the international office*" (IPGS9fD).

While the IRO was not proactive, similarly IPGS were hesitant to reach out to the IRO. The assumption by IPGS was that the IRO was not supportive enough. Given such circumstances, IPGS only reached out to the IRO when situations such as the renewal of the visa were inevitable. But at the end of it all, students got the assistance they needed. For example, one former IPGS explained *"the only time I was getting there is if I want to renew my permit, if not I was not seeing why I have to go there. When I reached out to them sometimes you won't even get assistance the way you want it* (IPGS11fM). *Equally* one respondent added "*I only go there when I need something maybe we know that they don't assist much* (IPGS10cD). Further another IPGS stated the only time the student reached out to the IRO "w*as when I needed my admission letter"* (IPGS13fM).

The results of this study established that IPGS were not satisfied with the IRO as a form of support service. These findings corroborate those of a Malaysia study that revealed that none of the international students interviewed expressed satisfaction with the services provided by the IRO, for the same reason as the present study that the students were not well informed about the services provided by IRO (Talebloo & Baki's, 2013:143). The same study also found the IRO to be weak in support service provision. The findings of this study indicate there was little engagement between the IRO and the IPGS. IPGS only reached out to the IRO when they could not avoid an

administrative issue that required both parties. The situation could have improved if, as stated by The Internationalisation Policy and Procedure for the institution under study, The Directorate of International Relations will establish a help desk for international students in its office which will help during designated hours. This could have paved way for the IPGS to communicate their issues with the IRO. Then during organised activities such as the Buddie programme both parties could reach out to each other to solve the impasse.

Kahu's framework proposes that students should be privy to choices at their disposal that are within their control that influence choices towards engagement and success at a university (Kahu, 2013:767). The understanding is that IPGS should have been free to reach out to the IRO for support whenever possible. This study believes if IPGS had been told about the policy clause, they could have reached out to the office for reassurance of the support services. The findings contrasted with New Zealand institutions where international students expressed satisfaction where support services were provided with a system that monitored international student satisfaction (Van der Meer, n.d:30). In that case, New Zealand institutions feel it is their dictate to measure student expectations on the various support services available. Zinkiewicz (2004:24) corroborates that it is the institution's mandate to conscientise international students on the functions and responsibilities of the IRO about the well-being of international students. A study by Garza and Guzman (2015:5) also emphasises universities must focus on the provision of adequate resources for international students. Trowler (2010:44) and Thomas (2012:7) also recommend that international student affairs offices together with academic administration and the faculty must be leaders in monitoring effective educational experiences. Put together, it could mean that IPGS missed out on the support services from the IRO which could have been utilised if only they were made aware of such services. With the monitoring mechanism in place, the IRO could have been aware of the engagement challenges encountered by IPGS at that time. On the other hand, students as well did not get the support because they were not proactive in reaching out to their primary host based on the prejudices IPGS had about the IRO.

5.2.2.4 The engagement best practices as perceived by IPGS

The need for visibility of counselling services: Going by IPGS narratives, students were clear on what they presumed could be the ideal support that could address their unique struggles. They felt as international students "*it has been difficult to get some services that are restricted to foreign students*" (IPGS12cD). For example, IPGS recounted their personal stories on how they chronically suffered from depression and stress due to the struggles they faced as foreigners. Despite such an ill mental state among IPGS in the university, on-campus counselling services were deafeningly silent and invisible. As an illustration, one respondent bemoaned she had never heard of any counselling services offered despite their existence on campus and:

> I think they should be a special counselling service where you find help. You feeling depressed and stuff, or just stressed up. Though they (counselling services) are existing … they are not heard of, like you don't hear about what things they do a lot (IPGS13fM).

Another student witnessed fellow students suffer from morbid depression and proposed the need for support groups if international students were to lead a healthy mental life to allow them to engage more in their studies. The suggestion was:

> I think there should be a university postgraduate support group. Because I feel like postgraduates we go through a lot of challenges. They are not really addressed. Once, I actually experienced a girl collapse in the bathroom because of stress not because you are sick but because you didn't rest … (IPGS12cD)

The suggestions by the respondents are confirmed by Zinkiewicz (2004:13) that departments must create platforms such as online or face-to-face support systems for postgraduates, "in which students can discuss more personal life as well as study-related matters". Thomas (2012:18) proposes guidance and counselling as part of support services in institutions of higher learning. Perry (2016:716) agrees that there is a need for improvement in advisor and counsellor presence to benefit all students because a study by Prebble et al. (2004:72) revealed that students who received counselling services in their first year all managed to complete their studies successfully. Resonating this study, a respondent in a study by Wu et al. (2015:7) upholds the need for counselling and advisory services as she personally once sought counselling services after facing academic pressures which were worsened by a problematic supervisor. Interestingly, the findings of this study suggest that IPGS were

aware of the existence of counselling services as mentioned above by IPGS13fM. Another IPGS mentioned a billboard that directed students to the counselling services which was available on campus. This means the university had facilities for counselling services but IPGS did not seek the services. Or, as observed by Dhillona and McGowana (2008:283), the university had student support services on book but was not vibrant and beneficial as a support service. There could be a gaping inconsistency between the delivery and availability of the support services in the institution. More so, Madambi (2014:45) submits that students sometimes avoid counselling services as it is not the norm in the African culture to seek such kind of specialised treatment. The meaning of this data is that IPGS suffered in silence when the counselling service was available on campus, hence there was a need to address international students about the struggles they faced and give them options on how they may utilise the available counselling service. The other dimension was that while the counselling services were available in policy the delivery system was inadequate thereby denying the valuable service that they so needed to cope with the stresses of being an IPGS.

The need for an advantageous library for postgraduate students: The respondents thought as IPGS, they deserved a special treatment different from undergraduates. IPGS suggested there was a need for a secluded space in the library, especially for postgraduate students. They felt the existing space was too small to accommodate all postgraduate students who needed to use the library. A comparison was made with other institutions that provided better treatment to postgraduate students in library service delivery. The students suggested the library should "… *provide me with a space for postgraduates to study because the current space is small and it does not keep us from many students*" (IPGS10cD). "… *they should make some proper accommodation for postgraduates because of the way we see postgraduates in other universities … being … treated…"* (IPGS11fM).

A range of literature mentions the requirement for HEI to provide library services as part of formal integration in the institution (Chrysikos et al.,2017:99). Literature supports that it's noble for library staff and student-affairs professionals to create supportive learning environments that enhance international student academic experience (McCormick et al., 2013:56). IPGS bank on the library as a quiet environment to study compared to the residential area (Wu et al., 2015:7) which has

unlimited disturbances. Corresponding with IPGS observations, Trowler (2010:39) advocates for a library that has enough space not only for reading but also for students to engage in collaborative activities within the library. As the findings suggest, the act of studying abroad on its own is a commitment to success. Since IPGS place a high value on getting an international degree, it calls for a conducive atmosphere that would advance their educational goals (Wiers-Jenssen, 2021:688).

The need for proper funding: There were three sets of submissions made on the institution's student funding set up. One set of students yearned for proper funding that could otherwise see an increase of international postgraduate students' enrolment in the university. To that effect, one student recommended: "*The university, the first thing that they should do is to create a proper funding or bursary for the university for postgraduates which will attract more postgraduates* (IPGS22fD).

The second respondent advocated for a funding that is adequate and subject to review throughout the study period considering the volatile nature of financial needs. The IPGS reasoned:

> I feel the research grant is not sufficient. Because as I realised initially when we were starting, it seemed that it was going to be enough but then with the ever-rising costs of the expenses … as the two years progressed that money was insufficient. So, if they could bring in a review or re-evaluation as time progresses (IPGS14fM).

The other group of IPGS favoured funding that was easily accessible as and when the need arose. They felt the strain they had to go through to get the funding was daunting. The strain, the period and the bureaucratic nature of accessing the funding had a ripple effect which contributed to more struggles and therefore less engagement with their studies. Moreover, some IPGS did not get the whole research fund as per the offer letter by the institution. Respondents recounted, "*the funds, the process is strenuous. It's like you are not entitled to that money, … the process, it's so slow, it's bureaucratic. It takes forever. The worst part for me is I never got to get the whole of my grant* (IPGS14fM).

One IPGS advised that the research fund should be made easy to access, within a short period and without wasting the student' study time. The student suggested "*I think it should not be difficult for students to claim the research fund... I also think that*

these services should be accessed online and not from one office to the next. This is tedious and wastes a lot of research time (IPGS2cM).

Correspondingly, in a study in the USA, financial pressures were said to be most difficult for international students, which has since been identified as the main stressor event among international students (Ecochard & Fortheringham, 2017:103). This study also mirrored several other scholars who validate that indeed students who study across borders are confronted with financial challenges (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1830). For instance, in this study, it is compounded by the lack of adequate accessible financial assistance by the institution and "*because companies or organisations do not take (employ) anyone who is having a visa*" (IPGS 12)". A study cited by Khanal and Gaulee (2019:568) confirms that all international students report feelings of anxiety about finances with uncertainty about not meeting their financial needs during their study period. Statements in literature portray that with the absence of research funding, international students are likely to abandon their studies prematurely or delay completion thereby making studying abroad a costly undertaking. For example, in the study, as presented earlier, IPGS agreed some of their colleagues had to drop out due to financial constraints.

The other finding suggests some IPGS received funding but regarded it as inadequate compared to the projections in the proposal budget. A study in Turkey substantiates what was obtained in this study. A fellowship funding, from The Department of Turks Abroad and Related Communities, turned to be insufficient by the time they reached the end of the fellowship programme (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016:1830). Luckily, for the Turkey group of students, it was possible to get a job or live within their means. Viewed in this sense, it can be said that the lack of adequate financial support from the institutions led to aggravated anxieties among IPGS, especially when they were not able to supplement the institutional funding through employment in the host country. And since it has been repeatedly documented that international students will always face financial problems and institutions have made a deliberate move to enrol international students, it is up to the universities to make the provisions that international students will be financially secure. For example, England has taken it upon itself to allow graduates to stay for at most an additional two after completion to allow international students to pay back outstanding funds through work related

activities (Hegarty, 2014:229). Another way has been to recognise scholarships as a crucial tool without any exception particularly when recruiting international students (Groarke & Durst 2019:47).

The need for mentorship: Students indicated that they needed direction into life after postgraduate studies within the programmes they were undertaking by being involved in formalised mentorship programmes. Students thought they needed guidance on available opportunities that awaited them after postgraduate studies. One student was excited about the prospects of an IPGS mentoring programme in the university and proposed:

> There is another super service! … probably mentoring, they should operate something for that, especially when it comes to career development and the paths you want to take in life. Ya, those are practically not known … we don't hear about them a lot. They would really help the student experiences (IPGS13fM).

"For most international students being enrolled in a foreign university is a major change which calls for direction" (Dhillona, McGowana & Wang, 2008:383). Zinkiewicz (2004:13) a review of good practice in the UK recommends departmental formalised mentoring by staff or other students as a good practice approach. One other study agreed with the shared views of IPGS that felt mentorship was vital to adjustment and connectedness in the new environment (Thomson & Esses, 2016:882). The study recommends that universities must set up formal support networks such as peer mentoring to enhance academic engagement. Tinto (1993) in his theory, agrees informal group associations are classed as social integration mechanisms (Chrysikos et al., 2017:100). As highlighted in the mentoring programme at the University of Vienna in Austria, the goal is to steer up students to graduation in the appropriate manner by an experienced person that will guide and support the mentee's efforts to advance within the expected framework (Collier, 2017:9). Taking the respondent's suggestion, implemented mentoring programmes yield positive effects for mentees, mentors and universities (Leidenfrost et al., 2011:348). The mentee will perform better academically and benefit from social integration. Mentors will develop individual relationships with the mentee while the university increases its retention rate.

The need for proper orientation: IPGS interviewed placed great emphasis on the need for an induction process specifically designed for IPGS. As stated earlier, the

Internationalisation Policy and Procedure is clear on the mandate of IRO to coordinate induction programmes for new arrivals to a full degree. However, despite the clear policy, it was surprising to find the respondents still talked about the need for an induction process in the university for IPGS. Since most postgraduate studies started later than the undergraduate programmes, IPGS worried that they missed out on the university-wide induction process. One responded proposed:

> Maybe I would suggest that it is important that there should be induction for postgraduates considering that some postgraduates join the university at different levels. It is very important that the university put in place an induction programme so that everybody is aware (IPGS21fD).

Prebble et al. (2004:54) believe that orientation programmes facilitate both social and academic integration that will in turn enhance student outcomes. For most international students who are regarded as great achievers in their home institutions, being enrolled in a foreign university for graduate studies disorients them. Therefore, it is important to acquaint international students with the rules and culture of the new environments (Cowley & Ssekasi, 2018:111). In the UK, it is the onus of higher education institutions to put in place effective systems of student support and development through timeous induction within and outside the university, the authors explained. Further, their study concluded that induction processes are important in ensuring the positive arrival and transition of international students where they receive relevant information key to non-academic issues. Hence the call for an organised induction by IPGS. More attention should be given to the induction process for international students. As the findings suggest, the interactive sessions that support the induction of IPGS were inadequate in the university of study. Difficulty in addressing the technical questions that overwhelm international students in the early days may increase levels of stress and despondency. Thus, the missed orientations process meant IPGS missed out on relevant information about the new environments resulting in disoriented IPGS because of the little understanding and lack of confidence in the strange environment.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Engagement challenges faced by IPGS

Throughout the interviews, IPGS placed great emphasis on challenges that are unique to international postgraduate students. There was a submission that entering postgraduate education is a period of recurrent life-changing challenges that relate to

postgraduate life experiences (Zinkiewicz, 2008:13). Theme three is reflective of what IPGS perceived were challenging experiences encountered as IPGS. The engagement challenges had three categories: academic, interaction and support services and resources challenges. The categories will be presented, analysed and discussed next.

5.2.3.1 Challenges experienced with academic work

As research-based postgraduate students, international students were confronted with challenges that interfered with the progress of their studies. Challenges highlighted by IPGS include financial constraints, Covid-19 restrictions and supervisory aspects.

Financial constraints for research and on-campus accommodation: Several IPGS acknowledged financial constraints were a stumbling block at producing quality research work as the meagre resources they had were also used to cater for college fees, subsistence costs and residential expenses. One student bemoaned the premature withdrawal of the contract of the work-study by the institution before students had completed their studies. The work-study programme would at least cover tuition and accommodation fees. She narrated her story giving reference to students who had to withdraw from college before completing their studies because of the withdrawal of the work-study. Some students also recounted how the institution was discriminated against when it came to distributing institutional research funding. One student took some time and recounted the withdrawal of the work-study and the consequences that resulted:

> The institution would provide work-study and when they closed work-study most international students started struggling because you find that you don't have a bursary, the school fees are high and you need to pay for accommodation, you need to buy food. So, most students when the work-study closed had to go back to their respective countries considering that the institution is also not proactive when it comes to paying the international student. Most of the bursaries that are there like Nasras, only benefit the local students (IPGS8cD).

The same story was told by another international student who added how she had to stay out of campus because of inadequate financial support. The IPGS also bemoaned the cancellation of the work-study which she was accorded as an undergraduate. This meant she had to stay out of campus where there was a lack of facilities such as a

library IPGS cited as one of their preferences as IPGS to support academic work. Moreover, when she used the campus library she was forced to leave the campus library earlier to allow for travel time outside campus before darkness set in. The student narrated:

> Doing Honours, it was better for me because I was on campus on work-study, so everything was catered for. And then coming to Masters … I wasn't on that contract. I was chased out [residence) I had to get my own accommodation. … you needed to be in the library for a limited time frame you couldn't extend hours because you needed to be out of campus (IPGS14fM).

When Khodabandelou, Karimi and Ehsani (2015:169) conducted a study of Iranian international students pursuing their postgraduate studies in Malaysia, students similarly struggled with their finances, causing the most stress among the Iranian postgraduate students. Bilas (2016:6) agrees financial help such as scholarships and research grants are often hard to come by for international students who often do not qualify for the local scholarships, as revealed by the present study,

Bilas (2016:6) sees financial problems as the root cause of academic stress experienced by international postgraduate students. International postgraduate students become vulnerable to stress in an academic setting "due to processes of survival in maintaining a good academic performance and social interaction" (Gaol & Lin, 2017:179). Financial constraints revealed in this study imply that many IPGS could not positively engage in their studies and consequently dropout or take longer than anticipated to complete the programme.

COVID-19 slowed the process due to travel restrictions put in place: The challenges of COVID-19 did not spare IPGS studying in one South African university. COVID-19 was a stumbling block for international students as universities abruptly closed indefinitely without immediate contingencies for international students. The closure of universities meant delayed progress of the studies and a prolonged stay in the host country for international students thereby aggravating and extending the financial anguishes. Some IPGS predicted "*If there was no COVID-19 I think I would have much progress*" (IPGS2cM). Similarly, one other student shared, "*It is very slow because of COVID-19, and also the university didn't plan … COVID-19 affected the country and the world and also the university didn't give us the resources that they*

promised that they will give to PhDs" (IPGS4cD). Equally, another student was progressing very well until the coming in of the COVID-19 which caused the research work to stall:

> I would say everything was moving perfectly but I think I would safely say the COVID-19 pandemic has affected us because as we stand now I have only defended at the department but I am still waiting to defend at the school and it is taking longer because there is no clear plan or set days on when we are going to defend (IPGS17cD).

Gultekin (2020:147) predicted that after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, substantial changes in the forms of deliveries, operations, and policies in international higher education will be made. This was true of the IPGS as the COVID-19 meant delayed submission of projects because some students could not get ethical clearance for data collection and some could not present their thesis for the oral examination as academic activities had come to a standstill in the HEI of learning including the university under study.

Supervision Challenges: IPGS argued that the kind of student supervision, in a way, contributed to their engagement challenges. They expected guidance from supervisors on how to go about the research. It was difficult for IPGS to progress to the next level of research work due to lack of the guidance. Some of them highlighted "*the supervisor-student relationship is obviously a stumbling block* (IPGS12cD*).* One respondent thought:

> Supervision sometimes is a problem when the supervisor expects you to do so much and sometimes even when you don't understand and you tell them that you don't understand they still expect you to know instead of at least them knowing your weakness (IPGS5cD).

IPGS spoke of feedback as the cornerstone to the progress of students' research work. They felt let down by supervisors who delayed in relaying the feedback as it slowed progress of the research. Students were left frustrated especially when the response to the feedback went unanswered. They were convinced that speedy feedback positively contributes to the research progress. One respondent reacted *"I felt that the supervision aspect hampered my progress to a great extent. I was a full-*

time student. And I felt that if I had had my timely feedback I could have completed my project far much faster than I was able to" (IPGS7fD).

Some students described how having more than one supervisor hampered the progress of the research. Having more than one supervisor made it difficult to consult both at the same time. The situation added confusion to the students because of the difficult to reconcile the different reviews from each supervisor as they could not have the opportunity to consult to both at the same time. One student clarified:

> I cannot get them (supervisors) to be in one room at once for them to say what they think. In the end, you end up sending work on that side and end up sending work the other side and you get different reviews you wouldn't know what to put in the final chapter (IPGS9fD).

Dary et al. (2016:7) observed that a supervisor can be an enabler of a barrier to student engagement. Comparable to the present study, Cekiso et al. (2019:13) found out that postgraduate students at some point in their studies felt let down by their supervisors. Just as the IPGS desired, Fry et al. (2009:165) advocate for a supervisor who gives constructive feedback on the student's work. IPGS anticipated more and quicker feedback that would enable acquisition and enhancement of research skills (Kuh, 2003:28). Thomas (2012:36) bemoans that delayed feedback, more so with no substance is frustrating and causes anxiety on the part of the student. As well, IPGS suggested feedback must support, guide and inform the student on how to use the feedback (Cekiso et al., 2019:18). Further, positive verbal feedback enhances academic engagement that would in turn hasten student outcomes (Cage et al., 2018:304). The interpretation is that delayed feedback with no substance from supervisors caused despondency among which meant disengaged from their studies and thus negatively affected the students' progress. If constructive feedback had been given to the student on time, the pace of the study would be relatively faster in moving towards completion.

5.2.3.2 Challenges faced by IPGS about services and resources

The findings indicate that IPGS experienced challenges with professional services delivery for IPGS. The nature of the challenges consisted of immigration issues, accommodation on arrival, language barrier with university staff and local students and preferential treatment given to local students in the university.

Immigration challenges: IPGS experienced difficulties when it came to the processing of the study visa. The processes took longer causing anxiety and uncertainty of the success of the application. The immigration problems also became a major challenge for those who wished to switch universities for one reason or another. IPGS found themselves bound to the university stipulated on the visa. Thus, instead of the students leaving the university, they rather endured the prevailing challenges than go through the "*craziness of renewal of visa and permits*" (IPGS13fM). One IPGS explained:

> The only thing that made me stay was because I was an international student. My visa was for that particular institution. If I had to move to another institution I would need to apply for a new visa and that would be another expense on my part (IPGS22fD).

Another IPGS reiterated:

> I am also talking about the legal status of being able to study there. So, I would say that there are several challenges for international students like even obtaining the permit. The process. Sometimes it takes forever and you are stressed you don't know whether you are going to get the outcome or not (IPGS8cD).

Immigration challenges are a unique challenge students who decide to study abroad must go through. IPGS referred to the restrictions of the visa conditions as one of the major challenges exceptional to international students. International students found themselves having to work harder to avoid a prolonged stay in South Africa which would necessitate renewing their study permits. Thus, when IPGS perceived their progress to be slow and the expiry of the visa and funding conditions drawing nearer, anxiety took over. Postgraduate studies being a time bound programme, any delays were a major concern for IPGS. A study in Malaysia of Iranian international students, confirm the findings that migration rules and regulations are some of the struggles that international students must experience when studying abroad, that include the long procedures for the extension of the visa (Khodabandelou et al. 2015:169). Equally, Kavilanz in Khanal and Gaulee (2019, 564) in their study, observed that the issue of obtaining a visa was a major challenge among Indian students who aspired to study abroad.

As stated earlier, dissertations offer a unique learning opportunity which must be completed within a specified period (Fry et al., 2009:165). Bearing in mind the high

regard and value of completion rates and persistence in postgraduate studies, (Perry (2016:718), suggests the time factor is worth considering seriously for IPGS who have a specified period of stay in the host nation. International students who struggle with immigration issues find themselves filled with apprehension about having to work harder to beat the visa expiry deadline. Also, the fact students must secure placement first before the study permit, some IPGS find themselves starting the programme later than local students if the process of securing the study permit took longer to process. Further, at times, due to academic challenges encountered, IPGS could not complete their studies on time, which meant they had to renew the study permit to continue with their studies. This adds to more anxiety for international students who must struggle with both the overdue dissertations and visa processing. Sometimes the renewed visa took longer to process such that trying to return home after graduation with an expired study visa, one faced the risk of harassment at the border. Thus, a literature review by Perez-Encinas and Ammigan (2016:987) stipulates that assistance with visas and other administrative procedures are some of the support services which must be offered to international students. In compliance, the institutional Internationalisation Policy and Procedures document procedures stipulates that “the IRO must intervene if an international student experiences challenges with the Department of Home Affairs with immigration struggles”. Further it is stated that “the directorate of IRO will together with the directorate of communication and marketing develop an appropriate strategy for attracting international full degree students to the university”. Unexpectedly, IPGS spoke strongly about struggles with immigration issues yet policies were put in place to implement the support service. With the internationalisation policies in mind, IPGS must not struggle with study visa issues if institutions adhered to their policies.

Accommodation arrangements on arrival: From the international postgraduate students’ perspectives, they found it difficult to secure accommodation in the university at arrival. One student answered “… *also when it comes to housing, housing that you are supposed to get, it’s also a struggle for one to secure a room”* (IPGS 10). Another student substantiated that the problem was compounded if international students did not have anyone to host them at arrival. They suggested the problem must not happen because accommodation was assured in their admission letters. One student provided an illustration of how students struggle when they enter a new country for the first time with no one to connect to.

> … you come from a new country, you are expected that you got kin … We didn't know anybody, and when I was coming it was in my admission letter that in the university there is no tuition fees and the university will provide you with accommodation. And I had learnt that other people did get but I expected them to intervene. I can't count how many times I went to the place [IRO] (IPGS13fM).

Students should not have faced accommodation challenges at arrival if the institution had adhered to its internationalisation policy. The current institutional Internationalisation Policy and Procedures specifies:

> "The Directorate of International Relations will welcome newly arriving international students on campus. It will, in collaboration with the directorate of student affairs, oversee that international students are allocated appropriate rooms in university residence" (Internationalisation Policy and Procedures, 2013: 11).

What IPGS went through was typical to one study that examined policy, law and practice in Ireland. The study noted that one of the struggles international students in universities experience is that of securing accommodation. The observation was voiced by both the institution and the students themselves. Accordingly, 'Ireland's current strategy states that availability of on-campus student accommodation is an essential element of an institution's internationalisation strategy" (Groarke & Durst, 2019:63). This is because finding accommodation is one of the acculturative challenges that can be taken for granted unless one experiences it first-hand (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017:103). Since student welfare is an important consideration, it is generally an institutional obligation to provide support services for practical issues such as accommodation to ensure the well-being of international students (Zinkiewicz, 2004:12). Again, the issue of accommodation for IPGS could not be a challenge if the policies of the institution were put to work.

Language barrier with university personnel: Most IPGS agreed they found it difficult to communicate with staff to access professional services in the new environments due to language barrier. The language barrier was heightened by the attitude of some members of staff who took offence if they noticed the international student was not familiar with the local language. The language barrier was found to be a key challenge as everything else hinged on the two-way communication channel for international students to negotiate the university environment for the services,

particularly if the locals expected them to be acquainted with their native language at arrival. One IPGS was at pain explaining:

> I would say the primary challenge was that of language more so of the work staff at the institution they prefer to speak in their home language and they expect you to know the home language the first day that you are out at the institution. They take offence if you greet them in English. Sometimes they ignore you or they speak in vernacular language and you don't understand. So, it's a bit of a challenge because you don't know where to go, you don't know to whom to ask for help. (IPGS8cD).

Correspondingly, one IPGS explained how the language barrier was a challenge for those who could not speak the English language and preferred to stick to the local language as the mode of communication. The language barrier became more problematic for the international student as they were left unattended if they did not speak the local language. Most of the IPGS had similar sentiments to share. For example one IPGS expressed:

> In cases where maybe some of the colleagues are not very good in English and they have to speak in their mother tongue. That is the only time that you find that you have challenges explaining what you want and the person understanding especially when you want something from this office or from other offices (IPGS5cD).

Sometimes international students were left unattended as the locals stuck to their native language despite the lack of communication. One student highlighted:

> Language barrier probably. Ya, I think that's the major one. Many people want to stick with local language, they don't want to, actually when you don't understand they just leave you alone" (IPGS6cD).

Hegarty, (2014:231) suggests that the language barrier must be broken quickly and pursued aggressively for students to integrate soon enough into the new college life. It is said the US, UK and Australia remain top options for international students because English is a universal language in the regions (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019:562) and so communication is easier as everyone can understand each other. The failure to communicate by IPGS, as narrated by the respondents, caused unfavourable effects such as inferiority complex, confusion, alienation, anxiety, anger, isolation, loss of identity, low motivation and lack of focus and self-confidence (Tseng et al. in Mahmud et al., 2010:290) and more importantly, they did not get the support service

they required from the university personnel. A different study in South Africa also agrees foreign students found it difficult to understand the South African vernacular (Rawjee and Reddy, 2012:198). Nations like Malaysia have found a solution that accommodates locals and international students' languages by adopting a common language without the emphasis of the local language. The internationalisation policy for HEI in Malaysia, in its quest to ensure a steady growth of international students, stipulates that the management and administration must use English as a medium of communication when international students are involved. Despite the language barrier perpetuated by the local staff, the policy document for this study likewise supports the provision for programmes that expose local language and culture specifically for international students new in the university community. However, as presented earlier, students never had any induction experience resulting in new students struggling with the local language. Still, to learn a language at the induction sessions only would not gain the international student so much. The adoption could be that of Malaysia where support programmes are put in place with personnel conversing in English, a universal language for many. Had IPGS known the local language and personnel used the English language, it could have helped international students initiate dialogue with university staff thereby speeding up the integration process in the new university (Mahmud et al., 2010:289. By IPGS failing to communicate with the university personnel, it meant they were denied the engagement support service they so deserved.

Preferential treatment of local students in the university: While sharing their thoughts, IPGS voiced some form of segregation from local students. Multiple respondents felt local students were more privileged than foreign students concerning support services. They indicated that certain resources and services were exclusive to local students only. Also, IPGS bemoaned how being international students made them vulnerable to segregation. An IPGS explained:

> The issue of you being a foreigner first in the university of course it is a big mind to start with regardless of which department, institute, wherever you are, that alone is a fact of being a challenge no matter how much you really do push wanting to belong. That segregation is always there you could always feel it very heavy on your back that no, to some extent you are not welcome (IPGS3fD.

Another IPGS echoed how the international student status exposed them to segregation when it concerned resources, such as funding, meant to support student engagement. The concern was expressed as:

> They offer opportunities that are only given to South Africans. I was talking about opportunities mainly reserved for locals which are not afforded to international students which can affect monetary wise, for example, …even if you are better qualified, especially in our department it is reserved for locals… (IPGS10cD).

Another student cited issues of banking services and employment opportunities as segregation points for international students. IPGS found it difficult to open bank accounts or get employed in South Africa because study permits were not considered except for South African identity cards. One respondent reacted:

> It has been difficult to get some services that are restricted to foreign nationals, because take for instance when you are going to apply, there are certain banks that wouldn't allow you to open an account using a study visa. Then secondly, usually the university … have that kind of segregation, like there are preferences with the locals, they say when there is a post like this they prefer for local they actually hire locals who are having ID [identification documents] over those who have a permit (IPGS12cD).

The sentiments shared meant IPGS faced discrimination in the university in favour of local students when it came to the distribution of resources meant to support academic work. Tinto, in his theory, suggests students who have negative experiences such as discrimination suffer from a diminished academic or social integration. Considering that one of the motivating factors to study abroad is to immerse oneself in the culture of the host country (Kusek, 2015:122) discrimination defeats the integration process of international students in the new environment. The discrimination of IPGS on campus made students feel less valued, unfairly treated and insecure (Prebble et al., 2004:28). The adverse reactions affected students' sense of belonging which became risk factors for dropping out. This was despite the assurance in the International Policy and Procedure document of the university which stated that its principal measure of internationalisation was to ensure prevention of any form of discrimination based on nationality in the institution (International Policy and Procedure, 2013:24). The policy measure also recognises that successful internationalisation requires the availability of appropriate financial resources. Despite the policy measures, it was, therefore,

surprising that IPGS still voiced discrimination when it came to professional supporting services by the university. This is evidence of policy differing from practice.

5.2.3.3 IPGS interactional challenge experiences

The other IPGS challenge that emerged from the findings was that of relationships on campus. Such plights referred to stereotypes by local students about international students, xenophobic fears by international student and language barrier when communicating with peers.

Stereotypes about international students: There was concern among IPGS about negative ideas local students harboured against international students. The worry was that local students felt threatened by the presence of international students in in the university. The common responses singled out stereotypes about academic and job prowess coupled with the English language proficiency IPGS seemed to possess. IPGS were aware that local students linked their academic success to the use of charms. The local students thought IPGS' academic competence was not determined by their natural ability but due to external forces such as magic. Above all, IPGS were thought to have come to study in South Africa so that they could take up local jobs upon completion of their studies. One IPGS reflected:

> As a foreign student there was this thing especially if it is against my local peers. There was that thing they will feel like, you guys, you know you are moving too fast. I actually heard some say those people from Zimbabwe have a mushonga (charm), they use muti (charm) to pass. Then there was a time when they would feel like you guys you want to take [our] jobs (IPGS9fD).

In some cases, IPGS who could not converse in the local language when seeking for services were labelled by the university personnel as proud people because of the preference of the English language over their local languages. The labelling disregarded the fact that they were fresh students on campus who had yet to learn the local language. One student profoundly reflected:

> Yes, I would say the language barrier, I would say that was terrible because there is something about South Africa, they relate more with you when you know how to speak their language, when you are familiar with their culture, when you identify with them, so they do not take it too kindly with when you speak a lot of English. So, when I came, that was all I could speak, English. They were like this one she is just hanging her nose with us, she is being proud (IPGS13fM).

The findings above suggest the language barrier exposed IPGS to adverse treatment such as racial discrimination, by local students. Literature has it that language barrier is likely to expose international students to racial discrimination (Snoubar, 2017:1127).

An article entitled Stereotyping International Students is Unjust (Tran and Gomes, 2015:3) had extensive arguments presented about international students in a host country. The article justifies the locals' stereotypes and support that indeed, whoever is studying abroad harbour the idea of securing a job and gaining permanent residence. The reason is that international students aspire for global mobility with a strong desire to live and work in big cities continents such America, Europe and Asia. The article conversely agrees stereotyping may indeed negatively impact studies undertaken, as it leaves international students feeling vulnerable and marginalised resulting in disengagement from their studies. The article further argues that stereotyping international students by local students widens the rift between the two groups of students. Nevertheless, per the article, international students are themselves diverse, hence it can be argued that stereotypes are miscalculated because of the diversity of international students' views and approaches to life. Correspondingly, the Chinese studying in America are also stereotyped as smart and hardworking (Zhang, 2015:10). This study argues, IPGS should not focus on the negatives of the stereotypes but instead focus on the positives said about them. For example, "… *you guys are moving too fast … you guys you want to take [our] jobs*" (IPGS6cD) is a direct indication that international students are fully engaged in their studies and at the end of it they will get a job in South Africa if they wished because they would have attained the qualifications that are critical to South Africa, thus fulfilling their aspirations. Another positive stereotype students can capitalise and learn from is the stereotype about the perceptions that they not speaking the local language, IPGS can learn the basics of the local languages such as greeting, enquiring and thanking. International students can as well befriend the reluctant locals to be accepted. That way, international students can become multilingual and most importantly interact easily to get the services they so need and create relationships on campus easily.

The anxiety of xenophobia: IPGS felt unsettled and expressed fear about the xenophobic tendencies of the host students. In a xenophobic environment, IPGS revealed that they lost their sense of belonging, felt alienated and longed to be in their

home countries. One student demonstrated defenselessness when stating, "*We are just on our own so if we are struggling we are struggling on our own. There is no one who is coming to rescue you, so it's difficult for international students to study outside*" (IPGS4fD). Another, likewise, was at pain explaining "*First one was not being accepted …, not being accepted and It was the most painful*" (IPGS11fM). In the same vein, one lamented "*being in a foreign country is not easy … sometimes this is South Africa, there is xenophobia and sometimes you just feel like you do not belong. And sometimes you are treated like you don't belong* (IPGS17cD). Additionally, another respondent simply added "*not being accepted*" (IPGS11fM).

As discussed earlier, international students made deliberate choices to study in a South African university because of its potential, in IPGS' views, for employability, proximity to home, its viable economy and the chance to experience the diverse South African culture. However, the xenophobic tendencies experienced are some of the negatives of studying in South Africa. IPGS were aware of xenophobic sentiments by the locals towards international students. This confirms an earlier study in a different South African university by Masikane, Hewitt and Toendepi (2020:14) that concluded that international students had a satisfying level of awareness on xenophobia in the institution they studied. The dimension of xenophobia, per the respondents of that institution was similar because it was at personal level where individuals resented international students (Masikane, Hewitt & Toendepi, 2020:4) the authors concluded that kind of xenophobia was dominant and practiced by many South Africa. Akande, Musarurwa and Kaye, (2018:4) noted institutionally the xenophobia tendencies are generally expressed in understated tones but with a depressing impact on international students. International students similarly echoed fears of living in a xenophobic environment where they had to struggles with fear, loneliness and discrimination which left them emotionally distressed and fearfully apprehensive (Vromans, Robert & Knoetze, 2011:6) with a feeling of vulnerability with no one to turn. A study by Chinyamurindi (2018:215 also revealed insecurity triggered by xenophobic attacks in one South African university which left students expressing a lack of sense of belonging in the university. In line with the Internationalisation procedures of the university that state "The Directorate of International Relations will take the initiative to create awareness of the need to eliminate tendencies of xenophobia and discrimination based on nationality", the problem of xenophobia need to be addressed

to reduce the struggles international students must contend with. This can be made possible by those whose agenda is about student wellbeing, such as IRO, to dialogue more with the issue of diversity among students and what impact it has on the social and academic systems on campus. Kerr, Durrheim and Dixon (2019:1009) agree xenophobia should be taken seriously because it is deadly but the authors also agree it is a very unpopular decision because South Africans do not conform to the idea that they are a xenophobic nation,

Language barrier with peers: The narratives of language barrier were frequent as a challenge among IPGS. They said they found it difficult to communicate with peers because of the language barrier. The problem was made worse because local students had no intentions of speaking in the neutral language, English, and did not take it kindly if IPGS spoke to them in the English language. The reasoned local students shy away from speaking in English because although they understood the language their proficient in it were doubtful. Conversely, IPGS were also not impressed when local students tried to force them to speak in the local language because they thought they should be given a chance to learn the local languages first. IPGS shared "*the challenge was language barrier sometime they would like speak their local language and then, I don't know the local language. So, that challenge is there … they feel hurt* (IPGS 4). Another IPGS collaborated:

> sometimes they are people who don't like conversing in English or they are adamant that you have to speak in [local language]. But I don't think it is proper for someone to force you to speak in their language coz you are being in a place where they speak that language because to speak in that language you need to learn about it (IPGS 21fD).

The language barrier was recurrent with IPGS as it was a challenge as a stereotype as well as when IPGS interacted with peers and university personnel. This is an indication that the language barrier was a challenge that affected negatively and profoundly the levels of IPGS student engagement. Interestingly language barrier affected the two groups of students. IPGS could not converse in the local language as they were still to learn the local language while local students expected IPGS to use the local language despite them not knowing the language. Local students also found it a challenge as their proficiency in the English language was limited. This calls for an

intervention by the institution with the implementation of the internationalisation policy and procedure on language as discussed earlier and later in this section.

Tinto (1975) suggests negative experiences in institutions lead to people experiencing diminished academic or social integration where they may decide it is better to leave than stay. Cowley and Sskasi (2018:124) submit international students are potentially challenged by several non-academic issues, in this case, xenophobia fears. They substantiate that non-academic issues are potentially very serious as they compromise on the IPGS' sense of belonging, confidence and concentration causing them to consider withdrawing from their studies as stated earlier that xenophobia in South Africa made them *"feel like you do not belong*" (IPGS18cM) "*and not accepted*" (IPGS11fM). Chinyamurindi (2018:215), who investigated international students' sense of belonging in the Eastern Cape, South Africa similarly revealed anxiety among international students which was incited by xenophobic fears. In another study whose objective was to find out about what attracts international students to South Africa, with seven South African universities involved, (Strydom & Mentz, 2010: v). revealed what they termed "the dark side of students' experiences" where international students voiced the discriminatory tendencies of South African natives. The International Policy and Procedure for the institution of this study were clear on its policy that "To attract and retain staff, they will take the initiatives to create awareness of the need to eliminate tendencies of xenophobia and discrimination on a basis of nationality (Internationalisation Policy and Procedure, 2013:14). It was unfortunate that this submission was only intended for staff and not students. From the findings, it is evident that xenophobia is still a bone of contention among international students and unless policies are made and implemented, an international student will continue to confronted by xenophobic attacks in the HEI of South Africa.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Strategies employed by IPGS to cope with engagement challenges

After experiencing challenges, IPGS made deliberate coping efforts by reacting to the challenges as a mechanism for engagement in their studies abroad. The coping strategies theme was developed that captured the reactions of the IPGS. Three categories emerged from the coping strategies theme. First coping mechanisms were understood to be emotion-focused coping, second, problem-focusing coping and third,

adjustment-focused coping. Three sub-categories emerged from problem-focused coping, four from emotion-focused coping and four also emerged from the adjustment-focused coping as illustrated in (Figure 5.6).

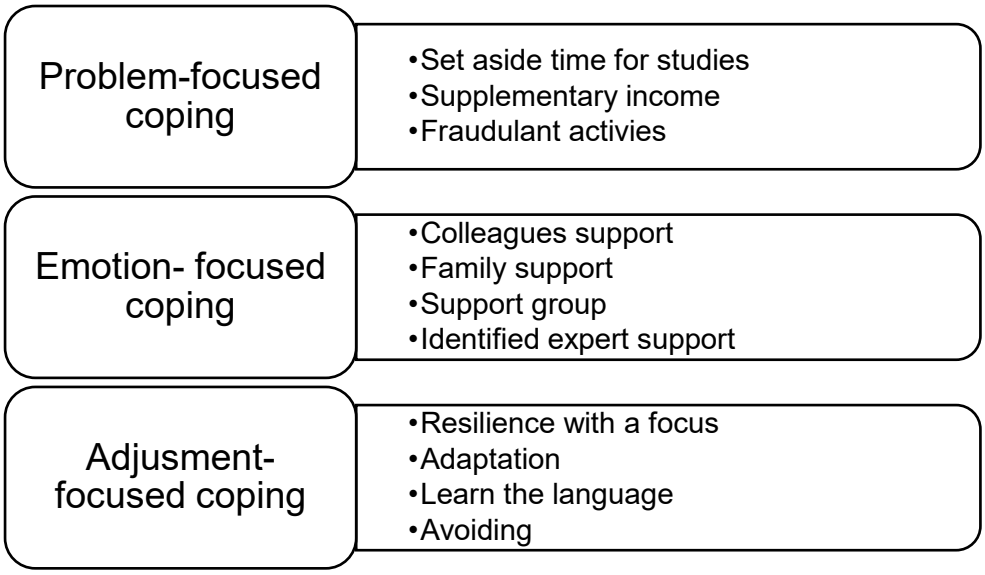

Figure 5.6: Coping strategies of IPGS

5.2.4.1. Problem-focused coping

The findings reveal that IPGS took an optimistic approach to cope with their unique challenges as graduate students in a foreign country by taking control of problems that they thought could be changeable (Yue & Le, 2013:35) through time management and financial supplementation as pivotal to not only completing their studies on time but to ensure quality work while still dedicating time to other worthwhile activities. One student decided, "*I would say quite a number of challenges but overall the challenges are not beyond my control or something that I wouldn't handle*" (IPGS21fD). Also, as a last resort, some IPGS unfortunately had to engage in unorthodox means such as false documentation to cope with the challenges encountered. Describing with profound responses to the coping strategies, respondents revealed how they coped with their peculiar struggles during their studies.

Time management: IPGS believed if they dedicated themselves to studies by managing most of the time available around their studies and other related activities, they could cope despite the struggles faced. One IPGS explained:

> You know with best work I think it requires one to be dedicated and to always set aside time for your studies. I always make sure I get time for reading. If I get stuck on what to write I always put a hold on the work do some reading and get back. Put aside time for studies and other personal commitments, make sure that I allocate time for everything (IPGS10cD).

One student placed importance in assigning time for reading but also valued the time for all those people involved in making sure the study was a success. So, the student made sure to:

> …also try to see if I can have more time with them [faculty] because remember this thing is not all about looking for this information on the internet like literature review and all but you are managing time with the relevant stakeholders and the supervisors involved even with the department (IPGS14fM).

Supplementary income: Students had to find ways of generating income for survival while still concentrating on their studies. An example is one IPGS who once took away some of the study time and got gainfully employed to supplement his meagre financial resources. The student virtually got other relief in the form of a bursary. The study revealed the resilience of international students who sometimes must multi-task for survival when studying abroad. The student revealed:

> At some point, I had to seek employment on a part-time basis. That was during my masters, but during the PhD, I was continuing with my job and I also managed to secure a bursary. So, it was a relief to that regard (IPGS8cD).

Fraudulent activities: While some students sought employment, some students were known to resort to dishonest means of supplementing income and coping with the research work as shared by one student who opined:

> . .. and when it comes to the funds that you are supposed to use or for your studies it is quite difficult for postgraduate students to get the funds and they end up resorting to fraudulent activities on documentation and to get the money. (IPGS10cD).

Student engagement is characterised by how much time one dedicates to studies and the effort taken towards studies (Abubakar, 2017:6). From the findings, it is evident that IPGS were fully engaged in their studies by adopting time management as a coping strategy. IPGS also took the effort to work by supplementing their income as a coping strategy so that they could be fully engaged in their studies.

5.2.4.2 Emotion-focused coping

At times, IPGS had to deal with issues or situations that were unchangeable and therefore, could not handle the challenges by themselves. They had to rely on other people to manage the challenges. For such cases, IPGS used emotion-focused coping (Yue & Le, 2013:35). IPGS relied on intervention from people around them for their emotional, physical and mental well-being. Such people included their research groups, experts in the field of study and supervisors.

Colleagues support: With a positive mind, a student shared how he relied on the supervisor and colleagues as a support system to cope with challenges encountered. For instance, one IPGS' position was "*it means you can deal with it because there is good support from the research group and the supervisor although we sometimes face challenges on the support we are supposed to get … as a university* (IPGS2cM).

Family support: While acknowledging the existence of the struggles during studies abroad, one student counted on the support of the family back home to bear with the struggles. For example, one respondent reflected:

> You had to rely so much back from home and the likes. It was a bit challenging … To me, if you want me to work I would just say no any challenge that comes with postgraduate studies within the university there are challenges and every student could handle (IPGS22fD).

Support group: One IPGS appreciated the benefits of a good support system when one is studying away from home and, therefore, utilised the dynamics of a support groups as a system to handle the academic struggles. The story was:

> … Input from my colleagues, where we have weekly presentations. So, I would say with all that support it wasn't all that challenging, because there is a built-in support system here. We have weekly presentations where people give you ideas, you think through and then you can improve your work (IPGS16cD).

Expert support: Some of the challenges were beyond the capacities of colleagues and family. In such cases IPGS needed the advice of an expert. One IPGS explained how she managed to cope with research in the methodology area through expert advice:

> I actually identified an expert in that area with the methodology I had. He was like … first of all, you didn't do this and this and this, you were supposed

> to have done this one and this one before, you should have come in the beginning, you know all these things and those are things I would have had known if we had had some form of training, you know, very basic things, but just wasn't (IPGS13fM).

5.2.4.3 Adjustment-focused coping

International students are sometimes confronted with challenges which needed acceptance as a coping strategy. The IPGS accepted the challenge as a situation that could not be changed and decided to adapt and adjust to the challenge instead (Rabenu & Yaniv, 2017:9). The IPGS chose to be either resilient but with motivation or adapt to the new environments or avoid the challenges or accept and learn the local culture.

Resilience with focus: IPGS were not surprised with the struggles encountered in their new environments and hence, decided to "*stay strong and keep focused*" (IPGS14fM) on things that were applicable to them and "*sometimes … had to do without things*" (IPGS5cD). Similarly,' IPGS14fM reacted:

> Perseverance, at some point it was getting tough. I was not really thinking of leaving the institution but I knew in life nothing comes easily and I can't just expect everything to be given to me in the porcelain plate so I placed myself in that it would be that. I couldn't wait to finish and leave (IPGS14fM).

Adaptation: Some IPGS committed to adjusting to the new environments as a way of managing stressful conditions. One student chose to ignore the stressor events but concentrated on the positives of the struggles. The narration was:

> I would say it doesn't affect me that much because we do not have any proximity interaction so it's something that I just see. If it doesn't concern me I ignore it. I don't take it so hard. This is how I cope; I just deal with what benefits me and what is relevant and pertinent for me to be able to achieve the objective that I would want at that particular time (IPGScD8).

Similarly, with no hard feelings another student commented: "*Ya, hey, that one requires one to just relax and just see how things unfold, thus how I deal with it*" (IPGS11fM). Yet another respondent reiterated "… *you have to endure up until you are certain that your results are out and you have passed and everything. That's it. With other things, you just endure (laugh) you just endure and move on*" (IPGS15fD). The argument was further strengthened when IPGS9fD added *"… you just have to deal with it in your manner. You just tell yourself that I think you have to brace up and*

not to make peers hear sometimes as to how you would just move on from it" (IPGS9fD).

5.2.4.3.3 Learning the local language

Several IPGS told how they managed to circumnavigate their struggles with the language barrier that hindered communication abroad. IPGS just had to learn the native language to deal with the local language issues. For illustration, one said *"... I have learnt just trying to learn their language to understand and communicate better with them"* (IPGS10cD). On the other hand, one of the IPGS saw no offence in her not being fluent in the native language and, therefore, was prepared to mingle with the locals so that she could learn the language faster. The student commented:

> I think they just have to live with it [her broken native language], I try to pick up a sentence or two and they will laugh at the way I pronounce it. But once I was serious about getting to know them and associating with them, they were like ooh it's cool it's, ok just learn to know like that (IPGS13fM).

Avoidance: Conversely, one student decided not to mingle with people who did not appreciate that she was not conversant in the local language and chose to only socialise with those who accepted his situation of not knowing the language by narrating, "*I tried to avoid people who had such an attitude. I tried and befriended people who appreciate that you cannot learn a language in a day. It really takes time [knowing a language]"* (IPGS2cM).

IPGS demonstrated that they had to find ways of making sure the studies that made leave their native countries were successful by finding was of coping with the well documented challenges that they faced. This study revealed that IPGS used problem-coping strategies for those struggles that could be altered to resolve the struggle and emotion-coping strategies with issues or situations that could not be changed but could be managed by removing oneself from the stressful situation. IPGS also used adjustment-focused coping to challenges that they thought they could live with. Naturally, as seen from the reactions, students used a mixture of all the types of coping strategies which undeniably changed as students adapted to the struggles. Similarly, another study in Australia found no clear demarcation of the coping categories and in most cases, they used a combination of the three to deal with challenges depending on situations prevailing (Yue & Le, 2013:35). The same study in Australia corroborates

that most IPGS had a positive attitude towards the difficulties encountered because of the anticipated prestigious foreign postgraduate qualification. The article disputes the idea that whoever is studying abroad has intentions of gaining permanent residence and securing a job. The reason is that many international students are naturally dynamic individuals who are highly skilled at adapting to living and studying in a country they highly respect (Tran & Gomes, 2015:3) and made a deliberate effort to visit. For example, another Australian study of international students in the school of medicine of a certain university revealed that "the most significant factor that aided participants in their persistence and progression in the medical programme was their key goal of becoming medical doctors" (Malau-Aduli, 2011:11). Scholarly literature on IPGS has it that coping strategies effectively boost international student's psychological and social being (Yue & Le; 2013:35) and because IPGS made a deliberate decision to study abroad, which itself involves overcoming a range of barriers, they quickly adapted to challenging situations (Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen, 2021:688) and for that reason they generally preferred problem-coping strategies where they changed by solving the challenges (Rabenu & Yaniv, 2017:8).

From the evidence provided by this study, IPGS dealt with multiple challenges as part of their academic life. In the process, they developed various coping strategies which were employed simultaneously in their determination to complete their studies. Kahu's revised framework recognises the challenges experienced by non-traditional students and points at the institution as critical to helping IPGS cope with their studies (Kahu, 2013:69). The author submits that student engagement can be fostered for all students by adopting institutional practices that activate mediating mechanisms. Without that, the findings suggest students will always turn to friends and family if institutions cannot be of assistance because per Kahu and Nelson (2018), chronic or extreme anxiety can lead to disengagement and withdrawal. Hence the stance taken by IPGS to adopt coping mechanisms for the struggles is commendable.

5.3 Chapter summary

Based on the objectives of the study, Chapter Five presented and analysed the findings. The chapter also discussed the gathered findings which I filtered into the findings as voiced by IPGS. Similarities and differences of the findings with those of previous studies were highlighted and interpretations were then made thereof. The

theoretical frame and conceptual frameworks of the study were integral in contextualising the data presented in this chapter.

Overall, this study established that first, IPGS were positively engaged in their studies despite the challenges encountered because of their sheer determination to get the prestigious South African qualification. IPGS displayed their tripartite nature of engagement in the new environment through the behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement.

They displayed their behavioural engagement through sound and fruitful interaction with peers and supervisor. IPGS also participated in educationally purposive activities such as community projects and organised activities for both local and international students. To a limited extent IPGS displayed positive behavioural engagement by way of representing in the various fora of institutional student organisations such. IPGS similarly indicated to a lesser extent behavioural engagement by representing their diverse cultural activities. Most IPGS appreciated the knowledge shared with their peers while a few thought of peer interaction as a time waster.

For their emotional engagement, IPGS knew exactly why they wanted to study in a South African university. The shared emotions why IPGS decided to study in a South African university, include the desire to be closer to home, recommendations from people they knew and the support services offered in the university. However, for many it was because of the combination of the passions. Sometimes, IPGS presented mixed emotional engagement on campus. The evidence was that while some IPGS were satisfies with the feedback from supervisors, most narrated dissatisfaction due to delayed, inadequate and sometimes the lack of the feedback. Most IPGS felt little connection to the university as they felt segregated and negatively labelled by the locals because of their international student status and hence the exhibition of high departure intentions among international students. IPGS also bemoaned the inadequacy of the events that could lead to sense of belonging in the university. Nevertheless, IPGS paid gratitude to the support given by the institution coupled with that of staff and peers. Still, IPGS recognised the existence of programmes and activities that promoted sense of belonging to the university.

The respondents also displayed cognitive engagement by investing their intellect through research activities that stood to benefit the university and the host nation. IPGS as well demonstrated cognitive engagement by sharing their cultural diversity at organised on-campus events. Furthermore, IPGS were a pool of students that kept the university's postgraduate studies viable. IPGS were cognitively engaged by showing appreciation for education abroad and gaining the uncontested benefits of being IPGS. More importantly, IPGS applied themselves to their studies up to completion despite their high intentions of departure. Regardless of being positively engaged in their studies IPGS were concerned by the little recognition given to the diversity of IPGS as a valuable resource of cultural knowledge. However, IPGS appreciated studying abroad because of the array of benefits they stood to benefit as international students that include a broadened mind, a foreign qualification, greater employability, cultural diversity and civic participation

Professional support services were highlighted in the findings. Mostly, IPGS expressed dissatisfaction with the supporting services provided by the institution. It emerged that IPGS missed out on the orientation process because of different undergraduate and postgraduate calendar. IPGS missed the orientation because the process was held at the beginning of the undergraduate programmes before the beginning of the postgraduate programmes. This meant IPGS were ill prepared for the postgraduate work-setting and found it difficult to navigate the new environment and therefore felt disoriented. The narrations were that IPGS relied mostly on their peers and supervisors for the knowledge on the support services and procedures. IPGS thought the IRO was a letdown as their primary host. Students figured since all those working in the office were South Africans, IPGS struggles were not understood and had no empathy for them. Institutional support services identified by IPGS include financial support, the library, counselling, clinic, IRO, administration, student union and laboratories. IPGS gave suggestions on what they understood to the best practices for support services. The accounts included the need for a visible counselling service, an exclusive postgraduate library, a proper funding, mentorship and proper orientation.

The findings also revealed that there were genuine challenges peculiar to IPGS which local students would not encounter. The challenges encountered impacted negatively towards the students' academic engagement thus affected the quality of research

study. The most recurring struggle was that of financial constraints. IPGS were privy of IPGS who withdrew from their studies due to financial struggles. Students bemoaned the withdrawal of the work-study and for some it was withdrawn before completion of the study programme. Students also bemoaned discrimination when it came to the distributing of the institutional funding which they felt was in favour of the local students.

IPGS felt the COVID-19 pandemic affected IPGS as the institution had to suddenly close and international students were locked-down either in their native countries or the host country out of campus. Hence studies could not progress due to the close of the university activities as students had to wait for to defend their studies. The delay of the studies translated to a prolonged stay in the foreign country. Students also expressed lack of the promised institutional support for IPGS.

IPGS recounted lack of proper supervision hampered the progress of their studies which compounded to their anxiety. Some respondents complained of poor relationships with supervisors, conflicting supervisor reviews, lack of guidance and delayed or inadequate feedback, Completion of the studies was paramount to IPGS to prevent a longer stay in a foreign land.

Students also faced challenges with the delivery of the supporting services. IPGS had to endure the processes of obtaining a study visa. First, getting a study visa was a long procedure filled with the uncertainty of its success. Second international students found it impossible to switch universities as the institution of study was stipulated on the visa. Also, students would rather stay in the university rather than start the whole process of applying for a new visa. Still, there were some IPGS who had to struggle with expired visas if the study took longer than expected. Such students had to contend with the anxiety of the prolonged study and the expired visa. Hence international students had to study harder to beat the deadline of both the visa and the study.

IPGS' perspectives indicated difficulties with accommodation especially at arrival when the students were not yet familiar with the new environments and there was no one to turn to. This was despite the assurance of campus accommodation stipulated in the offer letter and the internationalisation Policy and Procedure document. Students felt let down by the institution.

Most IPGS agreed the language barrier made it difficult to navigate the new environment especially when they had to seek for supporting services in the various offices. IPGS also found it to interact with local students. The language barrier was aggravated by the reluctance of the locals to use the universal English language as a medium of communication. IPGS who spoke in English faced discrimination and stereotyping tendencies by the locals. Discrimination and stereotyping were in their own way challenges faced by international students through preferential treatment when it came to allocating supporting services such as funding and negative ideas local students harboured respectively. Additional IPGS had to deal with the anxiety of xenophobia tendencies among the locals. International students felt unwelcome and not belonging in the institutions and therefore they longed to complete their studies and return home.

To succeed with their studies IPGS had to deal with the struggles in their own way, particularly where the institution could not intervene, by developing coping strategies. IPGS dealt with the struggles by taking charge of the problems they could manage to change such as time management to ensure timeous completion of studies and earning an income to supplement on the meagre amount they had. Sometimes IPGS had to rely on family, peers, study groups and supervisors as coping mechanisms. The other coping mechanism adopted was to adjust to the challenges such as finding strength in their studies, learning to doing without some of the things which they could not find, adapting to the situation such as learning the local language and sometimes they had to avoid the stressor event, such as unwelcoming or unfriendly peers.

Chapter Six presents a summary of the findings, recommendations are also made and conclusions of the study are drawn.

CHAPTER SIX

CONSOLIDATED FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of the policy or practice to increase student involvement (Alexander Astin, 1999:519).

6.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by restating the purpose of this study and giving an overview of the preceding chapters. This is followed by presentations of major findings of the study to answer the research questions that guided this study. The significance and contributions of the study in the field of internationalisation higher education, with a focus on challenges confronted by IPGS, are then discussed. Finally, the report includes limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and conclusions.

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand student engagement and experiences encountered by IPGS at one South African university. The knowledge gained was meant to provide explanations of IPGS engagement challenges that could otherwise influence the level of engagement when studying abroad. Chapter One gives an overview of the study which began by giving the background, rationalisation and justification of the study. The statement of the problem was also given, followed by objectives and research questions that guided the study. Ethical considerations observed throughout the study were put forward together with the delimitations of the study.

Chapter Two outlined and contextualised Vincent Tinto's theory of Social and Academic Integration and Kahu's Student Engagement framework as applied to student engagement and attrition in HEI. Tinto's theory clarifies the ongoing and unfolding process from the time students enter the university and interact within its academic and social systems. The frameworks in this way provided scientifically based accounts of relevant variables that influenced the engagement process and provided explanations of ways in which the influences occurred (Alzaghoul, 2012:27). Alzaghoul (2012:27). The relevance of the theory also helped explain how the

institution provided more conducive learning environments as IPGS attempted to cope with the unique challenges they faced in the foreign environment.

In Chapter Three, the works from books, journals, reports, reviews and past theses were reviewed to bring clarity and focus as well as put forward what other scholars have done about the phenomenon under study. The literature reviewed indicated that South Africa as a nation, has witnessed a growth in the numbers of international students in its HEI (Chinyamurindi, 2018:209) with a diverse range of nations, backgrounds, experiences, skills and levels of English and local language proficiency (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:138). Therefore, they encounter difficulties which are unique to them and adapting to the new environment intensified with the demands of the academic and social severities associated with higher education (Perry, 2016:741). Having international students on university grounds in South Africa, therefore, necessitates an understanding of their challenges and provision of the right support systems (Talebloo & Baki, 2013:139) through national and institutional policies, processes and services for the realisation of student and institutional achievements (Department of Higher education and training: South Africa, 2017:11). Hence, the literature reviewed facilitated the identification of gaps in the existing body of knowledge and justification of the significance of this present study. Similarities were also drawn expanding the knowledge on the phenomenon under study. In that case, findings by other scholars were used for discussing findings and arguments for this current study, thereby contributing to the already existing body of knowledge.

Chapter Four described the systematic procedure that was followed in carrying out this study that investigated IPGS experiences studying at one South African university. The chapter contextualised the purely qualitative nature of this study situated in the interpretive paradigm. Hence, qualitative methods described in this study included semi-structured telephonic interviews and document analysis.

Finally, Chapter Five highlighted and discussed the research findings of this study in confirmation or contradictions of other research findings together with relevant comments on the area of study from literature.

6.2 Consolidated findings

In presenting and discussing data that informed the themes and categories that emerged, great care was taken to ensure that there was adequate alignment with the study research question. Consequently, the next section outlines how the study research questions were responded to.

6.2.1: Research question 1: What is the nature of IPGS engagement experiences with staff and peers at one South African university?

The findings from the first theme revealed the tripartite nature of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement among IPGS. The student engagement nature was consistent with the description of student engagement that featured interaction between student commitment to studies, the social system on campus, the perceptions and values of the student and the institution with the goal of academic achievement.

The study established that generally, IPGS demonstrated a positive tripartite nature of student engagement despite the highly documented unique challenges they were confronted with. The behavioural engagement was demonstrated through the typical postgraduate standards that included peer and supervisor interaction and participation in academic activities. Most of the participants professed a cordial interactive relationship with supervisors and peers by showing commitment in their studies and other enriching educational practices to achieve their academic goals. The anticipated educational outcomes cited by the respondents included cultural diversity, civic engagement, a broadened mind, academic excellence, expanded networks, multilingual proficiency, a foreign qualification, greater job opportunities and security, personal growth and exposure to a highly regarded South African education. Therefore, IPGS committed themselves to taking their roles as IPGS seriously. They committed their time and effort to their studies facilitated by the interaction between IPGS-staff and IPGS-peers. The nature of the commitment was displayed through IPGS taking the initiative to participate in what was expected of them as IPGS, demonstrated through active collaborative activities with supervisors and peers. The findings, therefore, parallel the definitions in the literature that behavioural engagement is seen through the typical college behaviour standards that drew on the idea of participation, diligent pursuit in studies, interactions, time and effort devoted to

studies (Hu et al., 2012:71; Pagar, 2016:7; Ndudzo, 2013; Willms et al., 2009:6; Derek, 2013:2; Olson & Peterson, 2015:2; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009:3), with students giving their gratitude to the guidance and mentorship from the supervisors.

However, the findings also revealed negative factors that could have hampered full participation and commitment. The study revealed that students wished for a relationship with supervisors that also fostered the social aspects that would otherwise address personal struggles of a social nature. That way, IPGS thought they could be understood better because some of the social issues affected their academic performance. This tallies well with Tinto's academic and social integration theory that advocates for a commitment to both academic and social integration in higher institutions of learning. Tinto says low commitment to either academic or social integration can negatively influence students' departure decisions (Chrysikos et al., 2017:98). Some students were also worried about the lack of compatibility with supervisors. This caused a strain on IPGS' lives, considering that the supervisor-supervisee relationship was to last the duration of their studies in the institution.

The findings also revealed that IPGS had a clear intent on why they wanted to study at a South African university. The choice to study abroad translated to high emotional engagement before even travelling to South Africa. For their motivation to study in South Africa, in their view, IPGS spoke about the variety of programmes offered in South Africa which could not be offered back home, the geographical location - particularly those in the SADC region, encouragement from friends and relatives, the prospects of a funded programme and the hope to secure a job one day in South Africa or back home. Interestingly, each respondent had not one, but a blend of the listed motives that impelled them to study in South Africa. Interest is theorised as both a motivation and an emotion and, therefore, it is one of the psychological influences that also act as motivation (Kahu et al., 2016:57). It can then be said that the combination of the decisions boosted each other, which explains the higher level of engagement expressed by IPGS, and which in turn predicted their positive academic ability, retention and outcome in the university.

The research also revealed a dark side of IPGS' experiences in the South African university. IPGS felt discriminated against and alienated by the university personnel who ignored them due to the language barrier, and the local students who felt IPGS

were in South Africa to occupy positions in the job market and to plunder South African resources. The situation could mean such emotions caused anxiety and diminished IPGS' sense of belonging in the institution that could have influenced their academic performance or increased their departure intentions because one interesting finding of this research was that all the respondents interviewed indicated that the thought of leaving the institution occupied their minds all the time. But due to their resilience, many IPGS never left the institution because of their determination.

The enrolment showed that at the time of this study, IPGS stood at 88 from the nine countries represented. From these numbers, IPGS thought they kept South African postgraduate programmes alive as the host nation drew many of its postgraduate students from international students. The IPGS also regarded themselves as a valuable learning resource because of their cultural diversity. By applying themselves in the postgraduate studies, IPGS also considered themselves an investment for the critical skills needed by South Africa. However, investigations show that IPGS sensed they were not fully utilised as an intellectual resource by the institution. As a result, they felt the institution was missing out on the richness of the divergent nature and capabilities of IPGS, corroborating comments made by Hanassab and Tidwell (2002:306) that educators should not undervalue the resources presented by international students because internationalisation builds institutional diversity in thinking as well as being a good source of cultural diversity. The country could as well utilise internationalisation as a springboard to its long road to transformation in terms of its inclusivity of foreigners. From these findings, the submission is that IPGS were cognitively engaged by their intellectual contributions to the university.

The study also confirmed the positive nature of cognitive engagement among IPGS by the value they placed in being international students. IPGS believed their exposure to the South African education and environments earned them a wide range of opportunities that they could have missed if they had studied in their native countries. Among the opportunities mentioned were the benefits of broadened networks, cultural diversity, different life perspectives, personal growth and the freedom to study without the interference of domestic distractions.

Overall, the findings established the tripartite nature of students engaged among IPGS which occurred simultaneously as students navigated their foreign environments. The dimensions distinguished student engagement in terms of the diverse ways of IPGS engaged (Hu et al., 2012:71). Evidence also suggests every one of the components of engagement had a positive or a negative pole which addressed each type of engagement, isolated by a gulf of non-engagement (Trowler, 2010:5). From the positives and negatives, the findings indicate that IPGS engaged either positively or negatively along the behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions. A lot of evidence, as articulated by IPGS, shows that it was effortlessly possible for IPGS to engage emphatically along at least one dimension while connecting contrarily along at least one dimension (Trowler, 2010:5).

6.2.2: Research question 2: *What professional services and resources are provided to support IPGS at one South African University?*

The question sought IPGS reflections about services and resources to support their engagement in the university. The evidence of the findings reveals that IPGS did not experience the orientation process. IPGS relied on senior colleagues, their own ingenuity, and supervisors to navigate the new environments. Students blamed the lack of orientation on the poor organisation by the institution and lack of initiatives by departments. The institution failed to recognise the different calendar of postgraduate studies from that of undergraduates and hence, IPGS missed out on the orientation as it occurred before postgraduate studies had begun. The lack of orientation meant IPGS missed out on the information which could have meant a quicker and better adjustment to the new environment (Fotheringham, 2017:104).

Nevertheless, IPGS were quick to credit the institution for being supportive despite its pitfalls. The study established that IPGS were appreciative of the array of professional support services and resources that the institution provided which contributed immensely to their positive nature of engagement in the university. However, all the respondents reported problematic issues accessing the resources. IPGS students complained that they were taken by surprise when the funding, which came in the form of a work-study, which had lured the students to study in the institution was later withdrawn. This left IPGS having to struggle with tuition and accommodation fees and having to take it upon themselves to solve their financial problems. As for the available

research fund, students met with administrative red tape which caused delays in the whole process.

IPGS had different opinions regarding the IRO being their primary host. One group of IPGS felt let down while the other was satisfied as they got what they wanted when they reached out to the office. This mixed feeling suggests that it was up to IPGS to take the initiative to reach out to the IRO if they needed service or resources provided since some believed the IRO tried to assist IPGS.

Students had several suggestions on what they thought could be the best practices to support IPGS as they embarked on the journey to get that prestigious certificate. The study established that there was a need for a visible and vibrant counselling service, mentorship programmes and support groups as stress and depression were common among IPGS. IPGS also suggested for reserved space to be installed in the library exclusively for postgraduate students as their level of engagement was different from those of undergraduate students.

Since the issue of funding featured prominently as one of the struggles among IPGS, the proposal was first; having a proper bursary which could boost the enrolment figures of IPGS in the institution; secondly, having reviews for adequate funding during the progress of the research and, lastly, the funding should be easily accessible in a short period without the bureaucratic nature impeding its access. Respondents exposed how the challenges of funding negatively impact their studies. Most importantly, IPGS suggested the implementation of a timely orientation dedicated to them as one of the services the institution should provide. This answers the challenges of the different academic calendars for postgraduate programmes. In line with that, one study emphasised the importance of the orientation processes that would ensure a positive welcome and transition of international students (Cowley & Ssekasi, 2018:111).

6.2.3: Research question 3: *What engagement challenges are faced by IPGS at one South African University?*

The findings of the research suggest that students faced challenges that influence their academic progress negatively. Financial constraints caused the most stress among IPGS. As mentioned earlier, the financial struggles were aggravated by the unforeseen withdrawal of the work-study programme that catered for tuition and

accommodation fees. Students also complained of the discriminatory process against IPGS when it comes to the distribution of available institutional funding where only local students benefitted. Therefore, IPGS resorted to securing accommodation out of campus, which created other problems such as limited use of the library because staying out of campus means a shorter stay in the library as they have to commute as well as avoid nighttime travelling.

Students also reported that their research progress was moving in the right direction until the Covid-19 pandemic which slowed the process due to the lockdown put in place the world over. The lockdown caused disorientation of IPGS as universities closed without warning and with no immediate contingencies for international students put in place.

IPGS argued that supervisors, in a way, contributed to their academic engagement challenges. Constraints such as delayed feedback, the issue of multiple supervisors, lack of informative and constructive feedback and a lack of commitment caused frustration and anxiety among students. These academic challenges meant delayed or non-submission of the dissertation which translated to the prolonged stay in the host country and subsequently introduced more academic and financial challenges.

The data collected revealed IPGS similarly encountered challenges with service and resource delivery. The process of getting a study visa took longer than expected causing international students to start their programmes later than local students. More so, students were filled with anxiety, not knowing whether the study permit was going to be successful or not. Some reported that they could not switch universities because the visa stipulated the university one enrolled with. Switching universities meant having to start the whole process of applying for a visa all over again.

Students recalled that they went through difficult times on arrival as they had no accommodation to start with. They were at pains explaining how they had no one to turn to for the provision of accommodation on arrival.

The results also proved language barrier was one of the key challenges as everything else hinged on the two-way communication for international students to get the services they required, more so, with the locals expecting them to converse in the native language on arrival.

Furthermore, results show IPGS were concerned about negative ideas local students harboured against them. From the responses, local students felt threatened by the presence of international students in South Africa because of the negative perceptions from the locals concerning their proficiency in the English language, academic and job prowess and the threat to local jobs. Similarly, IPGS also felt unsettled and expressed fear about the xenophobic tendencies of the host students. In a xenophobic environment, IPGS revealed that they lost connectivity, felt alienated and longed for life back home. The findings imply that the challenges related were unique to international students and the challenges were recurrent throughout their period of study. The extreme and chronic frustrations and anxiety that confronted IPGS could have led to disengagement and withdrawal of IPGS (Kahu & Nelson (2018), had it not been for the coping mechanisms adopted by IPGS.

6.2.4: Research question 4: *What strategies do IPGS employ to cope with their challenges at one South African University?*

The narrations from IPGS reveal that after experiencing challenges, IPGS made intentional efforts to react to the challenges as a coping mechanism for positive engagement in their studies. The findings reveal that IPGS took control of the problems that they thought they could change to the best of their advantage by dedicating their time to studies and dividing the remaining time into other worthwhile activities. Students reported engaging in income-generating activities while still concentrating on their studies. They also sort for part-time jobs to supplement the available resources.

The IPGS students also revealed that at times they had to deal with issues or situations that did not change but needed the intervention of other people. Hence, they relied on organisations such as research groups and at times on their supervisors in both the academic and the social challenges. For some IPGS who could not get adequate supervision, they had to look for expert advice from those in the know. For example, one student cited the methodology section of the research as the area she needed expert knowledge. For issues related to finance, IPGS turned to the family back home for intervention.

The study revealed challenges that needed IPGS to adjust to the situation. One such challenge is the expectation from local students for IPGS to be well conversant in the local languages. Despite the challenge, IPGS chose to ignore and alienate themselves and interact with only those who could use a universally accepted language such as English. The data shows that while some IPGS opted to learn the language quickly to overcome the language barrier, others chose to avoid situations that caused the challenge.

From the evidence provided, IPGS dealt with multiple challenges during their studies in a South African University. It is for that reason why Kahu's revised framework recognises the challenges experienced by non-traditional students such as international students and singles the institution as being critical to help students cope with their studies (Kahu, 2013:69). For this study, without institutional intervention on the unique challenges, IPGS developed and employed various coping strategies which they employed in their endevour to complete their studies.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The sample size was one of the limitations of this study. The data collected was generated from a specific university using a small size (22) of IPGS and one (1) IRO. The study also involved only those who were accessible through the phone. Future research of such student population should introduce a wider spectrum of data by including more institutions, supervisors and personnel that interacted with the IPGS regularly. Thus, the findings gave a limited generalisability that cannot be extended beyond the group studied. Nevertheless, since findings produced evidence of the challenges of IPGS by exploring a specific context with individuals, it is expected that readers will see resemblances to their situations and judge the significance of the information produced to their settings.

This study had the intention of engaging the dynamics and diversity of a focus group to stimulate discussion that would unmask data not possible to gather by individual telephonic interviews (Flick, 2009:196; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:59). But, due to the travel restrictions and social distancing rules triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, group discussions paused logistical scheduling and social distancing problems and, therefore, focus group discussions were not possible. The option of a virtual group

discussion was also a challenge due to the different study schedules of the IPGS. For the same reasons, the researcher could not be on-site for contextual and observational data. Hence, the researcher based the strength of this qualitative study on effective listening (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017:5) to the one-on-one telephone interviews as key to providing rich in-depth data that helped understand the shared participants' perspectives on challenges encountered during their studies (Kumar, 2014:132; Antwi & Kasim (2015:221). Similarly, more significant results can be achieved if various data collection methodologies can be triangulated.

This was an insider researcher, which meant being an IPGS in the institution of study, I brought my own biases to the study that could compromise the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data gathered. For that reason, issues had to be negotiated to manage the dual role of being the researcher and the researched. To do so, as detailed earlier in Chapter Four, I remained truthful, neutral, refused to be swayed by personal experiences and likewise resisted the temptation to share my own experiences with the respondents (Fleming, 2018:313).

Lastly, the data collected for this study was based on IPGS's introspection and recollection of what was happening before, particularly for former IPGS. Therefore, insights into these events might have changed over time or some detail might have been left out.

6.4 Contribution of the study

Generation to new knowledge Several studies have been conducted in South African HEI with a focus on student engagement (Strydom and Mentz, 2010: v; Schreiber & Yu, 2016:160; Pather et al. (2017:167; Wawrzynski, et al. 2012:107; Mokhothu and Callaghan (2018:1). To carry out the studies, researchers utilised the Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) based on the American National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) but adjusted to suit South African expressions and terminologies. The diversion by this study from previous studies is that this present study was a qualitative case study of a specific university where interviews were employed instead to collect the data. Also, the interview protocols were not standardised like the NSSE or the SASSE, instead, interview items were designed specifically for this current study based on the insider researcher perspective of this study, together with literature gleaned on student engagement. The identification of

the challenges and survival avenues through the relived narrations of IPGS, where excerpts were illustrative of the experiences, provided for original findings by the study. Thus, the study contributed to new knowledge.

Correspondingly, as insider research, the study also added knowledge to the expanding professional doctoral programmes where many academics are exploring their own HEI as case studies (Green, 2014:1). The study expanded the dimensions to data collection.

From the evidence given by the findings, the indication is that IPGS face challenges in higher learning institutions above the despite the high documentation in prior studies. Therefore, the commitment of this current study was to fill a void in challenges faced by IPGS given a specific institution of higher learning which might have its peculiar challenges to explore contemporary situations of international students' experiences abroad.

Contribution to theory: At the time of this doctoral study, I was an IPGS in the institution of study. The intent was to get an in-depth understanding of engagement experiences and challenges of IPGS in the institution. The insider researcher status meant I was already deeply embedded and involved in the study setting where IPGS narrated the lived experiences of the researcher's own institution which allowed for a contrasting perspective with research undertaken by an outsider researcher (Fleming, 2018:311). The status enabled a broader understanding and perspective of the constructs *IPGS engagement challenges* and *IPGS coping mechanisms*. Thus, providing a valuable contribution to theory. The costs of anxiety, such as college dropout, failure and ill health, because of the struggles IPGS go through are damaging at an individual, institutional and national level. Thus, this current study attempted to expand a profound contribution to the literature that would expand research on the engagement experiences of international students.

Contribution to research: In recent years, interviewing has transformed in response to the proliferation of technology as researchers seek alternative methods to reduce costs and increase the reach of their data sources (Block & Erskine, 2012:429). One way that researchers have approached this is through the increasing use of telephones in the collection of interview data. Due to the Covid-19 lockdown, this

research had to adopt telephonic interviews as it became impossible to carry out face-to-face interviews in the setting because international students and the researcher were locked down in their respective countries. By taking the alternative technological aspect of data collection, this study contributed to alternative data collection methodologies that suit the times of less mobility but more technology usage.To help develop this study, an intensive preliminary literature review was necessitated. It was during this literature review that a gap was glaring in information relating to IPGS in South Africa which focused on the challenges of IPGS in HEI. This study, therefore, advanced the research agenda by adding to existing knowledge on a focused study of student engagement experiences at one of the universities in South Africa. Likewise, several national and international studies reviewed, either utilised quantitative surveys or archival records to explore student engagement in learning institutions. This study, however, took a qualitative case study approach thereby generating primary qualitative data, adding to the existing literature on educational qualitative approaches to study student engagement in HEI.

Contribution to policy and practice: "The insider research is often done to improve practice through understanding, influencing and changing the direction and the position of others" (Fleming, 2018:312). Creswell (2014:4) also agrees that research is imperative for the continual improvement of practice. With such opportunities, this study enabled contribution to knowledge, meaning and understanding that is directly related and relevant to the practices in internationalised HEI. Knowing the level of IPGS engagement experiences and their challenges will impact the institution and the student, hence influencing policy and practice in the university.

Contribution to the institution Results availed information that can be used to help design services and resources that address IPGS' needs and generate continued development and improvement in hosting HEI systems to enhance the quality of IPGS' academic experience. Hence, the results of this study bring awareness of the implications of engagement of the student and institutional achievement. This is against the background that, generally, educators divert their energies on education at the expense of student welfare and retention (Willms, 2003:57). The use of a case study informed relevant authorities to view international student engagement challenges as unique to certain university peculiarities compared to the universal

approach to student educational policies and programme designs. Since the presence of IPGS adds to the diversity of institutional environments, this study suggests the utilisation of such diversity may positively influence the curriculum, policies, culture and relationships on campus if well-taken advantage of. This study assumed that the inclusion of IPGS in curriculum and policy planning engagement may be enabled and may equally reduce barriers to learning and positively influence IPGS and university output.

Contribution to IPGS: The study revealed that IPGS wished for a relationship that also focused on social issues which included personal challenges a student goes through. With the enthusiasm and willingness to participate in the study, demonstrated by the respondent during the interview session, it was evident that many were willing to share their views and need to be listened to. This goes with the saying that "A problem shared is a problem halved". The study, therefore, allowed IPGS to share their lived experiences with the entire world. Additionally, students will feel valued knowing that as part of this study their contributions to the study may influence the policy and practice of the institution under study. As a deduction, the participants developed a passion for the dialogue as they welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues with someone who ventured into issues that related to their own experiences.

6.5 Recommendations to policy and practice for the management of IPGS studies

Given the findings of this study that IPGS were self-motivated because of the initiative that they took to study abroad and yet they were confronted by challenges exceptional from local students, that could have impeded academic engagement. Thus, to improve student engagement it was essential to making recommendations that address policy and practice for the management of IPGS studies.

6.5.1 Enhancing IPGS engagement: The study confirmed the positive tripartite nature of engagement among IPGS. The different levels of engagement narrated by IPGS clearly indicated that the experiences and nature of IPGS engagement can be of better quality if departments can learn from each other how international students may fully engage and complete studies on time. Hence, the university must offer international students extra attention and consideration to encourage them to continue with the hard work and talent that they are known to possess. The success is based

on taking recognition of the unique nature of international students. The institution should focus on providing IPGS with meaningful opportunities to collaborate with peers and faculties in positive, supportive and welcoming environments, which can be enhanced through frequent and timely institutional social events.

6.5.2 Student-supervisor relationship: Postgraduate studies involve students spending a considerable amount of time with the same supervisors. Great effort should be put to ensure IPGS and the supervisors are well-matched. Hence, great importance should be accorded when appointing a research supervisor to an IPGS. Compatibility and taking cognisance of the roles of each in promoting student goals is the key to mutual supervisory relationships (Abiddin & West 2007:28; Bacwayo, et al., 2017:32). A cordial relationship will ensure students enjoy their experiences with sound emotions and conversely poor relations of the two parties will have a negative influence on the student's engagement and progress. The onus also rests on students managing the effectiveness and guidance of the supervisors as the progress of their studies also rests on the cordial relationship created.

6.5.3 IPGS orientation process: The study found out that when international students get into a foreign environment they get into a state of disorientation. Therefore, the orientation experience must be the initial service international students receive from day one of the new life in a university. Hence, once students are enrolled, effort must be made to ensure that they are well received and quickly assimilated into university life through the orientation process which will prepare them for what experiences to expect at the university. Departments must ensure late comers equally go through the same process. The orientation process must be mandatory and run at the institutional level if the calendar of all postgraduate programmes begins at the same time or at the departmental level for those who join the institution later. To achieve a successful orientation, institutions must invest adequately in campus readiness. Pre-arrival orientation through welcome letters with details of accommodation, on-campus orientation, local transport and arrival arrangements using welcome representatives for the new students must be considered for students who are entering the university for the first time. Before international students leave for their new destination, institutions should have a contact person who is of the same nationality as the international student to assist the new student get as much information as possible

before arrival. Above all, IPGS must be encouraged to take advantage of the IRO, international groups and any other support services that can help them with day-to-day life as well as the postgraduate academic demands.

6.5.4 Professional supporting services: The study revealed financial struggles were the most recurring challenges among IPGS. Since institutions make the deliberate move to enrol international students and are aware of the repeatedly documented financial challenges international students always face, it should be up to the universities to make provisions that international students will be financially secure. One way is to offer scholarships geared solely for IPGS as a crucial tool particularly in recruiting international students. Considering the indispensable benefit of IPGS, the institution should also consider reverting to the work-study which used to attract IPGS, if the institution is to maintain the presence of IPGS in its programmes. Also, if the funds are available together with other services and resources, they should be well promoted and accessible to all postgraduates. Additionally, the institution should put in place measures to ensure stable and secure funding so that students can make plans around it and do not have to change plans frequently. To borrow from England, IPGS can be allowed to remain at most two years in the country to increase international students' ability to pay back loans owed (Hegarty, 2014:229).

6.5.5 Mentoring and counselling services for IPGS: The study revealed that IPGS wished for a relationship with supervisors and peers that also fosters the social and advisory aspect of their life. IPGS student welfare is another important consideration. Although it is an institutional responsibility to provide support services such as learning skills centres, departments may be able to do more to ensure the well-being of their postgraduate. Mentoring is another approach, with some departments setting up formalised mentoring by staff or other students. Departments may also set up face-to-face or online support groups or networks for postgraduates, in which students can discuss more personal life as well as study-related matters.

6.5.6 Effective internationalisation policies for IPGS: Above all, suggestions can only be effective if institutions set operative policies and implement the policies with effective monitoring mechanisms, timely scheduling of the orientation process, scheduling supervision oriented workshops at particular time frames, mandatory follow up on the progress of postgraduate students by heads of department, allocating

specific contact hours for postgraduate candidates and their supervisors and tasking heads of departments to ensure that policies are affected.

Figure 6 is illustrative of the experiences of IPGS that was defined by their nature of engagement, professional supporting services, challenges that confronted students, how they coped with the challenges and the coping strategies adopted to cope with the challenges as they positively engaged in their studies.

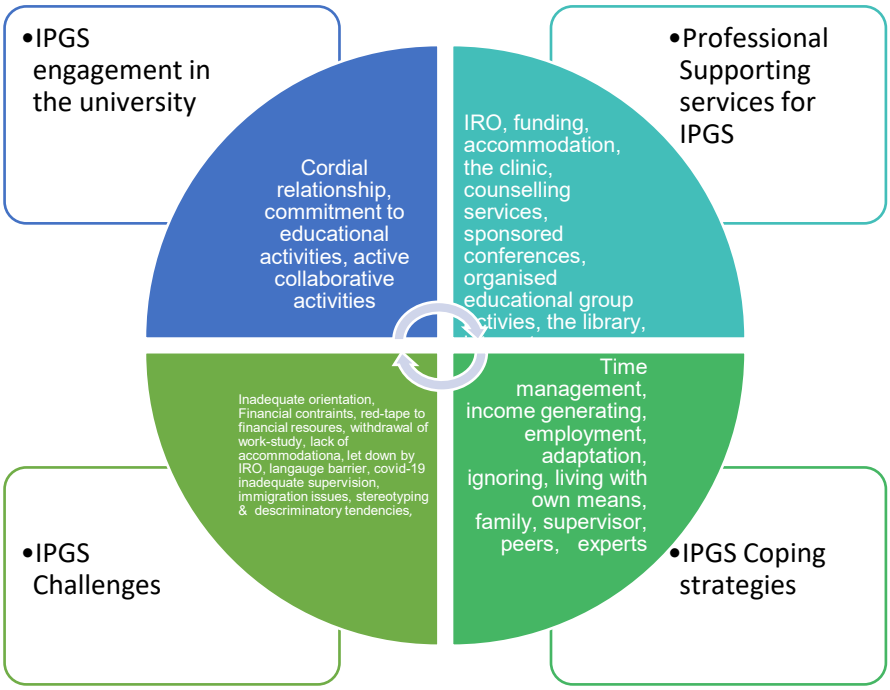

Figure 6.1 IPGS experiences, supporting services, challenges and coping strategies

6.8 Summary and conclusion

Using qualitative research methods, the study explored student engagement experiences and the challenges faced by international students. The findings suggest that IPGS were positively engaged in their studies despite the unique challenges such as financial constraints, language barrier, xenophobia, segregations, encountered when studying abroad. To enhance their engagement, IPGS employed varying coping strategies that included time management, supplementary income generation, interactional activities with peers and staff, expert advice, adaptation to suit certain situations and as a last resort, IPGS avoided the challenging events. Naturally, as heard from the reactions, IPGS used a blend of all the types of coping means which undeniably changed as they adapted to the struggles. Results also revealed IPGS' negative experiences through stereotypes and discriminatory tendencies of South

Africans towards foreigners. The implication of this could be that the challenges not eradicated or minimised led to failure, frustration, anxiety, stress and dropout for some IPGS.

Nevertheless, students were quick to appreciate the services and resources offered to IPGS by the institution. IPGS shared appreciation for the financial support from the institution, subsidised tuition fees for those in the SADC region, conferences attended with supervisors, study laboratories, exposure to local communities through projects. Conversely, IPGS were privy to the struggles they had to go through to access the available support and the lack of visibility of some of the supporting systems. For example, they complained about the work-study which was prematurely terminated leaving them financially stranded. IPGS had to rely on part-time employment to supplement income. As an insider researcher, I observed IPGS who used their skills to offer hairdressing, cake-making, printing services at the halls of residence

Measuring student engagement provided key insights into the IPGS' experiences in one South African university, which helped understand challenges encountered, how they managed the challenges and the provision of support service for student engagement. Conversely, results provided for the understanding of the departure intentions of IPGS. Results availed information that can be used to enhance the quality of IPGS' academic experience to help design services and resources that address IPGS' needs and generate continued development and improvement in hosting HEI systems. Overall, the lived stories told by IPGS left this insider researcher with an introspective and empathetic understanding of the nature of student engagement and challenges experienced by fellow IPGS in the university. Finally, integral to the phenomenon being studied, it was stimulating and evoking a roller-coaster of emotions.

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APPENDIX A

University of Venda

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum Studies

SUBJECT: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: Ms. Chiweshe M

Reference is made to the above subject:

1. Mrs. Chiweshe, M, student registration number **16023539**, is registered for the Doctor of Education (DED) degree in the Department of Curriculum Studies, School of Education.
2. Her study topic is; **Student engagement challenges encountered by international postgraduate students at one South African university**
3. As part of her studies, she is required to select relevant study site/s and sample study participants for data collection.
4. The University has approved her study proposal as ethically valid for data collection and she can provide your office with the relevant documents in this regard.

Based on the information above, permission is requested for Mrs. Chiweshe to conduct fieldwork for the study.

Thank you

Signature:  Date: 30 March 2021

Prof T Runhare
Co-Supervisor

APPENDIX B

7 May 2021
Mrs. Misozi Chiweshe
Student number:16023539
Degree registered: DED
Institution enrolled: University of Venda

RE: Request for Permission to Conduct Research

To the Registrar
University of Venda
University Rd
Thohoyandou 0950

South Africa

My name is Misozi Chiweshe a DED student at the University of Venda. I wish to conduct research for my Doctoral thesis entitled; **Student engagement challenges encountered by international postgraduate students at one South African university.**

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct a study at your university.

I will provide you with a copy of my proposal which includes copies of the data collection tools and consent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on telephone number 263 773 408 917 or email address misozichiweshe@gmail.com

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Misozi Chiweshe

University of Venda

Edward Nkhangweleni Lambani <Edward.Lambani@univen.ac.za> Mon, 17 May, 13:08

to me

Dear Misozi Chiweshe, your request is hereby approved. Good luck and all the best in your project.

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM/INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICE

Title of Study: Student engagement challenges encountered by International postgraduate students at a South African university

Name of Researcher: Misozi Chiweshe

Hello, my name is Misozi Chiweshe. I am a graduate student at the University of Venda and I am carrying out a study on **Student engagement challenges encountered by international postgraduate students at your university.** This research will fulfil my Doctoral degree requirements. Your university has been chosen as the case of this study. You were selected because you are in the office of international relation at this university. Please verify if you meet the criterion.

Recently I posted an introductory letter through e-mail informing you of my intentions where you were asked to respond if you were interested. This is a follow-up to your response as an interested interviewee. I appreciate your willingness to help with my study. What we learn from this study will help enhance retention and success at this university. Please note that our conversation will be tape-recorded to allow for the capture of everything while we engage in an attentive conversation.

I anticipate that the interview will take less than an hour to complete. There is no compensation nor is there any known risk from the study. To ensure that all information is kept confidential, your name will not be recorded. I will use a code: IRO. Copies of the report will be submitted to the School of Education. Participation is strictly voluntary. Please know that you can pull out from the study at any time, if you so wish, with no explanation required.

Excerpts from our conversation will be used during data analysis to voice your responses. I assure you that all your comments will be treated with confidentiality. During data analysis, information from all other respondents will be combined and analysed together and, therefore, nowhere in the report will the names of participants or universities be attached to the comments. After completion, the works of this study will be published.

Thank you for consenting to this interview. I will now switch on the recorder and we begin with the first question.

1. Stating the country of origin, please share with me the present enrolment of international students at your university.
2. What is your comment on the trend of IPGS enrolment in the past five years?
3. What do you think attracts IPGS to your university?
4. Please share with me the orientation process of IPGS at your university?
5. Are there any challenges that you face during the induction of IPGS?
6. What formal activities promote IPGS interaction with your office?
7. Suggest an ideal environment that would support IPGS academic experiences at your university.

8. Tell me the challenging aspects to their achievements.
9. Other than academic work, what other activities are organised for IPGS that promote student engagement at this university?
10. To what extent do institutional policies or any other documents promote the idea of IPGS' sense of belonging to this university?
11. Please explain to me how IPGS responds to university activities? What do you think is the reason for your response?
12. How are the IPGS integrated as a resource at this university?
13. How engaged are IPGS as a student representative at this university?
14. As the primary host to the IPGS, how proactive is this office at reaching out to IPGS who are at risk of dropping out or those who are on road to delayed graduation?
15. How proactive are the IPGS in reaching out to this office?
16. Describe the communication pathways between the IPGS and the IRO?
17. What challenges have come to the attention of this office that the IPGS encountered during their studies at this university?
18. How frequent are the challenges brought to you?
19. How does this office get feedback on the IPGS engagement experiences and challenges at this university?
20. Besides your office, what other professional services are available that support the IPGS engagement at this university?
21. We are now nearing the end of our conversation. At this point please tell me your general view about IPGS at this university.
22. We have come to the end of our conversation, is there anything else, related to this conversation, that you think we might have left out that you think will add value to our discussion?

APPENDIX: D

CONSENT FORM/INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Title of Study: ***Student engagement challenges encountered by International postgraduate students at a South African university***

Name of Researcher: Misozi Chiweshe

Hello, my name is Misozi Chiweshe. I am a graduate student at the University of Venda and I am carrying out a study on **Student engagement challenges encountered by international postgraduate students at your university.** This research will fulfil my Doctoral degree requirements. Your university has been chosen as the case of this study. You were selected because you are/were an international postgraduate student at the university. Please verify if you meet the criterion.

Recently I posted an introductory letter informing you of my intentions on the UNISU WhatsApp group where you were asked to respond if you were interested. This is a follow-up to your response as an interested interviewee. I appreciate your willingness to help with my study. What we learn from this study will help enhance retention and success at this university. Please note that our conversation will be tape-recorded to allow for the capture of everything while we engage in an attentive conversation.

I anticipate that the interview will take less than an hour to complete. There is no compensation nor is there any known risk from the study. To ensure that all information is kept confidential, your name will not be recorded. I will use a code; (a) IPGS (b) order of participation (c) programme status. Copies of the report will be submitted to the School of Education. Participation is strictly voluntary. Please know that you can pull out from the study at any time, if you so wish, with no explanation required.

Excerpts from our conversation will be used during data analysis to voice your responses. I assure you that all your comments will be treated with confidentiality. During data analysis, information from all other respondents will be combined and analysed together and, therefore, nowhere in the report will the names of participants or university be attached to the comments. After completion, the works of this study will be published.

Thank you for consenting to this interview. I will now switch on the recorder and we begin with the first question.

Demographics
Respondent code ……
Sex…….
Programme……
Nationality ……..

1. What motivated you to pursue your studies in South Africa?
2. When you meet with your supervisor who initiated the meetings?
3. What educational issues did you sometimes discuss with your supervisor?

4. What educational activities did you collaborate with your supervisor?
5. Is there anything else you expected from your supervisor to support your study?
6. How prompt was the feedback from your supervisor?
7. How did you perceive the progress of your research?
8. What do you think contributed to that kind of progress?
9. How did you find the challenge of the academic work which was required of you?
10. How did you deal with that level of challenge?
11. How proactive were you in reaching out to your supervisor?
12. How proactive was the supervisor in reaching out to you?
13. Describe the kind of relationship you had with your supervisor.
14. What challenges, if any, did you experience with your academic work?
15. How did you deal with the challenging experiences?
16. Are there any other comments you would like to add that you think we should have discussed concerning academic work?
17. Tell me about your experience with the orientation process.
18. As an IPGS, what services were you aware of that supported your studies? How did you come to know of the services?
19. What resources are you aware of that support your studies at the institution? How did you come to know of the resources?
20. Suggest other services and resources that you feel the university should provide.
21. How proactive was the office of international relations in reaching out to IPGS?
22. How proactive were you at reaching out to the office of international affairs?
23. To what extent did the office of international affairs nurture a culture of connectedness at the institution?
24. To what extent did you think you belonged to the institution?
25. How engaged were you as an IPGS representative at the university?
26. How are IPGS integrated as a resource at the university?
27. What specific challenges did you encounter in relation to support services and resources at the university?
28. Did you ever think of leaving the institution before completion? Why was it so?
29. Are you aware of IPGS who left the university before completing their studies? If any, what were their reasons?
30. Would you recommend higher education in a foreign country to others? Give your reasons for that.
31. How did time as an IPGS contribute to your present life?
32. How did the academic achievement benefit you?
33. As a last thought. what challenges did you encounter as an IPGS at the institution?
34. We have come to the end of our conversation, is there anything else, related to this conversation, that you think we might have left out that you think may add value to our discussion?

APPENDIX E

Demographics profile of the IPGS N=22

Participant	sex	Home country	Programme	Status of study	Area of specialisation
IPGS1cD	Female	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Current D**	School of Environmental Sciences
IPGS2cM	Male	Zimbabwe	Masters	**Current M**	School of Environmental Sciences
IPGS3fD	Male	Nigeria	PhD	**Former D**	School of Environmental Sciences
IPGS4fD	Male	Democratic Republic of Congo	PhD	**Former D**	School of Environmental Sciences
IPGS5cD	Female	Kenya	PhD	**Current D**	School of Agriculture
IPGS6cD	Male	Nigeria	PhD	**Current D**	School of Environmental Sciences
IPGS7fD	Female	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Former D**	School of Education
IPGS8cD	female	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Current D**	School of Human and Social Sciences
IPGS9fD	Female	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Former D**	School of Human and Social Sciences
IPGS10cD	Female	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Current D**	School of Human and Social sciences
IPGS11fM	Male	Democratic Republic Congo	Masters	**Former M**	School of Agriculture
IPGS12cD	Male	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Current D**	School of Mathematics and natural Science
IPGS13fM	Female	Cameroon	Masters	**Former M**	School of Management sciences
IPGS14fM	Male	Zimbabwe	Masters	**Former M**	school of Management Sciences
IPGS15fD	Female	Cameroon	PhD	**Former D**	School of Management Sciences
IPGS16cD	Female	Zimbabwe	Phd	**Former D**	School of Management Sciences

IPGS17cD	Male	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Current D**	School of Education
IPGS18cM	Male	Kenya	Masters	**Current M**	School of Agriculture
IPGS19cM	Male	Nigeria	Masters	**Current M**	School of agriculture
IPGS20fD	Male	Swaziland	PhD	**Former D**	School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences
IPGS21fD	Female	Uganda	PhD	**Former D**	School of Human and Social sciences
IPGS22fD	Female	Zimbabwe	PhD	**Former D**	School of law

APPENDIX F

Table 5.3: Themes and categories of the findings

THEME	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
5.2.1 Theme 1: Nature of IPGS engagement in the university	5.1.1 Behavioural engagement	5.1.1.1 Interactive activities with supervisor 5.1.1.2 Collaborative activities with supervisor 5.1.1.3 Feedback from the supervisor 5.1.1.4 Student-supervisor relationships 5.1.1.5 Student-peer interaction 5.1.1.6 Educational activities with peers
	5.1.2 Emotional engagement	5.1.2.1 Motivation for studying in a South African university 5.1.2.2 Sense of belonging to the university 5.1.2.2 Thoughts of dropping out 5.1.2.4 IPGS representativeness in the university
	5.1.3 Cognitive engagement	5.1.3.1 IPGS representativeness in the university 5.1.3.2 Perceptions of the progress of the research 5.1.3.3 Integration of IPGS as a resource 5.1.3.4 Contribution of being an international student 5.1.3.5 Benefits of academic achievement 5.1.3.6 Recommending higher education to others 5.1.3.7 IPGS as a resource for research output
5.2.2 Theme 2: Supportive professional services and resources for IPGS	5.2.1 Insights about the orientation process	5.2.1.1 Lack of pre-orientation 5.2.1.2 Lack of the orientation process 5.2.1.3 Poor orientation process 5.2.1.4 Sourcing information about support services and resources
	5.2.2 International relations office as a support service	5.2.2.1 International relations office reaching out to IPGS 5.2.2.3 Introspection on IPGS reaching out to the international relations office
	5.2.3 Resources and services that support student studies	5.2.3.1 Beneficial institutional support services available include access to health facilities, accommodation, library, internet 5.2.3.2 Resources available for IPGS to support their studies include financial support 5.2.3.4 There are counselling services that help international students
	5.2.4 Institutional based support needs for IPGS	5.2.3.1 the need to improve on the support system 5.2.3.2 the need for special treatment of IPGS 5.2.3.3 Lack of financial support, accommodation, library and internet, Inadequacy of funding Difficulty in accessing the funding 5.2.3.4 the need for mentorship The need to schedule an orientation for IPGS
5.3 Engagement challenges faced by IPGS	5.3.1 Challenging experiences with academic work	Supervision challenges 5.3.1.1 Difficulty in methodological processes 5.3.3. Financial constraints as research for PhD requires some funding to have quality research. 5.3.4. Covid-19 slowed the progress due to travel restrictions put in place.
	5.3.2 Interactional challenges experiences	Stereotypes about international students Language barriers as communicating with other colleagues will be difficult Anxiety of xenophobia
	5.3.2 Challenges faced by IPGS about services and resources	5.3.2.1 immigration challenges 5.3.2.2 discriminatory treatment in the university 5.3.2.3. Language barrier with personnel Accommodation arrangement on arrival

5.4 Strategies employed by IPGS to cope with challenges encountered	Reaction of IPGS to challenges	5.4.1.1 problem-focused coping 5.4.1.2 Emotion-focused coping 5.4.1.3 adjustment-focused coping

APPENDIX G

Table 4.2 Summary of interviews

Date	Place of interview	Country of origin	Activity	Participant	Interview Time	Duration (Minutes)
25/10/2021	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS1cD	3:04	28.53
28/10/20	Swaziland	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS2cM	10:46	41:25
2/11/2020	South Africa	Nigeria	Telephone interview	IPGS3fD	10:34 11:09	1:02:37
4/11/2020	South Africa		Telephone interview	IPGS4cD	3:37 3:50 4:40 4;41	9:50 11:41 12:58 0:52
4/11/2020	Kenya	Kenya	Telephone interview	IPGS5cD	20:41	36:15
5/11/2020	South Africa	Nigeria	Telephone interview	IPGS6cD	16:07	17:34
13/11/2020	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS7fD	11:09	1:07:16
16/11/2020 17/11/2020	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS8cD	14:05 08:24	31:48
17/11/2020	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS9fD	2:39	31:21
23/2/2021	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS10cD	12:25 12.47	44:14
23/2/2021	South Africa	DRC	Telephone interview	IPGS 11fM	17:21	40:29
15/3/2021	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS12fD	18:36	28:23
20/3/2021	South Africa	Cameroon	Telephone interview	Post masters IPGS13fM	8.25	48:57
21/3/2021	South Africa	Zimbabwean	Telephone interview	IPGS14fM	14:20 16:03 20:20	1:47:50
22/3/2021	Cameroon	Cameroon	Telephone interview	IPGS15fD	10.05	50.23

23/3/2021	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS16cD	16.34	47.33
25/3/2021	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS17cD	15.15	55.03
25/3/2021	South Africa	Kenya	Telephone interview	IPGS18cM	20.34	45.23
26/3/2021	South Africa	Nigeria	Telephone interview	IPGS19cM	17.34	44.55
O4/4/2021	Swaziland	Swaziland	Telephone interview	IPGS20fD	14.10	47.43
10/04/2021	Uganda	Uganda	Telephone interview	IPGS21fD	13.34	40.30
12/04/2021	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Telephone interview	IPGS22fD	10.05	30.59
1/6/2021	South Africa	South Africa	Telephone interview	IRO	10:08	1:07:15

EDITORIAL REPORT

THESIS TITLE: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT ONE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

CANDIDATE: MISOZI CHIWESHE

I was tasked to (language, technically and ideationally) edit a draft of the above-titled doctoral dissertation. This entailed:

- proofreading the entire draft;
- making changes or suggesting changes to phrases/sentences therein to improve readability;
- highlighting or eliminating the unnecessary repetition of words, phrases or ideas/points;
- making changes to or adding punctuation where necessary;
- making suggestions as to the placement of words, sentences or paragraphs to ensure cohesion and coherence within the document;
- highlighting phrases or sentences that I, as a (lay) reader, was unable to make sense of, or that appeared inaccessible to the ordinary reader;
- highlighting phrases or sentences that were incomplete, or incorporating missing words where it was possible to deduce what these were;
- ensuring consistency – or pointing out inconsistencies – throughout the document in the use of either UK or US English spellings;
- highlighting technical, ideational and conceptual issues that will need to be attended to by a technical editor.

All changes made, suggested changes or comments were tracked to allow the client to reject or accept them as she sees fit, since she is ultimately the author of the thesis and the content therein.

I am available to assist the client should she require further explanations or clarifications about the editing process.

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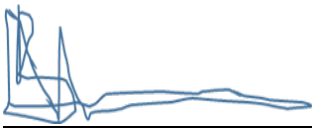
Signature:  **Date:** 14.12.2020