



**PRE-ENTRY ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING
TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Subethra Pather, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.

— Nelson Mandela

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DEDICATION

For my parents: Amma and Papa

Matha, Pitha, Guru, Deivam (Mother, Father, Teacher & then God)

ABSTRACT

The research question that guided this doctoral study is: How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance? The study was designed within the qualitative research paradigm and employed a case study strategy to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative approach included a questionnaire that was completed by 195 respondents. The qualitative data was obtained from one-on-one and focus-group interviews with eight participants that were purposively selected. The conceptual framework developed for this enquiry took into consideration the significance of student diversity in understanding first-year experience and thus employed concepts from two sociological models, Tinto's (1975; 1993) integration model (social and academic integration) and Bourdieu's (1984; 1990) theoretical tools of capital, habitus and field. Six key themes emerged from the data: determination, self-reliance, fitting-in, out-of-habitus experience, positioning oneself to succeed and challenges.

The unequal distribution of economic, social and cultural capital created disparities between students' habitus and schooling experiences which influenced the way they integrated into their first year at university. The study revealed that more mature students than school-leavers and gap-students are entering higher education. Further, the majority of first-year students are unable to fund their studies and source external funding or engage in part-time employment. Students pursued financial aid before focusing on academic activities. Engagement in the social domain remained marginal. Students' determination to change their economic circumstances was the primary factor that influenced their attitudes and actions at university.

Higher education needs to consider student diversity, financial constraints of disadvantaged students, first-year curriculum planning and delivery, and the high cost of university studies. It needs to move away from viewing entering students from a deficit model, to capitalise on their qualities of determination, optimism, enthusiasm and openness to learning, thereby creating an inclusive first-year experience that could encourage retention and student success.

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The legacy of apartheid education places an enormous responsibility on universities. The sins of our fathers visit us in the underprepared generation of learners we have to guide and shape to be the creative and productive future of our country. The challenge is to be caring, responsible and innovative; and to be truly South African in our practice and approach, being neither patronising nor claiming of entitlement.

President Nelson Mandela (1998),

(Address by President Nelson Mandela on the installation of Professor Bundy as Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand)

GLOSSARY: ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACT	American College Test
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education & Training
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FET	Further Education and Training
FP	Foundation Phase
FYE	First-Year Experience
GET	General Education and Training
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ISP	Intermediate and Senior Phase
NAO	National Audit Office
NBT	National Benchmark Test
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SES	Socio-Economic Status
STD	Self-Determination Theory
TE	Teacher Education

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Challenges facing higher education in South Africa

Since the advent of democracy, the student population at South African universities has become racially and culturally diverse. In accordance with the rich diversity of a mixed student population, students' needs and expectations have become increasingly heterogeneous (Nelson et al., 2011). The need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to appreciate, and adjust to, such diversity is particularly urgent among first-year students. The first-year experience has been highlighted in recent research as a critical factor with regard to persistence, academic performance, retention, assessment and success (Harvey et al., 2006). McInnis (2001) identified the first year as a year in which the highest degree of academic failure and attrition occurs. Students' first-year experience and perceptions have a major impact on their study options and participation in higher education. The first-year experience may be a decisive factor in the success or failure of students' university studies (Kantanis, 2000; Hillman, 2005). McInnis (2001), together with Nelson et al. (2011) demonstrate that the significance of religious, racial, economic and cultural diversity on students' first-year experience has been underestimated: further research is essential on how diversity can add value to the first-year experience of all students and consequently the overall pass rate if the relevant tertiary institution understands, appreciates and makes adjustments for such diversity. Consequently, many HEIs have begun to shift their attention to analysing who their first-year students are and the levels and scope of their first-year experience. Nelson et al. (2011) note that this trend has, to date, been depicted loosely and imperfectly as 'student-centredness'.

Given the foregoing, this study aims to investigate South African higher education students' first-year experience and academic performance. The selected problem parameter for the study is a cohort of first-year teacher education students in a university of technology. The selected setting is used as a vehicle to explore certain key aspects of students' first-year experience: students' pre-entry academic and non-academic backgrounds and the influence of such factors on their social and academic integration in their initial year of study. McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) identified social and academic integration as strong predictors of university life satisfaction. For a first-year student to be successfully integrated into university life,

integration must take place in both the social and academic domains (Tinto, 1975; Hillman, 2005). First-year students' level of integration can be influenced by internal and external factors. Tinto (1975, 1993) considers students' initial commitment to the university and their goal to graduate as directly influential in their level of social and academic integration which could determine whether they decide to stay and persist or drop out of university.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: background to the research problem, neglected areas in the literature with regard to this study, teacher education in South Africa as the context for the study, the research questions, aims and objectives of the study, research design and methodology, definition of concepts used, and finally a conclusion. Figure 1:1 below provides a graphical overview of Chapter 1.

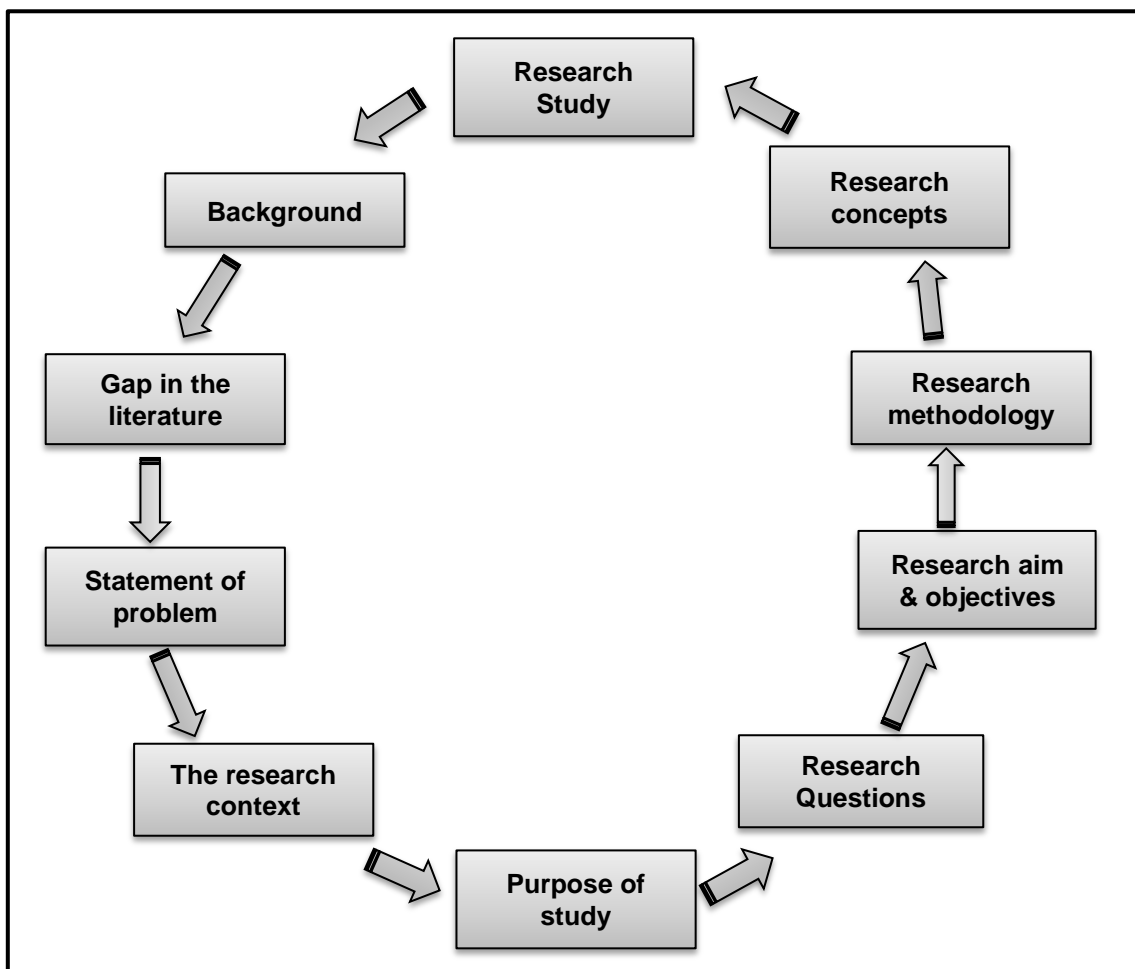


Figure 1:1 Chapter 1 – overview

1.2 Background to research problem

Since 1994, South Africa's new democratic government has committed itself to transforming higher education and its inherited apartheid social and economic structure (Badat, 2010). The South African Constitution of 1996 (South Africa, 1996) and the White Paper of 1997 contain the primary policies which underpin the transformation of higher education. The underlying objective of the policies was to eradicate all forms of unfair discrimination and advance the process of redress of past inequalities (DoE, 1997). One of the key imperatives of transformation was that student enrolment should be expanded and access broadened to reach a wider distribution of social groups and classes (DoE, 1997).

1.2.1 *Changing HE landscape: from elite to mass-based system*

The Ministry of Education had a specific role to play in advancing transformation goals: the creation of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education (DoE, 1997). Two specific outcomes that the Ministry of Education sought to achieve were:

- increasing and broadening participation to reach a wider distribution of social groups and classes, including adult learners, thereby accommodating a larger and more diverse student population (DoE, 1997:1.13); and
- the promotion of equity of access and fair chance of success to all (DoE, 1997:1.14).

During the era of white nationalist government control of education, the University of South Africa (Unisa) used distance learning to reach students from all racial groups in South Africa. This was the only institution, in the pre-apartheid era, which provided access to a non-racial mass education at a tertiary level. At traditional universities, however, there was racial segregation, which still has an effect on academic staff and students. Freedom in 1994 brought with it a drastic shift in focus in South African higher education at traditional universities which are the focus of this present discussion. The pool of students entering higher education expanded and became richly diverse (Jarvis, et al., 2004; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Student numbers drastically increased, doubling enrolment figures from 473 000 in 1993 to 893 024 in

2010 (DHET, 2013). Female students outnumbered male students by an increasing margin of 55,5% (CHE, 2009). The new enrolment trends also showed a different racial imbalance with more students from historically under-represented groups entering higher education and resulting in at least 50% representation of African¹ students in traditional universities (CHE, 2009).

These changes in the country's student demographics indicated a shift in higher education institutions from being elite and racist to inclusive and democratic. The elite system of the past favoured and cossetted a single race group of students who generally possessed the fundamental skills necessary for higher education (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Trow, 2006). The change to mass education has successfully produced a student body that is more representative of the South African population, one which reflects diversity in language, socio-economic and academic backgrounds, culture, religion and race (Asmar, 2004). However, the broadening of university access brought with it a host of new challenges for South Africa's HEIs. Foremost was resistance to such change from traditionally white elitist tertiary institutions. Little attention has been paid to the difficulties faced by underprivileged students from underachieving schools, economically depressed environments and homes offering minimal learning support. Many traditional universities have been slow to adapt their staff component to reflect the national profile. Moreover, such institutions have not been prompt to make substantial adjustments or sacrifices to ensure their students' social or academic wellbeing. Such tardiness prevents the management at universities from acknowledging the potential advantages and benefits that may be drawn from a diverse and socially representative student body whose democratic and open interaction is possibly the most reliable guarantor of understanding and future equity in the country as a whole.

It seems fatuous to point out that such problems are not unique to South Africa. Many international countries faced with student increases at HEIs were challenged with addressing problems that included under-preparedness of first-year students (Engstrom, 2008; Kift et al., 2010), concerns with retention and persistence rates

¹ This study makes use of the four population groupings used by Statistics South Africa: African, coloured, Indian and white. Black refers to the African, Coloured and Indian population.

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto 2007) and the need to institute first-year support programmes (Morsi et al., 2007; Tinto, 2007).

1.2.2 Student attrition and persistence

Within the context of massification, a number of problems presented themselves, especially with regard to student attrition and persistence. The National Plan for Higher Education expressed concern that South Africa's HE throughput rates were too low and that the graduation rate of less than 22% for a three-year generic bachelor's degree was one of the lowest in the world (DoE, 2005). Interestingly, this is a problem faced internationally as well, but at a lower level. For example, in the United States of America an average four-year university degree suffers the loss of 29% of its new students in the first year of study (ACT, 2004) while South Africa loses 30% of its students in the first year and an additional 20% in the second and third years of study (DoE, 2005). Tinto (1993) identified the first-year student cohort as the group at greatest risk of attrition from university. In Schneider's (2010) study on first-year student attrition the following areas of concern were highlighted: prior academic performance, academic and social integration, and academic and psychological readiness. According to Terenzini et al. (2001) and Terenzini and Reason (2005), attrition rates are even greater among low-income, historically under-represented students and first-generation students.

1.2.3 Dealing with the problem: focus on first-year students

The Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation in South Africa acknowledged the need to maximise students' chances of success (DHET, 2010). The summit highlighted the following areas that needed attention: importance of, and challenges around, understanding students' first-year academic and social experience; the influence of the First-Year Experience (FYE) to high dropout and low throughput rates; and finally the importance of providing first-year student support for academic success (DHET, 2010). The focus on first-year intervention has been identified in other national and international studies. These studies all emphasise the importance of the first year of study with regard to providing foundation knowledge; frontloading academic support; and enhancing academic success and persistence. For example, Reason et al. (2006) identified the first year as the most critical year for

laying the foundation on which students' subsequent academic success and persistence rest. Other studies on the FYE reveal the first year of study to be the most significant phase of the student experience in relation to academic success and persistence (Tinto, 1995; McInnis, 2003; Yorke & Longden, 2008). According to Krause (2006), exploration of students' first-year experience assists in determining student attitudes and approaches to learning and, as a result, makes it possible to improve retention and student success.

1.3 Bridging the gap in the literature?

This study bridges a gap in the literature by contributing empirical research to the first-year experience field by means of examining what, how and why certain pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence students' first-year experience and academic performance. The understanding of this phenomenon was pivotal to the increase in the diversity of the higher education student body that has added complexity to the nature of students' first-year experience. Traditionally, much of the research and literature on higher education student experience and retention has overlooked the influence of students' backgrounds and characteristics (Reay, 2012). Tinto, who for the last 35 years has been acknowledged as the leading expert on student retention, makes reference to students' backgrounds and characteristics in passing and places greater emphasis on students' social and academic integration within the campus climate (Tinto, 2007). However many of the studies on student retention consider the students' pre-entry characteristics, such as socio-economic status, academic experience or age, as control variables rather than considering each of these key factors 'investigated as variables whose effects are important to understand' (Walpole, 2007:8). In addition, Wilcox et al. (2005) note that many studies on the first-year experience that employ Tinto's concept of social and academic integration rarely discuss the concept of integration in detail. These studies lack analysis on how and why such social and academic integration takes place. Harvey et al. (2006) concur with this formulation and acknowledge that although there has been a large amount of data collected on students' first-year experience at the institutional level, a relatively insignificant amount has been reported with a view to explicitly exploring students' personal experiences in their first year of study.

In South Africa there has been limited research on university students' first-year experience. The majority of the literature reviewed for this study focused on research questions related to the academic and social issues within the university environment, such as student learning, academic support, social networks, student retention, and dropout rates. Having reviewed international studies, for example, Dumais and Ward (2010), Lane and Taber (2012) and Gaddis (2013), I noticed a shift in focus toward the role played by social class, capital and habitus vis-à-vis students' educational experiences and academic success. I realised that the issues external to the university environment cannot be ignored when investigating the first-year experience. I recognised this area as a gap in the literature concerning the first-year university experience. There need to be more studies in South Africa that investigate students' first-year university experience by considering the influences of factors outside of the university environment, such as students' habitus, different forms of capital resources that students bring with them into the university environment, and their prior schooling experiences. Given the context in which higher education institutions in South Africa have rapidly increased in student complexity, I believe that there is a growing urgency for a critical exploration and understanding of students' higher education experiences through the voice and individual experiences of first-year students.

This study thus aimed to bridge this gap in the literature by identifying and exploring the influences of pre-entry academic and non-academic factors on students' first-year experience and academic performance. The focus of this study is on investigating and identifying how certain pre-entry factors influence students' social and academic integration in their first year of study. By employing the pragmatic viewpoint together with concepts from Bourdieu's (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993) theories, I sought to bridge this gap in the literature. Tinto's (1975, 1993) model on integration and Bourdieu's (1984) conceptual tools – capital, habitus and field – allowed this study to provide an in-depth understanding of the complexities of this phenomenon. This study makes use of a conceptual framework that integrates the concepts from these two theorists to consider the significance of pre-entry factors such as prior schooling experience, religious, racial, economic and cultural diversity in influencing the way students negotiate their first-year university experiences.

Tinto's model of integration provided the scope to be descriptive and provide explanations at a practical level. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field were used as both conceptual and analytical tools. Finally, the justification for employing concepts from Bourdieu's (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993) theories in the conceptual framework model was to address the lacunae in the literature on the first-year experience. The use of concepts from these two theorists provided an explanation of how the social, academic and cultural environment in which students were raised shaped their attitudes and interpretation of their first-year experience, as well as their capacity to engage with academic and social integration in their first year of study (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

1.4 Statement of problem

The high attrition rate at undergraduate level, and more specifically at first-year level, has raised concerns about the low throughput rates, graduation rates, and the quality of student experience within the context of expanding student numbers and resource constraints (Wilcox et al., 2005; CHE, 2013). These concerns have prompted an urgent need to profile more accurately the students entering higher education so that appropriate measures could be implemented to ensure a quality university experience which could result in improved throughput and graduation outputs. Presently, South African's higher education student population is very diverse. Students entering higher education come from differing social, economic and cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and levels of education which influence their university expectations, needs and academic potential. Limited empirical research on these issues within the South African context has resulted in a challenge, specifically when trying to address issues on low throughput and graduation rates in higher education.

If South Africa is to offer quality education, it is imperative that HEIs understand who their students are, where they come from, and the qualities and attributes these students bring with them to higher education. In addition, HEIs need to move away from viewing today's entering students from a deficit model and try to capitalise on their qualities of determination, resilience, enthusiasm and openness to learning.

1.5 The research context: teacher education in South Africa

One of South Africa's greatest challenges is providing quality education to sustain the country's human resources. In this regard teacher education plays a pivotal role as Wolhuter (2006:124) states: 'Any education system stands or falls by the quality of its teaching profession, and therefore, by implication, the quality of its teacher education programmes.' Good quality teachers imply the need for good quality teaching programmes. Owing to the poor literacy and numeracy levels of school students in South Africa judged against international standards and the low percentage of Grade 12 students qualifying with a university entrance certificate, the country's schooling system is facing several serious quality problems at the tertiary level (Wolhuter et al., 2012). This is a cause for concern because education is viewed as key to effecting an economic, social, moral, political and value reconstruction of society (Wolhuter, 2010:6-7). The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2013) adds that South Africa's social stability greatly depends on the establishment of an educated, trained and employable workforce. In addition to the country's national concerns about the quality of school education, contributory fears relate to the high teacher attrition rate and the imminent shortage of teachers in the country.

1.5.1 Current teacher profile in South Africa

Latest statistics on teachers in South Africa (DBE, 2012) indicate that there are approximately 440 000 teachers employed. The *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa: 2011-2025* reveals that although 89% of these teachers have a professional teaching qualification, only 18% of them are graduates, that is, have a four-year degree or equivalent (DBE & DHET, 2011). In addition to the worrying statistics on teacher qualifications, the age and experience of South African teachers indicate a concern for future supply and demand in the teaching profession. A large percentage (42%) of teachers is aged between 45 and over, while only 5% are under the age of 30 (DoE, 2009). This implies that not many young students are choosing teacher education. Teacher experience statistics reveal that many newly qualified teachers are not entering the profession in South Africa. For example, in 2004 there was a total of 36% of teachers with fewer than five years' experience compared with 9% in

2009. The loss of young teachers will certainly create a drain on the vitality of the teaching force (Shisana et al., 2005).

The demographics of teachers in South Africa in some significant ways represent the demographics of the country. The Department of Education (DoE, 2009) reveals that the percentage of teachers according to the four racial groupings in South Africa is as follows: 79% of the teachers are African, 10% white, 9% coloured and 1% Indian. Close to two-thirds (67%) of the teachers in South Africa are women.

1.5.2 High teacher attrition rate: a national concern

Presently the teacher attrition rate in the country has stabilised around 5%–6% per annum (DoE, 2007:7; DoE, 2009:22). According to Crouch and Perry (2003), the high attrition rate peaked with the redeployment and rationalisation of teaching around 1997/1998. Teachers were found to be in excess at their schools in accordance with the teacher–pupil ratio set by the South African government: this led to many teachers being redeployed to areas of teacher shortage. This caused many teachers either to resign, opt for early severance packages, or be dismissed. In addition to the redeployment of the teachers at schools, the closure of the colleges of education that were spread across the country, including some in remote rural areas, resulted in a limited number of students gaining access to teacher education institutions. The closure of colleges of education meant that teacher education providers were concentrated mainly in the richest provinces, making accessibility a major problem (Welch & Gultig, 2002).

Rationalisation and redeployment escalated teacher attrition and contributed to a shortage of teachers in the country. Welch and Gultig (2002:17) highlight the following consequences on teacher education:

- The teaching profession was perceived by the public to have limited career prospects.
- It created the impression that South Africa had too many teachers.
- Many newly qualified teachers could not find employment.
- There was a decline in the prestige, predictability and attractiveness of teaching as a profession.

In Gordon's (2009) study it was noted that a high rate of teachers leaving the profession was experienced close to the end of their careers, for example, through early retirement, medical incapacity, or death. The effect of HIV-related illnesses increased attrition across all phases in teachers' careers. By contrast, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) notes that the highest rate of attrition actually occurs early in the teacher's career owing to job changes, further education and childbirth. Other factors of attrition were ascribed to the school environment: overcrowding of schools and classrooms; inadequate incentives and job rewards; poor parent participation; policy overload; conflicting role demands; lack of administrative and collegial support; insufficient involvement in decision making; and favouritism and nepotism (OECD, 2008; Pitsoe, 2013).

Currently, a major concern is South Africa's teacher attrition rate, which is much higher than the replenishing rate. According to Steyn (2006), if the country's attrition rate of teachers remains at 5% and teacher training institutions experience an attrition rate of 10%, which is not unreasonable, this implies that there should be approximately 84 900 students in training which will break even with the attrition rate. Steyn (2006) highlights that teacher education institutions in South Africa have an enrolment figure of around 25 600. This low replenishing rate is supported by Gordon (2009), who warns that South Africa would need between 20 000 and 30 000 new teachers for the next decade. Gordon (2009) voices a concern that the rate of graduates from teacher education institutions in South Africa is far lower than required in the profession. Nevertheless, South Africa is not alone with regard to the teacher shortage crisis. Pitsoe (2013) indicates that this trend seems to be global: two-thirds of the world's countries experience severe teaching shortages. Pitsoe quotes Unesco's 2009 statistics that divulge a global total of 10.3 million teachers needs to be recruited between 2007 and 2015 to address this shortfall.

In Pitsoe's (2013) article on teacher attrition in South Africa, he critically analyses the country's teacher retention policy and proposes that by rethinking attrition and retention policies through the lens of the incentive theory of motivation, teacher attrition can be reduced and its impact on the country avoided. Pitsoe (2013:317): identifies four most promising options that can assist South Africa to reduce teacher attrition through motivation:

- Higher salaries: An across-the-board salary increase for all teachers will make the teaching profession more attractive.
- Differentiated salaries: Additional compensation should be provided to teachers teaching in designated shortage areas, for example, in specific subject areas, certain geographical regions such as rural areas, or within student populations: low-achieving or high poverty. This gesture would improve the attractiveness of particular teaching positions to alleviate chronic shortages.
- Smaller class sizes: Reduction in class sizes as an alternative would be favoured by many teachers especially in overcrowded schools. This would improve working conditions and make teaching more attractive.
- Mentoring: Mentoring programmes provide support, advice and encouragement to new and inexperienced teachers which would make their employment more attractive. This would improve working conditions of teachers.

High teacher attrition rates escalate the demand for more teachers in South Africa. To add to this dilemma of urgent teacher demand is the immediate recruitment and migration of South African teachers to other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Dubai and countries in Asia. In a news article captioned 'Teacher exodus' (Samodien, 2008), she contends that the poaching of South African teachers and principals by overseas institutions has become a worrying factor for the Department of Education. In Samodien's interview with a teacher migration specialist, he estimated that between 25% and 30% of all graduating teachers leave annually to teach abroad. The migration specialist added that between July 1997 and July 2006, more than 10 000 teachers from South Africa had migrated to the UK, a number much higher than in any other country. Although it is not clear as to how many South Africans are presently teaching abroad or how long they remain abroad (Bertram et al., 2006) it is still a concern that needs to be addressed.

The second pressing concern with regard to the dilemma of high teacher demand is highlighted by the increasing population of those under the age of 18 in South Africa. Statistics South Africa's 2011 census reveals that the country's total population is

estimated at 50 million people, of whom 18.5 million are children under the age of 18. School-going children therefore constitute 37% of the total population, a rapid growth by about 6% (one million) over the 10-year period from 2002 to 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2012). For the country to provide good quality education to the increasing school population, the teacher supply–demand crisis needs to be addressed. Thus the focus of attention has now turned to teacher training institutions as a way of helping to alleviate the problem.

1.5.3 *Teacher training in South Africa*

Under apartheid, higher education in South Africa was skewed in ways designed to entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white minority (Bunting, 2006:52). Higher Education institutions were established along the racial divide. From 1990–1994 there were 21 universities and 15 technikons (polytechnics) that constituted higher education and 93 teacher training colleges catering for the African, coloured, Indian and white population groups of South Africa. The highest number of institutions from the three distinct types catered exclusively to the white population of the country. It was in this context that the new higher education policies of the new democratic government sought to reshape the system into one that met the goals of equity, democratisation, responsiveness and efficiency for all South Africans (Bunting, 2006).

In the new democratic South Africa, teacher training colleges underwent a radical transformation. Owing to the restructuring of higher education, many teacher training colleges were forced to close their doors; some colleges were forced to merge with other teacher training colleges which were later incorporated into higher education in the form of universities and technikons. Essop (2008) acknowledges that by incorporating the colleges of education into higher education it laid the basis for elevating the role, status and quality of teacher education in the country. However, the restructuring process brought with it a number of negative consequences, such as the following:

- The reduction in the number of teacher training institutions offering teacher education programmes resulted in a significantly lower number of individuals enrolling for such programmes.

- The fees that individuals had to pay at the higher education institutions were significantly higher than those at teacher training colleges.
- As many of these higher education institutions were located in urban areas, this limited the access of many potential students from rural and out-of-town locations (DBE & DHET, 2011).

Although initially these negative consequences drastically reduced enrolment numbers in teacher training programmes from 1995–2005, the past few years have shown a change in this trend. In 2005 there were 23 610 student teachers enrolled fulltime at contact universities in the BEd programme. By 2007 there were 33 546 student teachers enrolled at the 22 universities across the country. The 2009 enrolment numbers showed an increase of 25% from 2008 (DBE & DHET, 2011). In the same year, 2009, there were 5 942 new teachers who graduated (DHET, 2010: 8), but this figure was still far below the suggested requirement of between 20 000 and 30 000 new teachers annually (Gordon, 2009).

1.5.4 *Teacher education students*

There have been few studies that focus on the essence of the character or nature of being a teacher education student in South Africa. Wolhuter et al. (2012) maintain that not much research is available on what exactly inspires, motivates or drives student teachers to enrol in teacher education programmes. In addition, there is a gap in the literature with regard to understanding who our teacher education students are, what qualities they bring with them into the profession, and what attributes of the student teachers could be enhanced to ensure that students remain and succeed as newly qualified educators. Studies undertaken on career paths of education graduates reveal that many newly qualified teachers drop out of teaching within the first five years in their careers (Geysers & Wolhuter, 2001). A significant percentage of final-year teacher education students indicate that they have no plans to enter the teaching profession (Bertram et al., 2006).

This study focuses on pre-entry factors influencing teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance. The examination of such factors is intended to contribute to knowledge concerning who the students entering teacher education in South Africa are. If teacher education institutions wish to address the

issue of teacher supply, it is imperative that they understand the nature of the students entering the teaching profession. Wolhuter et al. (2012) assert that many students enter teacher education, but opt for the profession only as a choice of last resort. Pitsoe (2013) agrees with Wolhuter et al. and adds that teaching has become a 'stopgap' profession or a profession of 'last resort'. This mind-set of teacher education students has resulted in many prospective teachers not being intrinsically committed to the profession (Wolhuter et al., 2012). This has a negative impact on the quality of the teacher who exits from the teacher training institution and subsequently enters the teaching profession as an uninspired and uninspiring teacher.

1.6 Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to identify and explore pre-entry factors that influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance. A cohort of first-year BEd undergraduate students at a university of technology was selected as a case study. A pivotal process was the investigation of students' pre-entry academic and non-academic factors and their influence on how the students integrate into the academic and social environment during their first year of study. Several questions emerged during the review of literature on the first-year experience, academic performance and retention, but the following key research questions outlined in the next section guided this research.

1.6.1 Research questions

Main RQ: How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?

The following sub-questions were identified:

Sub-RQ1: Who are our first-year teacher education students?

Sub-RQ2: What are the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that first-year teacher education students bring with them to higher education?

Sub-RQ3: To what extent do pre-entry factors that students report influence their social and academic interaction in their first year of study?

Sub-RQ4: To what extent do these factors contribute to the students' first-year experience and academic performance?

This study was located within a university of technology in Cape Town, South Africa.

1.6.2 Research aims and objectives

The over-arching aim of the study is twofold: first, to identify and explore factors influencing the first-year experience and academic performance of teacher education students and second, to identify strategies for first-year student support.

The objectives of the research are to:

- gain a better understanding of who the first-year students entering teacher education programmes are;
- gain familiarity with specific pre-entry factors that influence teacher education students' first-year experience;
- ascertain how these factors influence students' first-year academic and social integration and academic performance; and
- propose strategies to enhance the quality of students' first-year experience in higher education.

1.7 Research design and methodology

This research study is located predominantly within the pragmatic worldview, which is unique in key worldview elements. Pragmatism, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), is an example of a single paradigmatic stance. According to Wheeldon and Åhlberg (2012), the pragmatic approach to understanding reality and developing knowledge occurs through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Using this process provided this study with an enhanced understanding of enquiry from which the fundamental nature of students' first-year experience and academic performance was elicited.

This study is designed within the qualitative research paradigm and uses the case study approach as the main research strategy. According to Harrison (2002), a case study is more aptly described as a strategy than a method: it sets out to address the understanding of a phenomenon within its operating context. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) describe a phenomenon to be a particular event, situation, programme, or activity which is researched in its natural context and is bounded by space and time. This study was focused principally on students' first-year experience at a higher education institution as its situation. It was bounded by a particular group of students, specifically first-year teacher education students, while the bounded time period was for one academic year, namely their first year of study.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods which consisted of two distinct stages. The first phase of the study collected quantitative data through questionnaires mailed to all first-year students accepted into the BEd undergraduate programme. The objective of the quantitative data was to provide an initial description of first-year students entering the BEd programme and purposefully select participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Purposeful sampling provided a source of information-rich cases that were studied in depth.

Qualitative evidence was collected from eight first-year BEd students using semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews. Priority in this study was given to the qualitative method because qualitative research represented the major aspect of data collection and analysis. Qualitative research refined the study and defined the experiences and perceptions of participants in much greater detail. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), qualitative research pursues a deeper understanding and description of human experiences than explanation and prediction of human behaviour. Participants selected for the study reflected the gender and racial balance of the BEd first-year cohort of 2012 of the case study. The purpose was to ensure that the conclusions adequately represented the range of variation.

Data was collected over a period of one year. The collection of data was sequential: the quantitative data was collected first. The rationale for collecting quantitative data was that it provided a general picture of the research problem and provided a backdrop for the first two research questions: who our first-year teacher education students are and what pre-entry academic and non-academic factors they bring with

them to higher education. Quantitative data was integrated with the qualitative data. Quantitative data contributed to the selection of participants for the case study and development of questions for semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews with selected participants were conducted at the end of the first term, three months after commencement of the course. At the end of the academic year, the same set of participants were invited to a focus-group interview. The intention was to identify pre-entry factors that teacher education students considered influential either in assisting or hindering their first-year experience. Participants' final academic scores were used as secondary data to determine academic performance. The results of the two phases were integrated during the discussion of the outcomes of the entire study.

The analysis of data relied mainly on thematic analysis as a means of organising data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. For the purpose of this study, for the researcher to be fully engaged with and immersed in the corpus of data, thematic analysis provided the most effective means of organising and describing how participants made meaning of their first-year experience in rich detail. For example, student teachers' perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences were analysed in an attempt to approximate their reality.

For the development, support and management of quantitative analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, since 2015 officially named IBM SPSS Statistics) was used. SPSS is capable of handling large amounts of data and was useful in electronically capturing and storing data from all the questionnaires received from respondents. The use of SPSS in this study facilitated examination of relationships between different questions, generating descriptive data and creating graphical illustrations of the data.

For the development, support and management of qualitative analysis, the Atlas ti computer program assisted; the Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used. CAQDAS has become a basic tool for qualitative researchers and is designed not to undertake the analysis for the researcher, but rather as a tool to aid the researcher in the processing of analysis. In this study, qualitative data collected from one-on-one interviews and focus-group interviews was uploaded to

Atlas ti. The CAQDAS package facilitated the processes of segmenting, categorising, annotating, retrieving, and searching within and across individual transcripts captured and categories identified. More importantly, Atlas ti allowed analysis of qualitative data in this study to be handled in an efficient and accessible manner.

1.8 Clarification of basic concepts and terms

Pre-entry academic factors: For this study, pre-entry academic factors refer to students' prior schooling experience: the school they attended, their academic performance at school, and their interactions with school staff and peers.

Pre-entry non-academic factors: For this study, pre-entry non-academic factors refer to demographic, socio-economic, family, and community influences.

First-year student (FY): Refers to an undergraduate student in his/her first year of study at an HEI.

First-Year Experience (FYE): FYE has a broad definition and encompasses all aspects of student life on campus. In this study, the identification by Krause et al. (2005) of key areas that make up the FYE is used to understand phenomena such as transition to university; aspirations of students; balancing work, study and social commitments; social and academic integration on campus; student satisfaction; and response to courses in the programme of study. The term 'student experience' is used interchangeably with student engagement, which is often applied in higher education (Harvey, 2008).

Student Expectations: In this study, student expectations refer to students' anticipation of a particular occurrence, FYE. According to James (2002a), student expectations are highly individualised and linked to their diverse nature.

Student Attrition: Refers to first-year attrition and is defined as the number of students who do not return to their chosen programme after the first year of enrolment. It refers to students who drop out of the programme.

Student Retention: Refers to students who complete the first year of study and have enrolled in the second year of study in the same programme. In this study student retention and first-year persistence are used interchangeably.

First-Generation Student: Refers to a student whose grandparents, parents or siblings have not earned a tertiary degree (Engle, 2007).

Academic Integration: Is described in this study as the students' academic associated perceptions and experiences with regard to their learning and the activities necessary for their learning: programme orientation; commitment and affiliation; students' formal interaction with lecturers and peers; use of the library; and attending out-of-class academic support activities.

Social Integration: Is described as the students' socially associated perceptions and experiences that arise from their social involvement with other students and lecturers in or out of university: informal interaction with lecturers; peer relations; participation in campus activities; use of campus facilities; and sense of belonging in the campus community.

Field: Bourdieu's concept of field is described as a socially structured space in which individuals play out their engagements with one another. Bourdieu regards every field as a situation of struggle, competition or conflict: the objective for each individual is to optimise his or her accumulation or retention of 'capital' (Swartz, 1997). This study is contextualised within the higher education field. The focus of this study is on what factors first-year students bring into the field of higher education that supports or constraints their first-year experience.

Capital: Bourdieu defines capital as any resource that holds symbolic value within a field and therefore acts as a currency that individuals take with them to the field. Bourdieu identifies the following three types of capital: economic capital, which he regards as capital that can be immediately and directly be converted into money; cultural capital that is mainly a product of education; and social capital that indicates an individual's social connections or networks (Bourdieu, 1986:245). Each of these types of capital has a social value and can be 'inherited', through the circumstances of early upbringing, or accumulated, exchanged and leveraged, like economic capital (Swartz, 1997).

Habitus: Bourdieu's concept of habitus emphasises the importance of history: it consists of 'a set of historical relations "deposited" within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:16). Thus habitus creates dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in a certain way (Lehmann, 2007). In this study first-year students' habitus is investigated to understand integration into the higher education field.

1.9 Organisation of the study

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to this study. Chapter 2, titled 'Conceptual Framework', outlines the two principal theories: Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration model, focusing mainly on academic and social integration, and Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice, focusing mainly on his theoretical tools: capital, habitus and field. These two fundamental theories are used to develop the conceptual framework for exploring how certain pre-entry factors were entrenched in a student's habitus and capital that influenced his/her social and academic integration into the higher education field.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed review of literature that pertains to the first-year experience in the higher education field. First-year experience literature examined in this section includes increasing student access, student diversity, student retention, first-year transition, and academic success.

Chapter 4 details the research design and methodology used in this study. It provides the rationale and justification for the study's design within the qualitative research paradigm. It employs a case study strategy to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions of this study.

Chapter 5 presents quantitative data derived from the mailed questionnaires received from the 195 respondents prior to their entering the BEd programme. This section makes use of descriptive statistical analysis and inferential techniques that include the use of correlations and *t*-test values to discuss the following characteristics of the first-year BEd student cohort entering higher education: demographics, socio-economic circumstances, prior academic experience, and students' expectations of their first year of study.

Chapter 6 presents the qualitative empirical evidence derived from in-depth one-on-one interviews and the focus-group interview. The five concepts within the conceptual framework, habitus, capital, field, social integration, and academic integration, provided a suitable framework to present and discuss pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that participants identified as either supporting or hindering their first-year experience and academic performance. The qualitative evidence was presented under the following six themes: determination, self-reliance, fitting-in, out-of-habitus experience, positioning oneself to succeed, and challenges.

In Chapter 7, empirical findings from Chapter 5 and 6 of this study are interpreted and discussed. Owing to the wide range of themes and sub-themes that emerged from Chapter 5 and 6, and in order to offer clarity in the discussion chapter, the themes and sub-themes were further categorised, grouped and reduced to two data sets for discussion: pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing the first-year experience and academic performance; and adjusting to first-year experience and academic performance.

Chapter 8 concludes the study with a synopsis of the research journey, knowledge developed and recommendations for future action and research.

1.10 Conclusion

This introductory chapter provided a comprehensive introduction to the discussion and research on the first-year experience in higher education. The background and rationale for such a study was identified, and the influence of this study in contributing to the research body of knowledge on the first-year experience was highlighted. The context of the study, teacher education, was underscored. The research design, methodology and key concepts were emphasised in this chapter. The next chapter outlines the conceptual framework that informed this study.

CHAPTER 2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The key purpose of this study is to identify and explore how first-year teacher education students' pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence their first-year experience and academic performance. I review a range of theories that focus on the first-year experience at HEIs. What was evident from the literature reviewed was that many of the theories highlighted the first-year experience from different perspectives, such as student retention, student attrition, academic performance, student engagement, and student success (Astin, 1985, 1993; Bean, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Berger & Milem, 2000; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). My research concern is complex and based in the South African context: many of the theories I reviewed partially covered aspects of the concern. These theories add to the understanding of studies on students' involvement in academic and social systems of the university, but the focus of these theories remains fairly limited (Reason, 2009). From the considerable list of literature that I reviewed, it was evident that many of the theories did not significantly address my research questions. The theories did not explicitly incorporate or emphasise the role and/or influence that students' habitus and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) may have on the way they experience university life and academic performance. Many of the theories on student persistence, retention and success focused on issues within the institutions, that is, the intra-university environment, but neglected to take into account students' prior dispositions.

The widening and increased participation in South Africa's higher education milieu over the past 20 years has resulted in diverse students entering universities. Many students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and educational experiences (CHE, 2013). In alignment with this study's research concern, exploring students' pre-entry dispositions becomes particularly important in understanding and interpreting students' first-year experience and academic success in the South African higher education context. In this regard, I focus on specific concepts from two theories to inform this study: Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration model, concentrating mainly on academic and social integration, and Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice, focusing mainly on the theoretical concepts he defines: capital, habitus, and field.

A sound and well-considered theoretical matrix is essential when conducting research. Imenda (2014) states that the importance of theory to inform research is mainly because theory and research reinforce what is learned through practice to create knowledge within a given discipline. Kerlinger (1973:9) defines theory as 'a set of interrelated constructs or concepts, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with a purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena'. When a researcher is conducting research, he/she needs to select a theoretical platform or specific concepts within a theory to inform his/her research. Nonetheless, Imenda (2014) adds that if a researcher finds that his/her research problem cannot be meaningfully researched with reference to only one theory or those concepts that reside within one theory, then the researcher can bring together a number of related concepts to explain or provide a broader understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This synthesis of concepts can be regarded as a conceptual framework which provides an integrated way of examining a particular research problem (Liehr & Smith, 1999).

In this study, concepts from two theories are used to develop a conceptual framework that provides conceptual tools for exploring the interrelations between first-year students and their social contexts. The conceptual framework developed for this study not only provided a basic structure on which to build this study (Bell, 2005) but provided grounds for my research to gather together all the 'isolated bits' of empirical data into a coherent conceptual framework (Cohen et al., 2001). This framework allowed me to explore the first-year students' use of their personal habitus and capital in supporting or challenging their first-year experience and academic performance in the new higher education field.

A conceptual framework can be a visual or written product that explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main aspects to be studied, According to Miles and Huberman (1994:440), a conceptual framework lays out the key factors, constructs or variables, and presumes relations among them which are used as a way to understand or explain the phenomena under investigation. The following main research question provided guidance in developing the conceptual framework for this study:

How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?

The conceptual map, Figure 2:1 on page 26, provides a guide to my thinking process which culminated in a comprehensive conceptual framework being developed for this study. In this chapter, the next section (Section 2.2) highlights the significance of a conceptual framework. It considers various authors' views with regard to constructing, using and interpreting a conceptual framework. Jabareen's (2009) guideline for developing a conceptual framework is used to inform the development of this study's conceptual framework, which is based on the work of two theorists, Tinto (1974, 1993) and Bourdieu (1984).

Section 2.3 below is divided into three parts. The first elaborates on Tinto's (1974, 1993) student integration model. The second part of this section reviews empirical studies undertaken in higher education that are underpinned by Tinto's integration model. The final part of this section concludes by exploring some criticism of Tinto's integration model.

Section 2.4 considers the second theorist's contribution to the conceptual framework of this study. This section is divided into three parts. The first part elaborates on Bourdieu's (1984) conceptual tools: field, habitus, and cultural capital. The second part reviews empirical studies completed on higher education that utilise Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field. The final section includes a critique of Bourdieu's three concepts.

Section 2.5 of this chapter concludes with the visual presentation that places this study within a clear and well-constructed framework which, according to Atkins and Wallace (2012), allows the study to be conceptualised with similar studies but not regarded as a stand-alone study. The five concepts: habitus, capital, field, social integration, and academic integration are discussed with reference to this study.

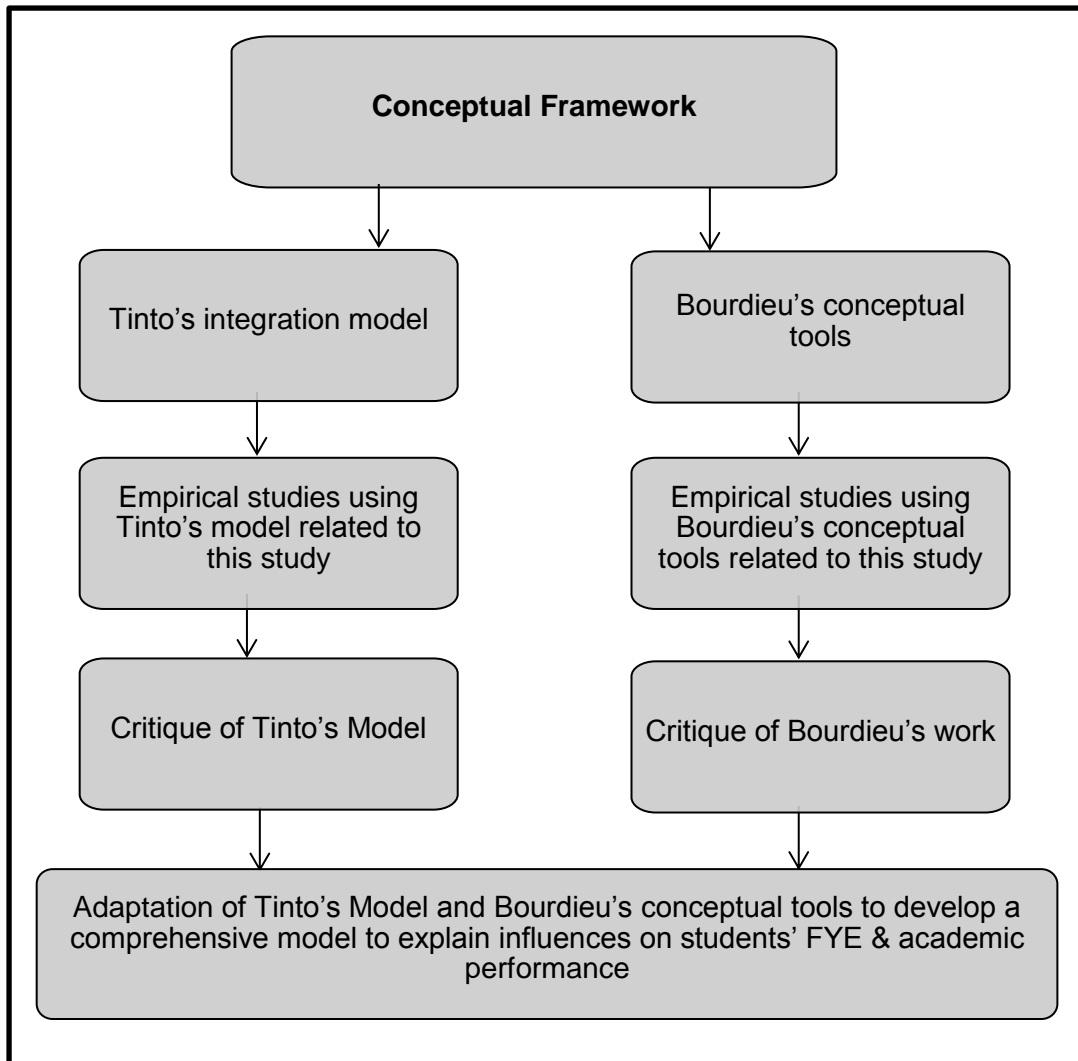


Figure 2:1 Conceptual map of Chapter 2

2.2 Significance of a conceptual framework

Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to a conceptual framework as the researcher's map of the territory being investigated. The practical relevance of a conceptual framework to a study can be achieved by making use of concepts that provide a set of general signposts within the field of that study (Bryman, 1988). Cohen et al. (2001:13) add that 'concepts enable us to impose some sort of meaning of the world; through them reality is given sense, order and coherence. They are the means by which we are able to come to terms with our experience'.

Smyth (2004) regards a framework as a research tool that may assist a researcher to develop an awareness and understanding of the situation under scrutiny; to

interrogate, review and reform the research investigation; and finally to be able to communicate the research under scrutiny.

For this study the following main features provide a structure and thinking tool in developing the conceptual framework that guided the investigation.

A conceptual framework:

- is not merely a collection of concepts but, rather, a construct in which each concept plays an integral role;
- does not provide a causal/analytical setting, but rather an interpretative approach to social reality;
- provides understanding and interpretation of intentions rather than offering a theoretical explanation or hard facts on knowledge;
- is indeterminist in nature and therefore does not enable us to predict an outcome; and
- can be developed and constructed through a process of qualitative analysis.

Finally, the sources of data consist of many discipline-oriented theories that become the empirical data of the conceptual framework analysis (Jabareen, 2009).

Smyth (2004) cautions that researchers developing a conceptual framework should be aware of the subjectivity of the process. A conceptual framework is a construction of knowledge bounded by the life-world experiences of the researcher developing it and therefore should not be attributed a power that it does not have. In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994) advise that a conceptual framework could be restrictive because researchers should be aware that not all data analysed fits within the framework which, in turn, limits the results of the study.

With the above cautions in mind, I believe I have remained open to fresh and unexpected incidents in the data and research investigation while using the conceptual framework as a map to guide the focus of this research. The concepts and ideas of Tinto (1974, 1993) and Bourdieu (1984) were used as a way of understanding and explaining the phenomena of the first-year experience. The

framework influenced the literature reviewed in this study; the approach to the study; the methods used; and the analysis (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

The identification of a suitable conceptual framework for this study was important. It enabled me to locate this study within a particular context in which I could examine students' first-year university experience with more rigour and credibility. Incorporating Tinto's (1974, 1993) model of integration, underpinned by Bourdieu's (1984) conceptual tools, namely, cultural capital, field, and habitus as a conceptual framework for this study, enabled me to undertake research which was 'systematic, credible, verifiable, justifiable, useful, valuable and trustworthy' (Wellington, 2000:14). Concepts from Tinto and Bourdieu supported one another but articulated their respective phenomena, and established what Jabareen (2009) refers to as a framework-specific philosophy.

A framework-specific philosophy of this study's conceptual framework was necessary to understand university students' first-year experience in the South African context. By exploring the first-year experience of students in the South African context through the use of Bourdieu's habitus, capital, and field concepts, brought into focus South Africa's unjust apartheid era, the social and economic injustices, and the concomitant inequality in the education system. The use of this conceptual framework guided this study and provided a more holistic understanding of the complexity of the first-year experience. As stated by Czerniewicz and Brown (2013), Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field enabled the unravelling of complex inter-relations between background, identity and the demands of higher education. Understanding first-year students through the use of this framework should enable first-year curriculum planners, lecturers and academic support services to be more mindful and sensitive when planning for a diverse first-year student body.

The use of the conceptual framework developed for this study allowed me to be more explicit in my thinking with regard to my research focus. It heightened my focus on first-year students' use of their habitus and capital when entering the new higher education field. First-year students entering the university bring with them their backgrounds and past dispositions (habitus) which are influenced by different forms of capital: social, economic, and cultural. Consequently, students' habitus and capital

produce practices that assist them to navigate the first-year educational experience, which, in turn, have an influence on their social and academic integration at university. Exploration of the varying degrees of students' social and academic integration emphasises the congruency between the university as a field and the students' habitus. The conceptual framework in this study permitted me to understand the complexity of certain characteristics and experiences from the students' habitus and capital: how such factors influenced their academic and social integration and ultimately shaped their first-year experience and academic performance. It assisted me in identifying and explaining why some students felt like 'a fish out of water', while others were like 'a fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Finally, my incorporation of constructs from Tinto's integration model (1975, 1993) and Bourdieu's (1984) conceptual tools was shaped by the need to understand and interpret the social realities of the students. My research commitment is less to an approach and more to exploring the problem of how students' pre-entry academic and non-academic characteristics influence their first-year university experience and academic performance.

To provide the backdrop to the construction of the conceptual framework for this study, the following sections examine Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration model and Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1984) conceptual tools in more detail.

2.3 Tinto's integration model

A dominant influence of theoretical literature on student retention and first-year experience has been the work of Vincent Tinto from the USA (Tinto, 1975; 1993). He developed a longitudinal student integration model that seeks to explain the process of student departure from higher education. Tinto's model (1975) theorises that interactions between students' characteristics and experiences in the university environment influence students' academic success and first-year transition. According to Tinto, students entering higher education retain attributes such as family background, skills, abilities, and prior education that influence their initial choices of goals and commitments. When a student's goals and commitments don't align with their university experiences, this may cause the student to become

academically and socially disconnected, which most likely, would lead to the student's dropping out of university. Thus Tinto's (1975) model suggests that students assign the following reasons to their dropping out of higher education: personal attributes, educational goals, and/or their commitment to the institution.

Tinto's (1975) interactionist theory of student departure suggests four distinct features in the process to student departure:

- Student entry characteristics
- Initial commitment to goal and institution
- Social and academic integration
- Subsequent commitment to goal and institution

Tinto states that students enter university with various individual characteristics, such as background characteristics (e.g. family background, parental educational level, socio-economic status); individual attributes (e.g. age, sex, race, ability), and prior academic experience (e.g. schooling experience, grades), that play a role in student departure. Tinto hypothesises that students' entry characteristics directly influence their initial commitment to the institution and goal towards graduation. He adds that students' entry characteristics can also directly affect their decision to either stay or drop out of university.

Tinto's model suggests that students' initial commitment to an institution and goal to graduate consecutively influence their degree of integration into the social and academic domain of the institution. Academic integration, which refers to students' formal interactions with lecturers, students and support staff, can be defined under two dimensions: structural and normative. According to Tinto (1975:104), structural integration involves the students meeting the explicit standards of the university required for academic achievement, while normative integration relates to an individual's identification with the normative structure of the academic system. Tinto (1975:106) also adds that the normative integration takes the form of congruency between the individual's intellectual development and the intellectual environment of the university. Social integration refers to students' non-formal networks and associations with peers, academic staff and extra-curricular activities at university.

Tinto (1975:107) suggests that social integration concerns the degree of congruency between the individual student and the social system of the university.

In Tinto's (1975) model, the formation of students' subsequent commitments to the university and their own goals to succeed is directly affected by their level of social and academic integration. He posits that the greater the level of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the students' academic goals. Similarly, Tinto adds that the greater the level of social integration, the greater the level of the students' subsequent commitment to the university (Tinto, 1975:110). He adds that students' initial commitments also shape their subsequent university and goal commitments which will influence their university persistence. In this regard, Tinto's model asserts that students who engage in formal and informal academic and social integration are less likely to leave their institution. Harvey et al. (2006) further contend that the integrative and positive experiences at university reformulate the students' goals and commitment, thus reinforcing commitment.

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure highlights academic and social integration as two constructs that represent the process of student adjustment to their new university environment. He adds that these two clusters of behaviour influence students' overall performance and affective responses to the university experience. Tinto (1975, 1993) suggests that compensatory mechanisms can be applied with regard to academic and social integration, and goal and university commitment. For example, Tinto suggests that a high level of academic integration can compensate for a lower level of social integration and a high level of social integration can compensate for a lower level of academic integration; however he does caution that an excessive level of social integration can cause an impact on academic performance. This study examines Tinto's two constructs, social and academic integration, to understand how and why certain pre-entry factors influence students' integration into the university environment.

The next two sections (2.3.1 and 2.3.2) highlight the many studies that validate, test and apply Tinto's model to different types of higher education context. Section 2.3.2 provides a critique of Tinto's student integration model.

2.3.1 Empirical studies on Tinto's student integration model

Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration model provided a conceptual framework which many researchers used to develop their empirical evidence on student persistence, attrition, academic performance, success and engagement at tertiary institutions (Abramson & Jones, 2003; Yorke & Longden, 2004; Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007; Kuh et al., 2007). Tinto's integration model was applied to different institutional settings, for example, single institutions, small campuses, multiple institutions and within faculties and subjects (Wilcox et al., 2005; Stuart, 2006; Noyes, 2007-2008; Pather, 2013).

Researchers using Tinto's integration model have contributed a great deal to the understanding of what affects student dropout and persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (1978, 1979) indicated that the model was appropriate in predicting those students at risk. Researchers have applied Tinto's integration model to a range of different contexts within higher education institutions to identify the factors that influence university experience, student performance and persistence. The following studies highlight the flexibility of Tinto's model within the different higher education contexts.

In Duquette's (2000) study on disabled students, Tinto's integration model was used as a framework for exploring university experience and persistence among university students with disabilities. The variables, student background and characteristics and social and academic integration, were examined to provide an insight into the students' university experience and reasons for persisting or dropping out. The findings of the study revealed that the variables that were more important in predicting disabled students' success and persistence were their background characteristics and academic integration, rather than social integration. Family support, goal commitment and supportive lecturing staff were found to be important elements related to persistence among students with disabilities.

In another context Tinto's model was applied to students with a military background. In this study DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) used Tinto's (1975) model to identify variables influencing veteran students' academic success and persistence. The study focused specifically on students' pre-entry attributes that influenced their

academic success and persistence. Finance was cited as one of the main issues influencing the veteran students' academic success and persistence. The findings from this study were useful in initiating introductory discussions on veteran students' access to funding to enhance university experience and persistence. The study created a platform for future research on veteran students and financial aid in higher education.

Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008) used Tinto's model on a multiple case study involving working-class first-generation white male students in their first year of study. Their study focused on social and academic integration with specific attention to student-lecturer interactions. Their study revealed that first-generation working-class white male students felt intimidated by the idea of seeking academic support from lecturing staff. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice asserted that universities need to find proactive ways to develop student-lecturer interactions to improve student success and retention. In a similar study completed on first-generation college students, Woosley and Shepler (2011) used Tinto's model to examine predictors of social and academic integration, institutional satisfaction and homesick-related anxiety, early in the students' integration experiences at college. Their study acknowledges the importance of the institution in creating a campus environment that enables students to feel accepted and promotes academic performance.

According to Tinto (1995), students' decisions to withdraw from campus will depend on the level of integration within the two domains. Therefore much of the literature on university experiences that I reviewed focused on empirical studies relating to students' institutional experiences with a specific focus on their level of academic and social integration. Some studies used Tinto's concepts of academic and social integration to examine the influence of both the social and academic integration of students into the university environment. Other studies focused solely on either academic or social integration to explain academic success, persistence and dropout. For example, in the study of Krause et al. (2005), they focused mainly on academic interaction with staff and students to investigate academic success. Studies by Inman and Pascarella (1998) and Benham (2006) focused on successful classroom and learning experiences to explain the level of academic integration and academic success. However, studies undertaken on students' social integration

highlight the following influential factors with regard to persistence and academic success: student and peer interaction (Harris, 2006), out-of-classroom contact with faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and integration into the campus learning community (Jaffee et al., 2008).

Some research findings, however, indicated that social integration is more influential on students' withdrawal decisions than academic integration. Mackie (1998) found that dropping out of campus in the early part of the course often results from a failure in social integration, such as difficulties in making friends, feeling alienated, homesick or lonely. Wilcox et al. (2005) stressed that compatible friends provide direct emotional support, equivalent to family relationships, as well as buffering support in stressful situations, which is essential to retention. In addition Thomas (2002) acknowledged that students' new social networks at university often provide support to overcome retention difficulties. Harvey et al. (2006) maintained that social and academic factors both play a role in withdrawal but it would be hasty to give priority to one over the other.

Consequently, other empirical studies that used Tinto's model (1975, 1993) revealed that the model did not support their research, specifically when applied to minority and under-represented students. It was acknowledged that Tinto's model does not take into account cultural variables (Tierney, 2000; Guiffrida, 2006). In Guiffrida's (2006) study, he attempted to integrate the social and cross-cultural psychological principles into Tinto's integration model. Guiffrida's intention was to strengthen and enhance cultural sensitivity and make Tinto's model more descriptive of minority students' academic achievement and persistence. Guiffrida used key components of theories on self-determination and job involvement to create a framework for explaining cultural norms' and motivational orientation's impact on college students' achievement and persistence. His study suggests that the integration of cultural norms and motivational orientation into Tinto's integration model may allow Tinto's theory to recognise how diverse socialisation experiences affect motivation towards academic achievement and persistence. Guiffrida (2006) adds that the use of his framework can provide a more comprehensive multicultural understanding of students' commitment and subsequent academic performance and persistence.

Other researchers have built on Tinto's integration model to offer a different perspective through which student dropout and persistence could be examined. For example, Bean (1980) proposed an examination of student attrition through organisational perspectives. His research focused on student attrition and those factors influencing non-persisters. Bean applied the theoretical concept of job turnover to tertiary education and reported on similarities between leaving the world of work and leaving university. Bean's model synthesised Spady's (1970) social integration process model with Tinto's (1975) model to create a new model that included attitudinal variables. Bean (1980) suggested that student attrition was affected by the following: student background variables; interaction by students within the institution; the influence of environmental variables (finances, family support); and the presence of attitudinal variables and student intention.

During the same period Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) expanded on the work of Tinto (1975), Spady (1970), Bean (1980) and Astin (1975). In their theory on student intent and persistence, social and academic integration formed the basis. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) outlined their student involvement theory from the perspective of student interactions with academic staff and peers. They provided a connecting relationship model addressing both direct and indirect effects of student involvement and interaction. A study by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) focused on interactions and inter-relationships between students and academic staff; it revealed that the amount of time that students spent with academic staff, both in and out of the formal classroom, strongly influenced student intent and persistence.

Accordingly, Tinto (1982) acknowledged that his 1975 model did not focus on characteristics or forces external to the institutional environment. He stated that the limitation of his theory was 'what we took to be self-evident in its development has apparently proven not to be' (Tinto, 1982:688). Tinto added the need to include additional ethnographic information such as background variables and to assess the role of academic and social integration factors into his conceptual model of persistence (Metz, 2002). Thus Tinto's 1987 model posited the following five major theoretical research bases for developing and understanding the evolving nature of student persistence: psychological, societal, economic, organisational, and interactive. In spite of Tinto's revision to his 1975 theory and the fact that it is the

most studied and tested model in the literature (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005), criticism of his model on student integration is ongoing. The next section highlights some of these criticisms that relate to this study.

2.3.2 Critique of Tinto's model

Tinto's theory focused heavily on traditional, white young American first-year students in private residential institutions. Consequently, this has led to his model being criticised for the following reasons: being too homogeneous (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Attinasi, 1989; Brunnsden et al., 2000); its inability to explain racial minority student retention (Tierney, 1992; Stage & Anaya, 1996; Rendón et al., 2000); lack of research on the attrition of older students (Bean & Metzner, 1985); and neglecting the 'widened community' of students that augmented participation has brought (Rhodes & Nevill, 2004).

Another critique of Tinto's 1975 model is the use of academic and social integration which is central to his model on student integration. Tierney (1992) noted that these constructs were too broad and did not address specific examples that could be related to non-traditional elements in higher education. Melguizo (2011) adds that Tinto does not provide explicit definitions or clarity to academic and social integration or measuring of such constructs. This has resulted in researchers defining and measuring these constructs to fit their own purpose. In addition, Tinto does not explain how students become socially and academically integrated into the institutions (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

Another significant critique of Tinto's integration model was cultural limitation. Tierney (2000) critiqued Tinto's model for misrepresenting the cultural aspects of transition which placed too much emphasis on withdrawal as an individual matter. Tierney (1992) also criticised Tinto's misinterpretation of Van Gennep's anthropological rites of passage: Tinto's theoretical presupposition that students must undergo a three-stage process of separation, transition and integration to successfully persist until degree completion. This theory may hold potentially harmful consequences for racial and ethnic minority students. For example, Tinto's (1993) assertion that students need to separate from past associations and traditions to become integrated into the social and academic systems in the institution is strongly

opposed by Tierney (1992). Tierney argues that Tinto's use of the concept from Van Gennep's (1960) transitional model is not applicable to minority students because the model was intended to describe development progression within a single culture rather than adaptation from one culture to another. Tierney further states that the misinterpretation is potentially harmful as it encourages minority students to separate from their cultural traditions and supportive relationships.

Many researchers felt that Tinto's integration model has limited applicability since it is best suited to institutional analysis of the persistence of traditional undergraduate students (Rendón et al., 2000). Nonetheless, the work of Tinto (1975, 1993) has been particularly important in establishing the role of the institution in promoting an environment for student integration and remains relevant in this regard. Tinto (2007), however, acknowledges the limitations of his model and recognises a range of models, some sociological, psychological and economic in nature, that can be used to explain student retention. This study acknowledges Tinto's limitations for the current study and reviews an alternative model that goes beyond the explanatory and descriptive, creating a deeper understanding of factors influencing students' first-year experience and integration into the university environment.

2.4 Bourdieu's theoretical tools

A complementary approach to Tinto's integration model draws on Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical tools, capital, field, and habitus, which Bourdieu termed his three 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989:50). Bourdieu uses these three concepts to explain how the environment in which people are raised and their conditions of cultural and material existence shape their attitudes, their means of interpreting the world and their capacity to engage in academic dialogue (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu's theoretical tools are predominantly geared to understanding the social world. This, according to Maton (2008), is not simply the result of one's habitus, but rather of relations between one's habitus and one's current circumstances. For Bourdieu, habitus, capital, and field are unavoidably interrelated, both conceptually and empirically (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:96-97). To talk of habitus without field, or claim to analyse 'habitus' without analysing 'field', extracts habitus from the very contexts which give it meaning and in which it operates (Maton, 2008).

Bourdieu encourages researchers to adopt a relational mode of thinking that goes beyond surface empirical practices to explore more deeply their underlying structuring principles. James (2011) elaborates that Bourdieu's theoretical tools enable researchers to be more specific about their unit of analysis. He adds that Bourdieu helps the researcher to choose a 'social space', or a 'field', or a set of relationships defined by differences in some form of capital and/or power, while not losing sight of the individuals. Seemingly, Bourdieu's tools aim to help transform our ways of seeing the social world. Using Bourdieu's conceptual tools to explore and understand students' pre-entry factors influencing their first-year experience is essential to this study.

(a) *The concept of field*

In examining Bourdieu's theoretical tools, Warde (2004) expresses that the concept of field, although central and essential to the theoretical foundation of the analysis, does not play a substantive role as habitus and cultural capital, which accomplishes all the interpretive work. Bourdieu describes field as a socially structured space in which individuals play out their engagements with one another. Warde (2004) elaborates on this description by conceptualising a field as a relatively autonomous structured space, which has been socially instituted, thus having a definable but contingent history of development which agents recognise and refer to its history. Thus Warde characterises the field as possessing the following features:

- Having more autonomy than others, with some parts of fields more autonomous than other parts.
- As an arena of constant struggle for 'stakes', particular types of field-specific and generic capitals.
- The dynamics of a field arise from the positions, dispositions and position-taking of agents.
- It could be altered in accordance with the experience within the field itself.

In Bourdieu's (1984) explanation of 'field', he frequently employs the analogy of a game when conveying the sense of activity or activities within a field. Hillier and Rooksby (2002) elaborate on Bourdieu's analogy of a game and state that to be successful in a game requires participants not only to understand and follow the rules of the game, but also to have a sense of the game. Playing in the game

requires constant awareness of, and responsiveness to, all the participants involved in the game. It requires assessment of one's own team players' resources, strengths and weaknesses and also those of the opposition team. Strategies required to play the game include improvisation, flexibility and intuition. Few players come into the game with the abilities described. Insights and a sense of the game, a habitus, develop with experience. Players learn from experience what is possible and not possible; how to work effectively within existing practices in the field and how the rules might be modified. The players' activities are constructed as much by the external limits of the rules and regulations as their own internalisation of what they can or cannot do and want to do in particular circumstances. Thus entering a new field could be supportive of some participants while posing challenges for others.

A field could be an organisation or system: government, university, business, or education in which actors play out their engagement with one another. The actors' behaviours will be related to their position in the field and also the resources available to them (Hillier & Rooksby, 2002). Like a game, each field encompasses the 'rules of the game' and the taken-for-granted practices that could be explicitly or implicitly imposed on those who seek to enter it. This in turn structures practice by defining the range of possible and acceptable actions or behaviour available to those operating within the field (Grenfell, 2004). According to Jackson (2008), a field encompasses its own rules and regulations, and its own objectives, values and strategies on how to play the game, concluding that the concept of field is restrictive regarding the social context in which the actors are embedded and through which their actions are aimed. Bourdieu (1984) discusses the field as a competitive arena where individuals compete and struggle to accumulate and monopolise different kinds of capital which DiMaggio (1979) states can protect or enhance individuals' existing resources.

From the above description of the field and the practices within it, it is evident that within a specific field, an individual's capital and habitus come into play. Berger (2000) asserts that each field has its specific logic that dictates in what ways different amounts and types of capital can be used for competitive advantage. However, it is habitus that offers an insightful way of understanding social interactions within a field.

(b) *The concept of capital*

In order to 'play the game' in the field, Bourdieu (1984:224) states that individuals need to have some existing stock or capital that is relevant to the new field. Bourdieu defines capital as any resource that holds symbolic value within a field and acts as a currency that actors take with them to the field. Bourdieu identifies the following three types of capital: economic capital, which he regards as 'immediately and directly convertible into money' (Bourdieu,1986:245); cultural capital refers mainly to the products of education, and whether these are visible in individuals: accent, vocabulary, behaviour etc., connected to objects such as qualifications, or connected to institutions, such as schools and universities (James, 2011); and social capital, which denotes individuals' social connections or networks of lasting relations that have been established and continue to expand (Grenfell & James, 1998).

According to Bourdieu (1971), individuals with access to similar types and amounts of capital share a common habitus. Berger (2000) concurs and elaborates that individuals' shared level of access to capital develops a shared worldview among these individuals as their perceptions, experiences, preferences and tendencies become standardised. This, however, serves as a mechanism to marginalise others who have access to different amounts and types of capital within a field. DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) regard capital as having a cumulative effect; the greater, the earlier the accumulation, the easier it becomes to expand one's personal assets.

The concept of the 'field' is closely linked to that of capital. As mentioned by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:101), 'capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field'. Therefore within a field, individuals hold unequal positions and experience unequal trajectories based upon volume and composition of their portfolio of capital (Wacquant, 1998). Bourdieu (1986) attributes success in higher education to cultural capital, both in the quantity and type inherited from a person's family background. He describes cultural capital to be cumulative and explains that students with higher initial levels of cultural capital, which is acquired from primary socialisation in the family, tend to be able to use this investment of cultural capital to gain further cultural wealth through the secondary socialisation process in schools and/or higher education (Bourdieu, 1973). Bourdieu sees cultural capital as a

resource which, based on its distribution among students of different social classes, enables some to profit in the new field while others fail.

It is the students' cultural capital that determines their individual experiences and consequently the congruence or fit between their habitus and field in which they enter. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:127) describe this as follows:

... social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.

(c) *The concept of habitus*

Habitus appears to be an elusive, indeterminate concept, yet it is central to Bourdieu's distinctive sociological approach, 'field' theory, and philosophy of practice. It is crucial to Bourdieu's originality and contribution to the field of social science (Maton, 2008). Habitus can be described as a set of values, practices and norms which people assimilate as part of who they are and how they operate. Habitus is 'a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future' (Bourdieu, 1977). It represents how individuals make use of their past and present experiences to address a current or future situation. Bourdieu explains habitus as 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions' (Bourdieu, 1971). Bourdieu defines habitus as a property of actors, whether individuals, groups or institutions, that comprises a 'structured and structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1998:170). It is 'structured' by one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is with 'structuring' that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices. It is a 'structure' in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or haphazard. This 'structure' comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (Bourdieu, 1990:53).

Bourdieu used habitus to explain how structures are limited in their power to control individuals, as individuals bring dispositions to what structures offer to produce practice (Maton, 2008). For Bourdieu, individuals' habitus or dispositions and their expressions of power operate within fields which are structured arenas. The concepts of field and habitus prove useful when examining the interaction between

students as individuals and the institutions they attend (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). For Bourdieu and Passeron, the individuals and the institution exist in structural relations to each other. The individuals use their experiences and practice which are influenced by their personal habitus to navigate within the higher education field. The following quotation encapsulates Bourdieu's theoretical tools in a few condensed lines:

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:6).

It is therefore evident that the field and habitus are both manifestations of power, where field is a set of power relations objectified within institutions, and habitus a set of power relations embedded within individuals. As Bourdieu highlights, if a field is the game, then habitus is the 'sense of the game' (Bourdieu, 1990:61; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:98).

Webb et al. (2002) highlight four important aspects that Bourdieu associates with habitus:

- First, our knowledge, the way we understand the world, our beliefs and values, are always constructed through the habitus.
- Second, our cultural trajectories exert an influence toward certain attitudes, values or the way we behave.
- Third, the habitus can be understood as 'the feel for the game'; it is always constituted in moments of practice and brought out when a set of dispositions meet a particular problem, choice or context.
- Finally, habitus operates at a level that is partly unconscious because habitus is arbitrary; there is nothing natural or essential about the values we hold, the desires we pursue or the practices in which we engage.

In summary, habitus operates at various levels: in one's thoughts, actions, use of language, and in how one embodies experiences of structures and relations (field). Although habitus is a whole body experience, it can't be solely attributed to an individual, since dispositions are created and recreated through social interaction and tradition. Thus James (2011) describes Bourdieu's approach as 'relational': the

study of the social world is not only about the relations between things or people but also about the substance of the things or individuals themselves. In this regard Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of capital, habitus and field can be represented in his theory of practice relational equation: Capital + habitus + field = practice. Practices are actions undertaken by individuals or groups that represent what they do. That is, the values of cultural capital, social capital, economic capital and habitus in a society can be best understood in relation to where individuals work (fields). James (2011) acknowledges that these concepts have more practical importance and can help a researcher choose a social space or field, or a set of relationships defined by differences in some form of capital and/or power, while not losing sight of the individuals.

2.4.2 Empirical studies using Bourdieu's theoretical tools

Many researchers have applied Bourdieu's theoretical tools to explore differential higher education experiences by gender, race and class of the varying student population, such as minority students (Ovink & Veazey, 2010); black students (Jones, 2001); first-generation and non-traditional students (Watson et al., 2009); low-income and working-class students (Reay et al., 2010; Devas, 2011); and gender (Dumais, 2002).

A considerable number of studies were reviewed and focused specifically on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain, interpret and understand institutional habitus, individual habitus, collective student habitus, and habitus of academic staff (Nash, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Reay, 2004; Jawitz, 2009; Kloot, 2009). Other studies reviewed used cultural capital as a tool to explore its influence on student behaviour and experiences. For example, in the study by Ball et al. (2002), they explored the notion of cultural capital and the role it plays in individuals making the choice to attend university and the choice of programme to study at university. In this study they found that students with strong cultural capital are likely to make more informed choices and therefore have more commitment and clearer goals than students with a lower cultural capital. Martin and Spenner's (2009) study, conducted at an elite university, examined how students' habitus is associated with types of economic, social, cultural and human capital. In addition, their study investigates how these types of capital influence academic achievement, college activities and post-

graduation plans. Martin and Spenner's findings revealed similar results to those of Ball et al. (2002), which suggests that the different forms of capital, especially cultural capital which more privileged students simply inherit, play an important role in educational attainment. Bourdieu (1986) concurs that schools and higher education institutions are sites for cultural reproduction where particular forms of cultural capital are promoted, which according to Lane and Taber (2012) has implications for social mobility and economic success. Lane and Taber add that if a student's cultural capital aligns with that which is privileged in education institutions and by teachers/lecturers, then that student is more likely to be academically successful.

In Longden's (2004) study, which influenced the development of this study's conceptual framework, he explores Bourdieu's cultural capital and social reproduction theory as an alternative lens to understanding, explaining and interpreting student retention within the context of higher education in the United Kingdom. His study questions the appropriateness of Bourdieu's lens within the different social and cultural settings for interpreting data relating to students' early departure. Longden argues that although Bourdieu's (1984) lens has not been widely used in the UK, his theory has been helpful in viewing and interpreting data where influences of socio-economic factors are important. For Longden's (2004) study, Bourdieu's lens provided a different perspective on the importance of previous experience of education and its influence on a student's habitus and forms of capital prior to engaging with higher education. His study is based on the view that all institutions have cultural capital formed on the wider perception of the status of the institution. Thus by the institution's promoting particular forms of culture, the education system has the ability to influence how well a student's habitus and levels of cultural capital available to them to access resources can promote or inhibit their educational activities in the higher education environment. Similarly, Lane and Taber (2012), agree that social status or social class position, habitus and capital, are influenced by the organising effects of education and supported by how well a student's cultural capital aligns with the cultural capital promoted in these institutions.

Longden (2004) concludes that viewing early student departure through Bourdieu's lens emphasises the role played by schools in influencing early cultural experiences

which provide the cultural capital that is used by students within the higher education arena. In addition, students' experiences are influenced by the higher education institution's own perceived cultural capital. The findings from Longden's (2004) study suggest that a disjunction between the relative amounts of cultural capital that the institution and the individual has can either promote and support persistence in higher education or undermine persistence, resulting in early departure. He concludes by advising researchers to view their research problem under investigation from the perspective of a theoretical framework or through a lens, as he did in his study, to bring about a deeper understanding of student departure from higher education. He adds that only when a phenomenon is interpreted against a theoretical framework or through a lens, can action be tested and evaluated with increased understanding of the underlying factors which affect the problem to be identified. This study takes heed of Longden's recommendation and uses a conceptual framework to guide the investigation of the study.

2.4.3 Critique of Bourdieu's conceptual tools

Bourdieu's theoretical tools have been applied and reviewed by many researchers (Thomas, 2002; Longden, 2004; Reay, 2004; Reay et al., 2007). There have been several researchers who have criticised his concepts (Kingston, 2001; Sullivan, 2001, 2002; Reay, 2004). In this section, criticism of Bourdieu's conceptual tools is discussed and in particular the relative vagueness of his concepts of habitus and cultural capital.

Kingston (2001) and other authors have criticised Bourdieu for the vagueness of his concepts and state that the lack of a more explicit description of, for example, his cultural capital concept, has resulted in a wide variety of variables used to study this concept. To compound the vagueness, Bourdieu in his own work identifies the following as some elements of cultural capital: education credentials, linguistic capabilities, and school systems. In his work on educational credentials, Bourdieu's (1973) view is that cultural capital is inculcated in high-class homes and thus enables high-class students to gain higher educational credentials than other students. Bourdieu has been criticised by Sullivan (2002) for not being precise enough about exactly which of the resources associated with high-class homes contribute to cultural capital and how these resources are converted into educational credentials.

However, Bourdieu admits that his cultural capital concept is not as precise in definition as economic capital and points out that cultural capital must be fluid to be reflective of the society which is being studied. Sullivan (2002), however, acknowledges that the concept of cultural capital, although not constructed concisely by Bourdieu, is substantive enough to be potentially useful to empirical researchers.

Another concern is with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which is regarded as central to his conceptual tools, but Sullivan (2002) argues that this concept is theoretically incoherent and has no clear use for empirical researchers. Habitus holds the same criticism as cultural capital, of being too vague and nebulous, to be operationalised and interpreted (Kingston 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Wildhagen, 2010). Although habitus has been reported as the most misunderstood, misused, and contested of Bourdieu's concepts, it is still Bourdieu's most widely cited concept (Maton, 2008). Many researchers in the field of education have referred to habitus in a broad range of theoretical tasks (Nash, 1999; Dumais, 2002, 2006; Reay, 2004; Wacquant, 2005; Davey, 2009). Habitus has been conceived by Bourdieu as a mediating device between structure and agency, yet his concept of habitus has been frequently criticised for being overly deterministic and unable to account for individual change. DiMaggio (1979) observed that the notion of habitus is completely deterministic, thereby leaving no place for individual agency or individual consciousness. What is problematic, according to Warde (2004), is that Bourdieu developed habitus in part as a means of countering the undue emphasis on consciousness in social science. Bourdieu states that habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by dispositions which are created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence ... without any conscious concentration' (Bourdieu, 1984:170). This sparked criticism by many authors. Firstly Bourdieu's lack of a clear explanation of 'a set of dispositions' caused many authors to condemn the concept of habitus as 'ambiguous and overloaded' (Nash, 1990:446). Secondly, his unconscious aspect of habitus is critiqued for neglecting the mundane everyday reflectivity, what Sayer terms 'our inner conversations' (Sayer, 2005:29), thus leaving researchers with little choice but to innovate and invent new, seemingly consistent notions to make sense of Bourdieu's concepts (Atkinson, 2011:332).

However, Bourdieu (1990:116) denies the charge of determinism on the grounds that the same habitus will produce different practices in different social fields and the habitus can be changed by changed circumstances. Reay (2010) points out that without a confined definition of habitus, this ironically contributes to a potential strength of the concept, specifically when conducting empirical work, as 'it makes possible adaptation rather than the more constricting straightforward adoption' of the concept within the applied study (Reay, 1995:358).

In sum, Bourdieu's three conceptual tools should be understood as an interrelated system and not considered individually. As Frank (2002) explains, cultural capital provides the tools for success within a particular field, which includes understanding how and why to comply with the rules of the field. Habitus gives an individual the confidence, feeling of comfort and sense of entitlement to use these tools in the field. Thus Bourdieu's concept of habitus enables us to understand individuals as a complex mix of their past and present, which is always in the process of completion but never complete, which Bourdieu describes as 'a power of adaptation' (Bourdieu, 1993:88).

2.5 A conceived conceptual framework for this study

After reviewing Tinto and Bourdieu's theories and considering the criticism of their work, it was evident that the strengths of both these models and the lacunae and ambiguity of certain concepts should form part of this study's conceptual framework. In this regard the framework developed provided a more suitable and expanded conceptual one for exploring the interactions and influences between students and their particular contexts. The views of Tinto (1975, 1993) and Bourdieu (1984) that contribute to this study are:

Tinto's integration model:

1. Students entering university have various individual characteristics that influence their first-year experience and academic performance:
 - Family background (socio-economic status, parents' education levels and expectations)
 - Individual students' attributes (ability, age, gender, race)

- Pre-academic experience (characteristics of school attended and academic achievement)
2. Students' prior dispositions and experiences influence their initial commitment to the university and goal to be successful.
 3. This commitment or lack of commitment would in turn influence the way students' academically and socially integrate at university.
 4. The extent to which students socially and academically integrate at university would subsequently affect commitment to the university and the goal to be academically successful.

Bourdieu's conceptual tools:

1. Social, economic and cultural capital which is used by individuals during their own ongoing struggle to maintain and improve their own position in the university environment. Their families are the primary agents responsible for transfer of capital.
2. Habitus is described as a set of values, practices and norms which individuals assimilate as part of who they are and how they operate. It determines individuals' actions, aspirations and expectations.
3. Field is the social space where actions take place and individuals compete to protect or increase their capital.
4. Capital, habitus and field are relational and interact to produce social outcomes for individuals, groups and societies.

The justification for employing concepts from Bourdieu's (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993) theories in the conceptual framework model was to address a gap in the literature on the first-year experience. I sought to fill this gap by contributing empirical research to the first-year experience field by means of examining and understanding what, how and why certain pre-entry academic and non-academic factors, such as religious, racial, socio-economic and cultural diversity, influence students' first-year experience and academic performance. The gaps, clarity and significance of pre-entry factors that needed further investigation formed the focus of this study's conceptual framework. The framework provided a more holistic approach to fully explore pre-entry factors influencing the way students negotiate their first-year experience.

Taking into account Jabareen's (2009) main features mentioned earlier in Section 2.2 page 28, provided a structure and thinking tool for this study. It assisted with the development of an appropriate conceptual framework to investigate the phenomenon in the study. The conceptual framework provided a tool to guide this study to consider the significance of the range of pre-entry factors influencing students' first-year experience and academic performance. It provided sufficient opportunities to understand, analyse and interpret the factors contributing to the respective complexities identified. In addition, the conceptual framework with its integrative use of concepts from Bourdieu (1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993) theories, formed an analytical and theoretical tool to investigate and answer the following research questions of this study:

Main RQ: How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?

The following sub-questions were identified:

Sub-RQ1: Who are our first-year teacher education students?

Sub-RQ1: What are the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that first-year teacher education students bring with them to higher education?

Sub-RQ2: To what extent do pre-entry factors that students report influence their social and academic interaction in their first year of study?

Sub-RQ3: To what extent do these factors contribute to the students' first-year experience and academic performance?

Figure 2:2 on page 50, which graphically represents the conceptual framework developed, identifies four sets of constructs that provide a more comprehensive array of influences on students' first-year experience and academic performance: students' habitus; students' different forms of capital; institutional context; and individual students' first-year experience.

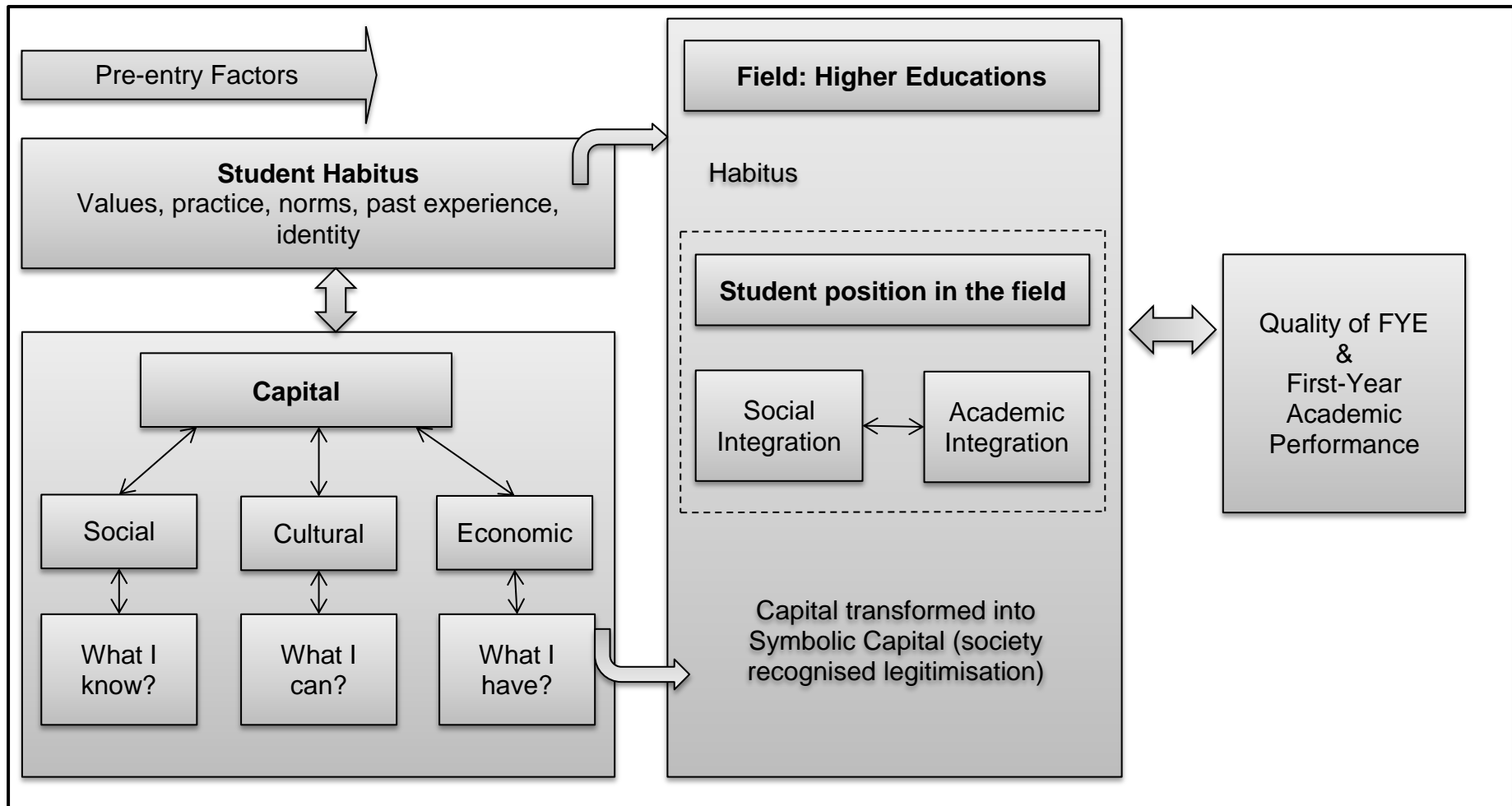


Figure 2:2 A conceptual framework to explore influences on first-year students' experience and academic performance

The methodological approach that was used to understand the first two constructs, student habitus and capital, located under the pre-entry factors in Figure 2:2, was initially directed by a quantitative analysis to obtain an overview of the first-year students; this was followed by a qualitative analysis to elicit a more in-depth understanding of students' individual contexts. This type of analysis assisted in identifying patterns, trends and expectations of first-year students entering university. The next two constructs, the institutional context and the individual students' first-year experience, represented in the middle block of Figure 2:2 on page 50, was guided primarily by a qualitative analysis. The use of one-on-one interviews and the focus-group interview allowed me to understand how the identified pre-entry factors influenced students' first-year experience as it was located within an individualistic gaze.

This study's conceptual framework posits that students come to university with a range of academic and non-academic (social and personal) background characteristics and experiences, which in Figure 2:2 are referred to as student habitus and forms of capital. Students make use of varying levels of their different capitals' resources and habitus to negotiate their first-year university experience. Different experiences and characteristics from their habitus and capital resources available to them may positively and/or negatively influence their integration into higher education. These dispositions both prepare and dispose the students in varying degrees to integrate socially and academically in their new field of higher education. The more satisfying the interaction at university, the better the student would experience a sense of integration. When this 'fit' between the university community and the student experience is lacking, the student senses incongruence between his/her institution or academic community, and how he/she perceives him or herself. This incongruency Tinto (1987:53) refers to as isolation the 'absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration can be achieved'. Congruency and isolation will influence students' overall university experience and academic performance.

Therefore taking into account students' habitus and capital available to them will ensure a better understanding of their academic and social integration, which is necessary for understanding their sense of belonging or fit. Without this sense of

congruence between students and their educational pursuits, it could be presumed that they are less likely to navigate successfully through the first year of university. A student's sense of belonging is linked to that sense of congruence. Thus, pre-entry factors, such as the environment in which individual students were raised, their forms of capital, and habitus, will influence their attitude, interpretation and ability to integrate into the higher education field. This in turn shapes students' first-year experience and academic performance and could determine whether the student decides to persist into the second year or drop out of university.

Finally, the conceptual framework which was developed, assisted in understanding how new students who bring with them their unique habitus and forms of capital that they have accumulated as part of their personal histories, including those associated with their family, schooling and socio-economic status, have influenced their experiences in the higher education field. The way students navigate their first year of university could either be in tension or congruence with their sense of self, their habitus and the capital that they bring to the higher education field. This study, with the use of the conceptual framework developed, investigates this issue.

2.6 Conclusion

Establishing a conceptual framework for this study enabled me to locate the study within a particular context and 'make sense' (Cohen et al., 2001:1), in a meaningful and manageable way, of teacher education students' first-year university experience and the pre-entry factors influencing their participation at university. The dual-theory approach which utilised Bourdieu's (1984) thinking tools and concepts from Tinto's (1975, 1993) integration model equipped me to identify gaps in our knowledge and postulate the existence of previously unknown phenomena in this particular study. It was through this integrated approach that I was able to explore:

- the relations between the field of HE: the habitus and forms of capital that the first-year students bring to this field and its influence in their integration into the field; and
- how the interactions within this field influence student behaviour, aspirations and the congruence of their first-year university experience and academic performance.

Bourdieu and Tinto's concepts formed this study's conceptual framework and the basis of a methodology which enabled me to undertake a more rigorous investigation of first-year students' actions and interactions in the education field.

The next chapter will present a review of the literature on the transition to university and the nature of the first-year experience.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This research study investigated teacher education students' first-year university experience and academic performance. The research question that was probed investigated how pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance. In an effort to identify these factors and gain a clearer understanding of first-year experience in higher education, this chapter reviewed relevant empirical research and theories under the following headings to provide a holistic view of studies on the first-year experience globally:

- What constitutes the first-year experience?
- Significance of the first-year experience.
- Empirical studies on the first-year experience: retention, transition and academic success.
- Widening access and student diversity in first-year higher education.
- Factors influencing the first-year experience: academic factors, non-academic factors and institutional factors.

3.2 What constitutes the first-year experience?

In trying to address the above question: What constitutes the first-year experience? Scott's (2012) traditional image of the first-year university experience provides a good synopsis. He describes it to be 'one of exciting intellectual and personal discoveries, independence in thought and behaviours, widening horizons, and growth in confidence' (Scott, 2012:17). Such an experience, Scott acknowledges, is a reality for some first-year students, but for the majority of first-year students, especially in the South African context, this experience is marred by failure, loss of confidence, and perhaps disillusionment.

Researching and addressing the phenomenon of the first-year experience has become an important focus in many countries primarily as the first year of study at university has been identified as a period which has a major impact on future academic success. Numerous national and international studies that focused on the

first-year experience at higher education institutions indicate that there is no single first-year experience (Tinto, 1993, 1995, 2007; Krause et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Harvey et al., 2006; Kuh et al., 2007; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Leibowitz et al., 2012; Levy & Earl, 2012; Scott, 2012). It is multi-dimensional and multi-layered, therefore making it impossible to cite one specific action, event or definition that can best describe what constitutes a first-year experience. However, what emerged from many of the studies on this phenomenon is that students' response to the first-year experience is based on a combination of academic and non-academic factors, internal and external to the university environment. Empirical studies reporting on students' responses to tertiary studies indicate that the term 'student experience' has a broader meaning which encompasses all aspects of student life (Harvey, 2004). In a ten-year national study of the first-year experience in Australian universities (Krause et al., 2005), the following key areas of the first-year experience are listed: aspirations of students; first-year transition to university life; balancing work, study and social commitments; engaging with groups on campus; career prospects; ease of access to resources; responses to courses students are studying; and satisfaction with teaching and delivery of materials.

3.3 Significance of the first-year experience

The rapidly increasing student population from a diverse range of backgrounds has heightened research into the experiences of first-year students both nationally and internationally (Krause et al., 2005). Why is the first-year experience at university more important than that of any other year? One possible response is that the first year at university is regarded as transitional. Some studies have identified this year as a period where cognitive, personal and social development takes place (Scott, 2012); a make-or-break for learning (Terenzini & Reason, 2005); playing a critical role in determining the likelihood of graduation (Upcraft et al., 2005); and a period that may affect the development of attitudes towards continuing learning at university and beyond (Hillman, 2005). Krause et al. (2005:9) designate the first year of university as the 'most critical time for engaging students with their learning community and equipping them with the requisite skills not only to persist, but to be successful and independent in their learning throughout their undergraduate years and beyond'.

The first year of study is a significant time to evaluate how prepared students are for academic studies and whether they need to be supported. Research on first-year student support indicates that academic support programmes and initiatives have contributed to an increase in student engagement and academic performance that has positively impacted on student retention (Kuh, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005; Smith, 2011). Research on student support indicates that orientation of first-year students is critical for integration, retention and determining an opportune time to address student support initiatives (Shupp, 2005). Mullendore and Banahan (2005:391) consider orientation to be 'about new beginnings for students, their families, and the institution'. These authors add that orientation provides a platform for the institutions 'to introduce a strong learning environment, build the foundations for academic success, welcome students and families to the campus community, promote student interactions with faculty and staff, and convey the values and traditions of the institution' (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005:391). During this period students connect with peers, staff and resources that play a key role in their academic success.

The first-year experience has been identified as a year in which the greatest amount of failure and attrition occurs (McInnis, 2001). In response to this first-year challenge, the student needs to be successfully integrated into the university environment. As Tinto (1995) asserts, being both socially and academically integrated into the university domain can increase academic success and persistence. According to McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001), lack of social integration and poor academic performance are strong predictors of attrition. Astin (1993) adds that the more active and involved students are, the more academically and socially integrated they become, leading to increased student satisfaction and greater willingness to remain in the institution and persist with their studies. Studies of student success and retention indicate that students who felt more connected to peers, the academic community or activities in the institution were more likely to stay and succeed (Tinto, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Astin, 1993).

Gathering information on students' perceptions of higher education and their first-year experiences is important as it provides vital input for first-year curriculum planners, administrators and lecturers that could be utilised to improve student retention and academic success (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000). Hillman (2005)

stresses that this information could be used to investigate course attrition and lifelong learning. Scott (2012:19) concurs that exploring the first-year experience could contribute to improving the quantity and quality of the country's outcomes. This has major implications for social, political and economic development, particularly in a context of scarcity of skills.

3.4 Empirical studies on the first-year experience

'First-year students can and will do better when placed in intentional, intellectual and social campus environments that challenge and support their efforts to succeed' (Upcraft et al., 2005:524).

Many of the key research initiatives on the first-year experience over the past 25 years have been based on the core belief expressed by Upcraft et al. (2005) above. The central importance of the first-year experience in higher education became an international concern when countries began to recognise the value of focusing on the first year of study to enhance academic success and retention (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Yorke & Longden, 2004; Kuh et al., 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005; Harvey et al., 2006). Examples of initiatives are:

- In 1986, the National Resource Center (NRC) in the USA launched its first international meeting for the first-year experience.
- In 1995, Queensland University of Technology in Australia hosted the first Pacific Rim Conference on the First-Year Experience in Higher Education (FYHE);
- In 2005 the European First-year Experience Conference was launched.
- In 2008 the first South African Conference on the First-Year Experience was inaugurated (Nutt & Calderon, 2009).

Much of the research on the first-year experience has been conducted in the context of retention, transition, preparedness and academic success (Harvey et al., 2006). In reviewing the literature on the first-year experience, it is evident that extensive research surrounding this phenomenon has been undertaken in the USA, UK and in Australia. Most of the American studies on the first-year experience have focused on academic and social integration to explore retention and related issues (Tinto, 1975,

1993, 2007; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason et al., 2006; Kuh et al., 2007). UK studies have focused mainly on first-year preparedness and student satisfaction to explain retention and withdrawal (Thomas, 2002; Yorke & Longden, 2004; Harvey et al., 2006; Noyes, 2007-2008; Russell, 2008). In comparison, the Australian focus on the first-year experience was expressed in efforts to enhance student success and reduce attrition (James et al., 1999; McInnis, 2003; Hillman, 2005; Kift & Nelson, 2005; Krause, 2006). McInnis, James and Hartley's (2000) study provided an exploration of first-year trends across universities in Australia which built a picture of the overall character and quality of the first-year experience. A later study by Krause et al. (2005) provided a more detailed insight into the first-year experience of Australian undergraduate students. They noted that there was a significant increase in the diversity of the university student population and an awareness of its importance to academic achievement and retention. In South Africa, the focus on extended degree programmes and student support led many researchers to associate the first-year experience with 'struggling students' (Leibowitz et al., 2012); therefore much of the research on the first-year experience in South Africa focused on student support and academic development programmes (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Bitzer, 2005; Scott et al., 2007; Steenkamp et al., 2009; Levy & Earl, 2012; Scott, 2012).

Empirical research on the first-year experience completed both nationally and internationally, ranged from small samples of students in a single course, department or faculty to substantial samples that involved the entire institution. Some studies ranged from a single institution to longitudinal multi-institutional studies (Harvey et al., 2006). In the South African context much of the research on the first-year experience has been quantitative and from the perspective of the institution (Scott et al., 2007; CHE, 2013). There has been a wide range of studies on the first-year experience. The focus of these studies varies from small-scale studies focusing on students' learning outcomes and development, to broader, large-scale studies focusing on student success, transition, retention and support; however, there do seem to be recurring themes that emerge. In this regard, the next sub-section of the study will focus on literature reviewed under three broad areas of the first-year experience: retention, transition, and preparedness.

Nutt and Calderon (2009) note that studies of the first-year experience evince a real concern for students and a desire to see them succeed. They add that a considerable number of these studies seem to have a limited focus on the first-year experience from the students' perspective. In addition, fewer studies explore the students' prior background influences on their first-year experience in higher education. This is evident in many of the retention and persistence studies that use models to explain higher education student outcomes. Bean (1980), Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) and Tinto's (1988), models view background characteristics as an external factor that influences student outcomes within institutions and ultimately students' decisions to persist or drop out. However, Stage and Hossler (2000) voice their concern that background characteristics have not been fully explored and still remain unexplained. This study attempts to contribute to this area of contestation by foregrounding student perspectives on the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing their first-year experience and academic performance.

3.4.1 *First-year retention*

Research evidence from across the globe indicates unequivocally that first-year retention is the key to successful degree completion (Tinto, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Krause et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft et al., 2005; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Van der Meer et al., 2010). There have been many studies that set out to investigate either one single factor or multiple factors influencing the first-year experience and retention, but it is clear that the elements contributing to the first-year experience and retention are complex.

Of considerable influence on retention studies was the work of Tinto (1993). He focuses on explaining student withdrawal by taking into account student levels of commitment to their goals and the institution. This led to Tinto's conceptualisation of first-year engagement. The understanding of student engagement in learning outcomes and persistence was explored by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Kuh (2001). Other retention studies explored the role of individual student characteristics in understanding persistence (Dey & Astin, 1989). Yorke's (1999) study highlights the complexity of withdrawal patterns among students and emphasises the role of institutions in understanding and responding to student withdrawal. Yorke and Longden's (2004) project that focused on first-year fulltime

undergraduate students' experiences across institutions in Wales and England, evinced a better understanding of student withdrawal and highlighted four reasons for students discontinuing their studies:

- Unsatisfactory university experience
- Inability to cope with academic demands
- Wrong choice of course
- Personal factors such as family circumstances, finance, illness, loneliness, etc.

Empirical studies on the relations between the institutional environment and first-year retention highlight the key role that the campus environment plays in students' decisions to remain or withdraw. Many of these studies focus on student satisfaction and social/academic integration in relation to student retention. For example, studies on student satisfaction reveal that students' decisions to withdraw from campus are often linked to their dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, or adjustment to the campus environment (Nes et al., 2009). This could be due to poor service, quality of experience, unfulfilled expectations or incorrect course choice (McInnis, Hartley, Polesol & Teese, 2000; Yorke, 2000). In Fraser and Killen's (2003) study at a university in South Africa, first-year students identified the following five factors for their failure: inadequate preparation for academic work; boring presentation by lecturers; irregular attendance at classes or tutorials; lack of self-discipline; and poor examination techniques. Assistance and support given to students by the institutions in their first year of study could help increase their chances of success.

3.4.2 *First-year transition*

Wahr et al. (2009:434) define student transition as 'the process students go through to become ready to engage in learning as they move into new educational contexts, for example, school-leaver to first-year university student; vocational program to higher education degree; education in one cultural and language setting to another'. Thus first-year transition could be regarded as a period of adjustment and change.

Much of what is known about student transition in higher education has been gathered over the past 50 years by international scholars (Harvey et al., 2006).

Hooper (2005:91) highlights that many of the earlier studies on student transition experiences were underpinned by an institutional agenda to minimise casualties and costs in a bid to maximise outcomes and efficiency. Levy and Earl (2012) acknowledge that in recent studies there has been a significant change in focus: students, rather than academic staff, have been repositioned at the centre of the university experience and purpose. Levy and Earl (2012:xiii) add that in so doing, considerations and representations of the university experience from the students' perspective have become a vital part of gaining valuable information on how more students can be provided with more quality experiences so that the outcomes for all students, institutions and societies are qualitatively and quantitatively beneficial. This focus is evident in many of the recent studies on student transition (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000; Perry & Allard, 2003; Kift & Nelson, 2005; Krause, 2006; Wahr et al., 2009; Smith, 2011; Levy & Earl, 2012).

Studies undertaken on the first-year experience and transition indicate that many students encounter difficulties in moving from school or work to university (Terenzini, 1993; McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000; Scanlon et al., 2007). Some of the challenges identified were: lack of connectedness and involvement (Perry & Allard, 2003); difficulties in developing a student identity (Scanlon et al., 2007; Briggs et al., 2012); unhappiness and dissatisfaction (Yorke, 2000); and finally, feeling lonely and isolated (Pargetter, 2000; Lawrence, 2003). A factor creating a challenge for first-year transition is the change in the identity of a 'typical university student'. This was evident in McInnis and James's (1995) study, which revealed that a university student's identity developed at a slow pace. In the study of Scanlon et al. (2007), the slow development of a student identity was largely due to the increase in diversity of the student population: mature-aged students, foreign students, first-generation students and also students with part-time employment. They add that this diversity has influenced students' feelings of connectedness to the university which have impacted on their identity development and ultimately their decision to stay at or leave university.

Regardless of the many difficulties experienced by students in their first-year transition, there are many studies that reveal that student transition is not all negative. For example, national studies in Australia revealed that the majority of first-

year students enjoyed being university students; had positive experiences most of the time; and felt happy at university (McInnis & James, 1995; McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000; Hillman, 2005).

Many researchers have used a range of theoretical perspectives to understand or explain student transition to university better. Two frequently used and quoted theoretical perspectives are Tinto's (1988; 1993) application of Van Gennep's transitional model on 'rites of passage' and Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural capital (Scanlon et al., 2007). Tinto (1988) adapts Van Gennep's three kinds of rituals, separation, transition, and incorporation, to explain that for students to be successfully integrated into university life they need first to go through a period of separation from their past associations, which includes their families. He argues that only those students fully incorporated socially and academically into the university environment feel connected and persist in their studies.

Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural capital has been used extensively in student transition studies. These studies highlight students' cultural capital as crucial in shaping their decisions in respect of the school to university transition. According to Pitzalis et al. (2008), cultural capital, which is linked to social origins, is considered the variable that mainly influences the process of transition from high school to university and is used as a predictor of educational achievement in different theoretical frames. This concept is applied to educational institutions that produce the values, attitudes and dispositions of the dominant group in society. Bourdieu argued that schools whose students traditionally make the transition to university would be expected to transmit cultural capital to students as a necessary prerequisite for transition to university (Scanlon et al., 2007). Owing to the diversity in students and their educational backgrounds, not all students enter university with the dominant cultural capital, thereby creating a relative disadvantage for some students to fit into the university environment.

Much of the literature on transition studies reveals that for students to perform a successful transition, they need to develop a sense of belonging and connection with new peer groups and the wider academic community. Perry and Allard (2003) further claim that students need to make connections between the experiences they bring with them to the new environment and their new knowledge obtained at university.

Students are not alone in this process; Wilson asserts that what has become apparent at universities is that supporting and facilitating effective transitions into and throughout higher education has turned out to be increasingly student orientated, professional and accepted as institutional core business (Wilson, 2009: 1 in Levy & Earl, 2012). Universities now recognise their core role in supporting the successful transition of first-year students to improve graduation rates.

Pym et al. (2011) suggest that when providing support to first-year students, universities need to move away from a deficit model to a more value-added model that focuses on harnessing students' agency and actively nurturing their social connectedness and sense of community to enhance first-year academic performance. They add that this type of intervention, especially in the South African higher education context, takes into account students' range of diverse histories, experiences and context to develop a supportive community that attempts to promote a sense of belonging. The aim of the study of Pym et al. (2011) in implementing a value-added model to enhance academic performance was to reduce alienation and demoralisation among students who negotiate their transition into university.

3.4.3 *First-year student preparedness*

The preparedness of first-year students for higher education can be regarded as an important factor in determining first-year retention and academic success. There is a growing concern about the under-preparedness of students and the effectiveness of the skills they bring with them to university (Nutt & Calderon, 2009). Studies over the last 30 years indicate that student under-preparedness is a complex phenomenon which manifests itself in a range of ways, for example, from struggling with the formal curriculum to difficulties in adjusting to independent study and a new academic environment (CHE, 2013).

Taylor and Bedford's (2004) study notes that university academics regard students' level of preparedness, motivation and academic ability to be significant factors for university completion or non-completion. Entering students' level of preparedness may be influenced by factors such as high school final exit results (Grade 12 results); quality of primary and secondary education; language barriers; and socio-economic

status; however many national and international higher education institutions rely solely on students' final Grade 12/matriculation results. The validity of South African students' Grade 12 results has raised major concerns about university success rates, especially among first-year students. Leibowitz et al. (2012) observes that many first-year students who arrive at higher education institutions with high expectations have their hopes for academic success ruined before their first academic year is over. Students' Grade 12 results seem to provide unrealistic expectations with regard to higher education studies.

In this regard there has been a trend in South African higher education institutions to explore alternative ways of assessing students' preparedness for university studies. Several assessment tests such as the National Benchmark Test (NBT) have been implemented. For example, the NBT reports have shown that high school graduates are not sufficiently prepared for the challenges of higher education. Case et al. (2013) report that only a small minority of prospective students obtain NBT results which indicate that they are sufficiently prepared for mainstream university study. In addition, Pym et al. (2011) contend there is a clear relation between students' high school matriculation results and their university entrance tests when students' academic success is scrutinised systematically.

Fraser and Killen (2003) add that universities in South Africa make use of the entering students' Grade 12 results to identify at-risk students and offer appropriate academic support in their first year of study. The NBT results are used to place students in extended curriculum programmes at universities.

Further considerations in student preparedness are students' socio-economic circumstances and educational background. These factors play a major role in determining students' subsequent decisions to further their studies and their choice of institution. Students' personal circumstances and the area in which they live influence the quality of school education they receive and the knowledge and skills they bring with them into higher education. In the South African context, the disadvantaged educational background due to the apartheid past has contributed negatively to the achievement of poor students in higher education. These students, labelled disadvantaged students, according to Huysamen (2000), attended historically 'black' schools that experienced unequal education systems, resources,

quality of teachers and infrastructure. Fraser and Killen (2003) add that the quality of school attended has the power to determine the type of tertiary institution that students attend, assuming they were given the opportunity to attend university. A second distinctive characteristic of disadvantaged students as identified by Woollacott and Henning (2004) is that most of these students are likely to have English as a second or third language and are generally under-prepared for universities in South Africa, where most have English as the medium of instruction.

Many of these key factors identified above influence the way students experience their university education. These are factors which many university academics believe are beyond their control, which leads to Jansen and Van der Meer's (2012:10) relevant question, 'Who prepares students for academic studies: high school or university?' Scott (2012:23) asks a similar question: 'Where does responsibility for improving student performance lie?' In Yeld's (2013:5) article, 'Time to stop blaming schools', she cautions that higher education institutions' response to high failure and dropout rates is that under-preparedness is the responsibility of schools. Yeld claims this apportioning of blame is misguided. The responsibility, she avers, should be higher education's focus, and urges that higher education needs to start where schooling has left off as confirmed in Jansen and Van der Meer's (2012) study. They examine high school students' perceived preparedness for university study. Jansen and Van der Meer's study was conducted between two secondary education systems in two countries. Students from the Netherlands' school system that specifically trains students for university entrance were compared with students in the New Zealand school system who follow a broad-based general curriculum. Their results reveal no significant difference between learners in the two different school systems with regard to their self-perceived readiness for university. The authors suggest that, rather than reforming secondary education, the first year in higher education should be reformed to prepare students for university.

Studies in South Africa (Slonimsky & Shalem, 2005; Scott et al., 2007) indicate that the South African school system, with its continuing educational inequalities and worst knowledge practices due to apartheid education and embedded socio-economic conditions, is the primary cause of students' under-preparedness for higher education. Scott (2012), acknowledges that, in spite of the above statement

and universities commonly disclaiming responsibility for academic performance problems in higher education, 'it is necessary on pragmatic grounds for the higher education sector to identify factors affecting student performance that are within its control, and to act on these to the best of its ability' (Scott, 2012:24). This strand of thinking was highlighted by other authors of retention studies (Braxton et al., 2004; Tinto, 2007; Kuh et al., 2008) when they suggest that universities should play a more active role in reducing attrition. A suggestion offered by Jansen and Van der Meer (2012) is to utilise a pedagogical practice at a practical level and a scaffolding approach to develop the academic skills needed by first-year students so that they can gain early opportunities to academic success.

3.5 Widening access and diversity

In South Africa, the transformation goals relating to higher education are to achieve a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system (DoE, 1997). Specific outcomes sought include:

- increasing and broadening participation to reach a wider distribution of social groups and classes, including adult learners, thereby accommodating a larger and more diverse student population (DoE, 1997: 1.13); and
- the promotion of equity of access and fair chances of success to all (DoE, 1997: 1.14).

The widening of access has resulted in an even greater number of students, from a broad range of diverse socio-economic and academic backgrounds, entering higher education.

The South African government's objective for increased and more diversified higher education participation is expressed in both the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2012a) and the National Development Plan 2030 (NPC, 2012). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa stresses that representation among higher education graduates, in terms of race, gender and social class, is essential for equity, developing talent across the population, setting a balanced development agenda, and maintaining the public's respect and faith in higher education (CHE, 2013:32). In addition, the objective for more diverse higher

education participation by the South African government will ensure that no individuals are excluded from society based on race, gender and social class; and more importantly that the dominant hegemonic power structure that developed during the apartheid era would be dismantled and democratised.

Although female representation at higher education institutions has increased to 58% and black (African, coloured and Asian/Indian) enrolment has increased to 78% (DHET, 2013), Scott et al. (2007) highlight that participation rates in higher education still remain highly disproportionate. For example, the proportion of African students in higher education has increased from 49% in 1995 to 66% in 2011 (CHE, 2013; DHET, 2013), but if one takes into consideration South Africa's racial composition (African, coloured, Asian/Indian and white) 79% of the population constitutes Africans; the participation rate of only 12% for African students in higher education is considered therefore as being under-represented, while white students seem to be over-represented with a participation rate of 54% (CHE, 2009). This racial imbalance is reflected in undergraduate graduation rates which have major implications for correcting employment equity, income and development inequalities.

The Council on Higher Education, the Green Paper on Higher Education and other educational policies stress the need for graduates to be representative of the country's population to meet the changing demands of the South African society and economy (DHET, 2012a; CHE, 2013:32). Concerns of access and diversity in higher education seem to structure representation around the issues of race, gender and social class; many reports and studies on higher education mainly focus on race and gender. The notion of social class which may be more difficult to define is largely omitted or, as noted in many reports and studies, is included in race and gender. There is an increasing debate on the notion of social class as a structure other than race. For example, a University of Cape Town research paper, states that social class in higher education has largely been neglected and social scientists have been silent with regard to the issue of whether or not class is important in the 'new' South Africa (Seekings, 2003:6). Seekings (2003) states that in the 'new' South Africa, class inequalities are highly visible. However, emphasis on race, especially in official statistics, serves to obscure even the possibility of collecting data on other criteria, such as class. Chetty (2012) argues that, unlike race, social class is not

constitutionally protected. He adds 'there is no guarantee of equal opportunity on the basis of poverty and no political mobilisation on the part of poor, in contrast to mobilisation activities of race pre-1994' (Chetty, 2012:14). Therefore, in examining the objective for increased access and diversity and to meet the policy goals of a justifiable representation in higher education, all three issues, race, gender and social class, must be considered in an integrated way.

Importantly, such an objective is not unique to South Africa. There seems to be a global trend to increase the education of knowledge workers for 21st century economies (Levy & Earl, 2012). The Australian Government has committed itself to increase access to higher education by increasing participation by 20%, specifically from low socio-economic status (SES) groups by 2020. The Australian Government has targeted an additional 217 000 graduates by the year 2025 who would more accurately reflect Australia's SES demographics (Australian Government, 2009:12-13). The South African government has set a similar target, to increase the participation rate to 23% by 2030 (DHET, 2013). Since South Africa's participation rate has been steadily increasing from 761 090 in 2007 to 900 000 in 2011, the Green Paper calls for total university enrolment to increase to 1.5 million by 2030 (DHET, 2012a:x; CHE, 2013:41).

Consequently, the widening of access and diversity in higher education both nationally and internationally has brought with it a host of new challenges for these institutions (Wagner, 2000; Fraser & Killen, 2003; McInnis, 2003). McInnis and James (1995) warn that many universities and academics are not sufficiently aware of the increasing diversity of the student population or how this may impact on their institution and/or staff. They caution that institutions may have to deal with higher dropout rates and low throughput and graduation rates which will have financial implications. This has an impact on academic staff, as they will have to accommodate students who need additional academic support. This implies that lecturers will have to become more creative and innovative in their teaching and planning of programmes for a more diverse student population. This results in financial and planning constraints as more time and resources are required for staff to prepare adequately for the diverse student population.

The greatest academic challenge will be experienced in the first-year programmes. McInnis (2003) cautions that the increasingly diverse student population makes it difficult to identify the profile of a typical first-year experience. This challenge highlights the need for higher education institutions to profile the first-year students accurately, in order to estimate and respond to the diversity experienced within the rapidly changing mass higher education system (James et al., 1999). Smit (2012) suggests that to respond to the diversity in student body requires a change in thinking:

We need to thoughtfully consider the readiness of higher education institutions to respond to students, and cultivate the will to learn in our students. We need to find ways to research the full texture of the student experience and to value the pre-higher education context of students (Smit, 2012:369).

Many studies internationally have attempted to understand higher education diversity and the changing profiles of students focused on the following cohort of students: first in family (first-generation students); mature students (over 20 years) entering higher education; fulltime students employed while studying; and experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Tinto, 1993; McInnis & James, 1995; Yorke, 1999; McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000; James, 2002b; Terezini & Reason, 2005). Many of these studies acknowledge the importance of understanding student diversity and the influence it has on academic outcomes.

Harvey et al. (2006) attribute first-year persistence and success to the diverse nature of students' prior experience and expectations. They conclude that a composite from an intricate mixture of students' characteristics, external and institutional factors, contribute to persistence. Fraser and Killen (2003) add that this diverse nature could have either a negative or positive influence on students' first-year experience which would ultimately contribute to students' decisions to persist or leave the programme of study. Although Gregory (2012) contends there is limited African research on the issues of student persistence, there are many Western persistence models that could be used to understand the phenomenon in African universities (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In Tinto's (1975) model of student integration, he advocates that the fit between the student and the institution plays a key role in the likelihood of persistence. Tinto adds that the degree of institutional commitment a student feels and the subsequent persistence is shaped by congruency between the

student's motivation and ability, and the institution's academic and social characteristics. Yorke and Longden (2008) reveal that understanding persistence is multifaceted. They caution that there are more complex factors that influence student persistence, some of which are external to the university environment.

3.6 Factors influencing the first-year experience

There is a large body of research on factors influencing the first-year experience in higher education (Thomas, 2002; Fraser & Killen, 2003; ACT, 2007; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Jansen & Suhre, 2011; Cleyle & Philpott, 2012). In some studies these factors are referred to as cognitive and non-cognitive (Sedlacek, 2004, 2011), while other literature refers to them as academic or non-academic (Tinto, 1993; Nora et al., 1996; Lotkowski et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Miller, 2013). Regardless of the distinction, the majority of the variables researched under factors influencing first-year experience include levels of social and academic integration; pre-college ability; finances; institutional support; psychological and attitudinal factors; level of parents' education; socio-economic status and the level of family support (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Some studies focus on a single factor influencing students' first-year experience, others pay attention to a multitude of factors, thus highlighting that it is difficult to single out one particular factor that may influence student experience and academic success.

Mansfield et al. (2009:502-503) suggest that gaining a better understanding of factors contributing to the first-year experience and academic success will result in a greater ability to offer positive and timely interventions to improve first-year students' grades and their successful completion of higher education.

There have been many theorists who have developed models to understand a wide range of factors presumed to influence the first-year experience. Many of these models acknowledge pre-entry variables in understanding students' activities and outcomes at university: for example, Tinto's (1975) student integration model; Astin's (1985, 1993) Input-Environment-Output (I-O-E) model; Bean's (1980) attrition model; Weidman's (1989) student socialisation model and Berger and Milem's (2000) college impact model. These models make reference to background characteristics that could be divided into three categories: psychological, academic and

demographic. Astin's (1993) I-O-E model foregrounds the relation between the environment (activities that students engage in at university) and outcomes (the desired aim and objective of the programme enrolled in). Astin's model cautions that the first-year experience cannot be understood without taking into account the students' own input: the personal qualities that they bring with them to the university. Tinto's (1975) student integration model highlights the interrelated effect of students' family background, individual attributes and pre-entry schooling and how these influence students' goals, together with the role of institutional commitment. What is clear from the empirical studies using these models is that there is no single factor that can be identified to have influenced students' first-year experience above others. Influential factors can have a different outcome at different institutions depending on the institutional climate, course of study, changing diversity of student population and other internal and external variables (Harvey et al., 2006; Yanto et al., 2011). Harvey et al. (2006) maintain that the first-year experience is a shifting target that evolves and changes with time and culture. It requires research and practice, and continuous re-evaluation is required for relevance and enhancement. They caution that researchers should not be complacent that once the first year has been attended to, later experiences can be ignored.

The sub-section below considers factors influencing the first-year experience under three broad headings: academic factors, non-academic factors, and institutional factors. These factors are considered separately; however it is important to stress that these factors are inter-related, complex and often overlap as noted earlier in this chapter.

3.6.1 Academic factors

Academic and non-academic factors play an important role in helping students to achieve academic success. McKenzie et al. (2004) note there has been extensive research that supports the relations between prior academic performance and university performance. ACT (2007) reveals that the strongest predictors of university persistence and degree attainment are prior academic achievement and course selection. Other studies have shown that prior academic performance is similarly a good predictor of first-year students persisting to their second year of study (Nora et al., 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In McKenzie and

Schweitzer's (2001) investigation into the factors influencing academic success, they found that while integration into university, self-efficacy and employment responsibilities were predictive of university grades, it was the students' previous pre-tertiary academic performance that was the most significant and reliable predictor of university performance. There have been mixed responses to what is a more accurate predictor of academic performance and academic success at university. Sedlacek (2011) notes in recent literature that grades are becoming less useful as indicators of student achievement or predictors of future student success in higher education. He maintains that high school grades no longer appear as useful in differentiating student academic achievement as they once were. Sedlacek (2011:88) attributes this to what he terms 'grade inflation'. In South Africa there is limited evidence of the predictive validity of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results. These are not necessarily the best predictor for academic success at tertiary institutions, although they are the primary determinant for university entrance (Fraser & Killen, 2003). Jansen (2012) cautions that the levels set for passing the NSC examination are so low (30% in some subjects and 40% in others), that students who receive below 70% in the NSC examination should seriously consider whether to enrol in higher education studies. He adds that many South African universities have thus opted to administer alternative admission examinations to gain a more realistic measure of the potential of students entering their institutions.

For Terenzini and Pascarella (1978), prior academic performance, as a predictor of university performance and attrition, contributes only a small percentage: for them a more significant predictor is the students' academic and social integration at university. Malefo's (2000) study of black students at a predominately white university in South Africa indicates that variation in students' academic performance could be attributed more to the students' background variables than to cognitive factors. Sedlacek (2011) differs and demonstrates that these predictions could be improved by adding non-cognitive variables, such as students' perceptions, adjustment and motivation. He adds that cognitive and non-cognitive variables would give a more complete picture of applicants' abilities and would increase the diversity of entering students to include students from different races and those with less traditional backgrounds.

A second, related issue to prior academic performance is understanding entering students' educational experiences, since these play an important role in university achievement. In South Africa, the inequalities in the public school system, mainly due to inadequate resources, infrastructure, quality of teachers and socio-economic conditions of students, have contributed to the 'generally poor and racially skewed performance in higher education' (CHE, 2013). Thus Berger (2000) stresses that the key to understanding student retention better and shaping future chances of persistence would require universities to understand the role played by students' prior educational experiences from a social reproductive perspective. He states that prior school experiences contribute to the individual accumulation of cultural capital of students which has an 'effect on whether or not students are likely to attend university and if so, an effect on where students choose to go and how likely they are to persist' (Berger, 2000:102).

3.6.2 Non-academic factors

It is clear that predicting academic performance and student retention in the first year of study is not simply a matter of investigating academic factors. There is ample evidence that factors such as motivation, attitudes, goal attainment, family education, socio-economic status, income, student identity and student demographics are likely to influence student success at university (Tinto, 1975; Stage & Hossler, 2000; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Harvey et al., 2006). In the South African higher education context there have been few studies of socio-cultural and psychological factors impacting on first-year academic performance (Pym et al., 2011).

Research on personal factors such as motivation, personal interest, confidence, efficacy and self-esteem provides evidence that suggests that relationships exist between such variables and university academic performance (Kim et al., 2010). Goals and commitment are important factors concerning student retention.

Cleyle and Philpott (2012) indicate that numerous studies have demonstrated a connection between pre-enrolment educational goals and persistence. This view is evident in Tinto's (1975) theory where he acknowledges the importance of pre-entry educational goals and states that the level of one's commitment to one's educational

goals is directly related to persistence. Bean and Metzner (1985) discuss educational goals as a background variable in their model of non-traditional student attrition.

Students' life goals influence their commitment to their studies. Toni and Olivier's (2004) study on first-year black female students in a predominately white university in South Africa notes that these students' identities at university are shaped by their life goals, which are ignited by specific feelings and characteristics using their past experiences. Toni and Olivier (2004:194) suggest that lecturers need to understand that 'past experiences' form the root of a student's beliefs, sense of security, confidence, self-esteem and identity: such factors contribute to students' educational goal achievement and academic success.

Another important factor that generates contrasting views is financial assistance. The National Audit Office in the United Kingdom (NAO, 2007) identifies financial assistance is not a major factor in student persistence: it is not the sole reason why students withdraw from university. There are many studies that reveal that students are involved in paid work, but little evidence shows that paid work reduces students' levels of academic achievement (Fjortoft, 1995; Light, 2001; NAO, 2007). Zimitat (2003) explored the impact of employment and family commitments on the first-year experiences of three different groups of fulltime students:

- Group 1: fulltime students not in paid employment.
- Group 2: fulltime students in fulltime paid employment, with few family responsibilities.
- Group 3: fulltime students in fulltime paid employment who are primary income earners and primary carers in their household.

The findings revealed that there were significant differences in the experiences and behaviours of Group 2 students compared with Group 1 and 3 peers. Group 2 students spent less time on campus, found lecturers less stimulating and valuable, experienced more difficulty with motivation to study, and spent less time preparing for and attending scheduled teaching activities. These students were therefore significantly more likely to consider dropping out of campus. Zimitat concludes that the support of family and university friends appears to be a critical factor in their persistence at university. Cabrera et al. (1992) found that financial assistance

created an equal playing field among those students who were financially advantaged and those who were not.

Another important factor influencing academic performance is parental support and commitment. Studies on the relations between parental support and university adjustment have been limited, with the majority of studies quantitative in nature (Mounts et al., 2006; Yazedjian et al., 2007). Much of the research on student parental support and commitment while at university has been inconsistent. Some studies found positive relations between parental support and university adjustment (Martin, et al., 1999), while other studies found no significant relations between the two variables (Dennis, et al., 2005). For example, in Nora and Cabrera's (1996) study on minority students, although minority students had perceptions of discrimination and prejudice at university, this negative influence was negated by the students' perceptions that their families were supportive and provided encouragement while they were at university. Several studies found that parental education and encouragement to attend college or university were strongly associated with students' intention to attend such institutions (Stage & Hossler, 2000). In Stage and Rushin's (1993) study, parental encouragement was regarded as a strong predictor of persistence and it further influenced other factors such as educational goals and institutional commitment which had a positive influence on students' studies.

Perna and Titus's (2005) study highlights a different focus on parental influence and university adjustment. They show that students whose parents did not attend university tend to arrive at university less prepared than their peers whose parents attended university. The main contributory factor to this underpreparedness was that their parents might not be familiar enough with the university's expectations to prepare children adequately for first-year university studies. Student persistence literature reveals that parents' higher education levels and incomes are strongly related to successful involvement in university and indirectly to persistence (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1987).

3.6.3 Institutional factors

Institutional factors can contribute to the type of first-year experience encountered by students which can ultimately impact on their decision to either stay at or exit from university. Yorke (1999) draws attention to students' prior expectations of an institution. He adds that if there is a mismatch between a student's expectations and the reality of an institution, this would contribute to dissatisfaction with the student's first-year experience and hence his/her decision to withdraw. In addition, a student's perception of the institution's commitment and support, and the ease in which the student can navigate the internal operations of the university, would have a direct impact on their willingness to persist in their studies (Thomas & Yorke, 2003). A similar finding was found in Fraser and Killen's study on post-enrolment factors that students perceived to be influential in their academic success. The findings reveal that students viewed 'a better understanding of the mechanisms and functions of the institution' would contribute to their success in the institutions and programmes of choice (Fraser & Killen, 2003:262).

Cleyle and Philpott (2012) acknowledge that there are many factors within the institution that could be instrumental in influencing students' success and retention: access to information and advice; connectivity to campus services; availability of courses; the quality of the offering of these courses; quality of programmes; and the quality of instruction and guidance offered. Kuh (2001) adds that the culture of the institution undoubtedly also influences student persistence. Thomas reveals that if students feel that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they may be more inclined to withdraw early in the first year of study (Thomas, 2002:431). Thomas argues that if an institutional habitus is inclusive and accepting of differences, and does not prioritise one set of characteristics, but rather celebrates diversity and differences, this would allow students from diverse backgrounds to find greater acceptance of and respect for their own knowledge, which will ultimately promote persistence in higher education (Thomas, 2002:432).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter revealed that the body of literature pertaining to the first-year experience is extensive. The nature of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 necessitated a wide coverage of literature on the first-year experience in higher education. In addition, the complexity of what constitutes the first-year experience dictated that the literature be surveyed as widely as possible. Pertinent issues, such as the significance of the first-year experience, empirical studies and theories on the first-year experience, widening access and diversity in higher education, and factors influencing the first-year experience were reviewed and discussed in this chapter.

The literature reviewed in this chapter acknowledges that the first-year experience is multi-dimensional and multi-layered, making it difficult to cite one specific action to describe what constitutes a first-year experience. The literature reveals that the first-year experience is significant. It represents a year in which a student's cognitive, social and personal development crystallises; it is a 'make or break' year for academic learning; a year to front-load academic support; a year in which developing attitudes towards life-long learning are established, and finally a year in which successful social and academic integration can impact positively on academic success and retention.

The review of literature in this chapter covered empirical studies of the first-year experience: most of the studies have been conducted in the context of first-year retention, transition, preparedness, and academic success. The literature reviewed discloses many of the empirical studies have been completed extensively in the USA and UK and in Australia. Empirical studies in South Africa have been limited primarily to first-year student support. A prominent feature identified when reviewing literature on the first-year experience was that many of the theories used by researchers to underpin their studies on the first-year experience were those of Tinto's (1975) student integration model; Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) student engagement; Tinto's (1988) adaptation of Van Genneep's (1960) transition model, and Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural capital.

With regard to literature reviewed on factors influencing the first-year experience, it is evident that there is a large body of research identifying a multitude of factors which

define students' first-year experience. There is no one factor that could be identified as influencing students' first-year experience: the influential factors could have different outcomes at different institutions depending on the institutional climate, course of study, diversity of students, and internal and external variables.

Finally the first-year experience is identified as a shifting target that evolves and changes with time and culture and thus has to be continuously researched and evaluated, while practices need to be updated to be relevant and enhanced. The next chapter, Chapter 4, outlines the appropriate research design adapted for this study.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Sahu (2013:2) explains that research is 're-search', in which 're' means again and again, and 'search' means a voyage of knowledge, thus emphasising that research engenders an original contribution to an existing stock of knowledge. Kothari (2006) notes that research could be defined as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic. Thus the research undertaken in this study investigates pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing the first-year experience and academic performance of BEd undergraduate students at a university of technology.

The over-arching aim of this study was twofold. First, to identify and explore pre-entry factors influencing the first-year experience and academic performance of teacher education students and, second, to identify and propose strategies for first-year student support.

The objectives of the research as explained in Chapter 1 are to:

- gain a better understanding of who the first-year students are who enter teacher education programmes;
- gain familiarity with specific pre-entry factors that influence teacher education students' first-year experience;
- ascertain how these factors influence students' first-year academic and social integration and academic performance; and
- propose strategies to enhance the quality of students' first-year experience in higher education.

The research questions that guided this study's methodology were:

Main RQ: How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?

The following sub-questions were identified:

Sub-RQ1: Who are our first-year teacher education students?

Sub-RQ2: What are the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that first-year teacher education students bring with them to higher education?

Sub-RQ3: To what extent do pre-entry factors that students report influence their social and academic interaction in their first year of study?

Sub-RQ4: To what extent do these factors contribute to the students' first-year experience and academic performance?

The next sections describe the methodology or logical sequence that was followed to investigate the research phenomenon. Kothari (2006) explains that the scope of a study's research methodology is much wider than that of the research methods. A research methodology includes the theoretical perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and considers the general logic behind the specific techniques, collection and analysis methods used in the context of the study. Thus the alignment of the research methodology with this study's research aims, objectives and the associated research questions was a fundamental consideration when designing this study. I therefore reflected carefully on the purpose of the study before making the various methodological decisions.

4.2 Outline of this chapter

This chapter follows Creswell's (2003) line of thinking which emphasises that research methodology includes a researcher's plans, procedures and decisions that begin from broad philosophical assumptions to strategies of enquiry to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. In order to describe the research methodology employed in this study to investigate and explain the phenomenon of the first-year experience and academic performance, this chapter is divided into three main sections, namely, the philosophical perspectives; case study as a research strategy of enquiry; and the research design.

The first section presents this study's philosophical perspectives. It presents pragmatism as the general philosophical perspective, including some elements of

constructivism/interpretivism that inform this study. The constructivist/interpretivist perspective employs the assumption that meanings in the social world are constructed by individuals as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Creswell, 2003). Thus constructivism offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretive and engaging mode of enquiry from which the fundamental nature of students' first-year experience and academic performance may be elicited.

Pragmatism offers a practical assumption of 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:52). The pragmatic worldview offers the use of those methods most appropriate for studying phenomena where the essential emphasis is on actual behaviour and the beliefs that stand behind such behaviour (Morgan, 2007:67). The pragmatic philosophy of common sense uses human enquiry as its focal point. It was used as a mode of enquiry from which the students' habitus and cultural capital could be examined to understand their influence on the first-year experience and academic performance.

Section 2 discusses the case study approach as the main research strategy of enquiry. The use of a case study strategy allowed this study to explore teacher education students' first-year experience in greater depth and collect detailed information with the use of a variety of data collection procedures over a period of one year (Stake, 1995).

The third section highlights the research design by including the following: the sample design; the research method for the study which included the sequential collection of quantitative and qualitative data and the data collection tools used; the analysis and interpretation methods employed; and the trustworthiness of the data. In addition, this chapter briefly discusses the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2 as a theoretical lens to analyse and interpret the data.

4.3 Philosophical perspectives

All research undertaken needs a foundation for its enquiry and researchers need to be aware of the implicit worldview/knowledge/paradigm they bring to their studies. Yin (2011:285) contends that 'a worldview consists of a set of beliefs about the acceptable qualities of research and how it should be done'. For Kuhn (1962), a paradigm is an agreed worldview that is embodied in the beliefs, practices, and

products of a group of scientists (cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010:85). Creswell (2003) highlights four worldviews used in research (refer to Table 4.1) and argues that they all have common philosophical elements. He adds that that there are no set standards for the different worldviews, but they continue to evolve. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) state that the differing worldviews can and should coexist as they offer healthy contrasts and dialogues. Table 4:1 below presents the different worldviews and describes the characteristics under each view.

Table 4:1 Paradigms, methods and tools

Paradigm	Methods (primarily)	Data collection tools (examples)
Positivist/ Postpositivist	Quantitative. 'Although qualitative methods can be used within this paradigm, quantitative methods tend to be predominant ...' (Mertens, 2005:12).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiments • Quasi-experiments • Tests • Scales
Interpretivist/ Constructivist	Qualitative methods predominate although quantitative methods may also be utilised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations • Questionnaires • Document reviews • Visual data analysis
Transformative	Qualitative methods with quantitative and mixed methods. Contextual and historical factors described, especially as they relate to oppression (Mertens, 2005:9).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse range of tools – particular needs to avoid discrimination, e.g., sexism, racism, and homophobia.
Pragmatic	Qualitative and/or quantitative methods may be employed. Methods are matched to the specific questions and purpose of the research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May include tools from both positivist and interpretivist paradigms, e.g., interviews, observations, testing and experiments.

Source: (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006:201).

4.3.1 Constructivist/interpretivist viewpoint

In summary, constructivism holds that meaning is constructed by individuals as they engage with the world: their interpretations and the way they make sense of this world are based on their historical, cultural and social perspectives (Mason, 2002). In addition, the constructivists prefer qualitative methods of collecting data and the creation of meanings from data collected in the field is always social (Creswell,

2009). The constructivist view proclaims that there is no single reality, but multiple realities which are subjective and influenced by the context of the situation.

Two of the research questions of this study, RQ3 and RQ4 (outlined above in Section 4.1) required participants to construct meanings of the first-year experience with regard to their social and academic interactions in their first-year of studies. According to Crotty (1998), meanings are both constrained and constructed by one's culture, and historical and social perspectives; the social environment is seen as an extension of the experiences of the individual. In this view, the ontological orientation of the interpretive view resonates with the objective of this study which focused on exploring the internal reality of teacher education students' pre-entry characteristics and their influence on the first-year experience and academic performance. The main epistemological assumption of knowing reality was through exploring the experiences of others regarding a specific phenomenon. In this study, students' voices and their interpretations of their own experience were the medium explored to comprehend realities embedded in their first-year experience. Finally, the case study strategy was deemed appropriate for qualitative data collection, especially since I needed to conduct an in-depth study of a small number of participants that addressed RQ 3 and RQ4.

4.3.2 *Pragmatic viewpoint*

This research study is situated largely within the pragmatic worldview, which stands alone in key worldview elements. Pragmatism, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), is referred to as an example of a single paradigmatic stance. The uniqueness of this paradigm is that its focus, unlike that of other worldviews, is on the consequences of the research and the importance of the research questions over the methods used. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) describe the pragmatic worldview as:

... typically associated with mixed methods research. The focus is on the consequences of the research; on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods; and multiple methods of data collection inform the problems under study. Thus it is pluralistic and oriented toward 'what works' and practice (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007:23).

According to Wheeldon and Åhlberg (2012), the pragmatic approach to understanding reality and developing knowledge is through the use of both

quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This process provides an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. For Cameron (2011), pragmatism in its simplest sense is viewed as a practical approach to a problem. Thus epistemologically, the key to pragmatism is practicality, using the 'what works' approach to addressing research problems.

From a philosophical and methodological stance, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) assert the following:

Pragmatism will be productive because it offers an immediate and useful middle position philosophically and methodologically; it offers a practical and outcome-orientated method of inquiry that is based on action and leads, iteratively, to further action and the elimination of doubt; and it offers a method for selecting methodological mixes that can help researchers better answer many of their research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:17).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) identify the following characteristics as a philosophical worldview of pragmatism:

- Both quantitative and qualitative research methods may be used in a single study.
- The research question should be of primary importance, with a much greater emphasis than either the method or the philosophical worldview that underlies the method.
- The forced-choice contrast between postpositivism and constructivism should be abandoned. Pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews and different assumptions.
- The use of metaphysical concepts such as truth and reality should be avoided. Pragmatists sees truth as what works at the time to provide the best understanding of a research problem.
- A practical and applied philosophy should guide methodological choices.

Morgan (2007) describes pragmatism as a philosophy. It has strayed somewhat from the original focus according to Mertens (2010), but still resembles the ideas of the earlier pragmatists. The focus on 'lines of action', 'warranted assertions', and 'workability', is described by Morgan (2007:67) as:

... on actual behaviour (*'lines of action'*), the beliefs that stand behind those behaviours (*'warranted assertions'*), and the consequences that are likely to follow from different behaviours (*'workability'*).

The pragmatists' goal is to search for useful points of connection. Shields (2003) avers that pragmatism in its simplest definition is viewed as a philosophy of common sense, which uses purposeful human enquiry as its focal point. The uniqueness of pragmatism identified by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) is that it aims to unlock the process of enquiry to all possibilities in the most practical way.

In a pragmatic view on ontology the emphasis is on creating knowledge through lines of action or joint actions (Morgan, 2007). The value of the research is judged on its effectiveness and establishing what works. For this study I draw on multiple knowledge claims including those of the constructivist viewpoint (Section 4.3.1 above) to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of reality, taking into account the participants' personal experiences and their cultural, social and historical perspectives. The pragmatic view on how we gain knowledge of what we know (epistemology) is deemed most appropriate to understand the phenomena under investigation. This study makes use of a case study strategy to best understand such phenomena. First-year students within the Faculty of Education were chosen as the case. This allowed me, from a pragmatist view, to position myself as an insider and interrogate what 'interests' me and is of 'value' to me and to collect and utilise the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within my own value system (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998:30).

4.4 Research strategy of enquiry: case study

A case study was my choice of research strategy for exploring pre-entry factors influencing the first-year experience and academic performance. According to Harrison (2002), a case study is more aptly described as a strategy than a method: it sets out to understand phenomena within its operating context. Yin defines a case study as an empirical enquiry which 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003:13). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) describe a phenomenon as a particular event, situation, programme, or activity which is researched in its natural context and is bounded by space and time. A case study

could be regarded as a suitable strategy when the 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed (Yin, 1984:1). Atkins and Wallace (2012) state that the case study strategy has the ability to go beyond the 'how' and 'why' questions: it offers a way of investigating connections, patterns and context, and of reflecting on the details and the bigger picture under investigation. With the above explanation in mind, the case study strategy was an acceptable approach to capture an in-depth understanding of issues and the complexities of first-year students within their natural context.

Yin (2003:5) identifies six kinds of case studies based on a 2 x 3 matrix. He states that a case study could either be single, focusing on one case only, or multiple, which focuses on two or more cases within the same study. He then classifies three types of case studies: descriptive, exploratory or explanatory. A descriptive case study design presents an in-depth description of a phenomenon within its context. Exploratory and descriptive case study designs can involve theory generation however, only explanatory case study design is appropriate for theory testing (Yin, 1994). However, Stake (1995) includes three other types: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Stake expounds that an *intrinsic* case study is when the researcher has an interest in the case; when a group of cases are studied together it is referred to as a *collective* case study; and an *instrumental* case study is when the case is used to understand more than what is obvious to the observer.

This study can be classified as an instrumental single-case design (Stake, 1995). A defining characteristic of this case study was its intensive investigation of a single unit (Yin, 1994; 2009). Its primary concern was with particularistic, descriptive and heuristic analysis of a single unit within a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (1998:30) defines *particularistic* as focusing on a particular situation, event, programme or phenomenon; *descriptive* as producing a rich, thick description of the phenomena under investigation; and *heuristic* as enlightening the researcher's understanding of the phenomena and bringing about the discovery of new meaning to the phenomenon being studied. To capture a deep understanding of pre-entry factors influencing the first-year experience of teacher education students, I sought to embrace the single case study approach. An undergraduate BEd programme at a single campus in the Faculty of Education at a university of technology became the medium for exploring the first-year experience and academic performance of these

students. The descriptive case study design was considered most appropriate for this study, although according to Yin's (2003) six kinds of case studies, this study could be regarded as an explanatory case study as it does engage with Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration theory and Bourdieu's (1984) conceptual tools. In this case study, the concepts from the two theories were not used as theory testing, but more to support the description of the phenomenon (Yin, 1984). The use of a descriptive case study design was a more appropriate choice for this study: it allowed me to investigate the students' first-year experience with much rigour and gain a deeper understanding of the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing their experiences.

According to Stake's (1995) classification of case studies, this study is firmly established as instrumental: it focused on teacher education students as a means of understanding their first-year experience in higher education. As a lecturer employed in the Faculty of Education at a university of technology, and with a vested interest in academic support for at-risk first-year students, a pragmatic decision, based on easy access, was taken to focus the case within the teacher education context. This case could be regarded as intrinsic (Stake, 1995). But it can be argued that this study goes beyond self-interest to incorporate the insights gained to understand the phenomenon at a level that would be of significance to all stakeholders involved with first-year students and should therefore be understood as an instrumental case study.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) describe a case study phenomenon as a particular situation, event, activity or programme bounded by space and time. This study's situation was principally focused on students' first-year experience at a higher education institution. It was bounded by a specific group of students - first-year teacher education students; the bounded time period was for one academic year - the first year of study only. Merriam (2009) suggests that insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, procedures, and future research. The case studied in this research was aimed at gaining a better understanding of who our first-year students are and what pre-entry attributes they bring with them to higher education. The information gathered from this study may influence first-year curriculum planners and academic support programmes to plan inclusive first-year

programmes that could positively influence students' first-year experience. This could lead to an improved retention and success rate among the first-year student intake.

Case study research has many advantages. Reasons for utilising the case study strategy for this study were:

- Case studies often build upon tacit knowledge and provide a thick description of the case under investigation (Merriam, 1998:12).
- They have the ability to accommodate both quantitative and qualitative research techniques (Yin, 2003).
- They have the ability to deal with a variety of evidence, for example, documents, artefacts, interviews and observation (Merriam, 1998:12).
- Besides being able to explore or describe qualitative data in the real environment, case studies can assist in exploring the complexities of real-life situations (Zainal, 2007).
- They allow the researcher to explore the phenomena without restricting the context: the examination of the data is conducted within the context of its use (Yin, 1984).
- They are compatible with different philosophical viewpoints. Rezgui and Miles (2010) acknowledge that case studies are often associated with interpretivist and pragmatic viewpoints.

The use of case studies as a research design has been criticised by many researchers. For example Yin (2009:14) and Atkins and Wallace (2012:111-112) identify three types of arguments against case study research: the danger of generalising from the particular; accusations of lack of rigour; and the size of documents and unclear management structure.

The danger of generalising from the particular: The main concern with regard to case study research is its use of a small sample; therefore the results are often seen as not generalisable. Atkins and Wallace (2012) suggest that researchers should acknowledge such limitations of the research, in terms of scope and transferability, and should not offer any elaborate claims made on the basis of one case.

Accusations of lack of rigour: Yin (2009:14) acknowledges a second concern as a lack of rigour in the investigation. He admits that case study researchers have been accused of being 'sloppy', not following systematic procedures, and allowing biased pre-determined views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions.

The size of documents and unclear management structure: A third concern in respect of case studies is that this type of research can be too long, difficult to conduct and can produce a massive amount of documentation which can result in the data's not being systematically managed and organised (Yin, 1984).

Although there have been criticisms of the use of case study research, the validity and reliability of a case study can be established by following certain requirements. Yin (2003:34) highlights four tests commonly used to establish the quality of any empirical social research undertaken. Case studies form part of social research, so the following four tests are relevant to case studies: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Validity and reliability and their relevance to this study are discussed in detail in Section 4.5 below.

4.5 Research design

According to Yin (2011), all research studies have an implicit blueprint or design, whether planned by the researcher or not. He defines research designs as 'logical' plans where logic involves the link between the research questions, the data to be collected, and strategies for analysing the data so that the findings can address the intended research questions (Yin, 2011:76). This study's research design is highlighted in Figure 4:1 on the following page (page 90). This section includes a discussion on participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection methods, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study.

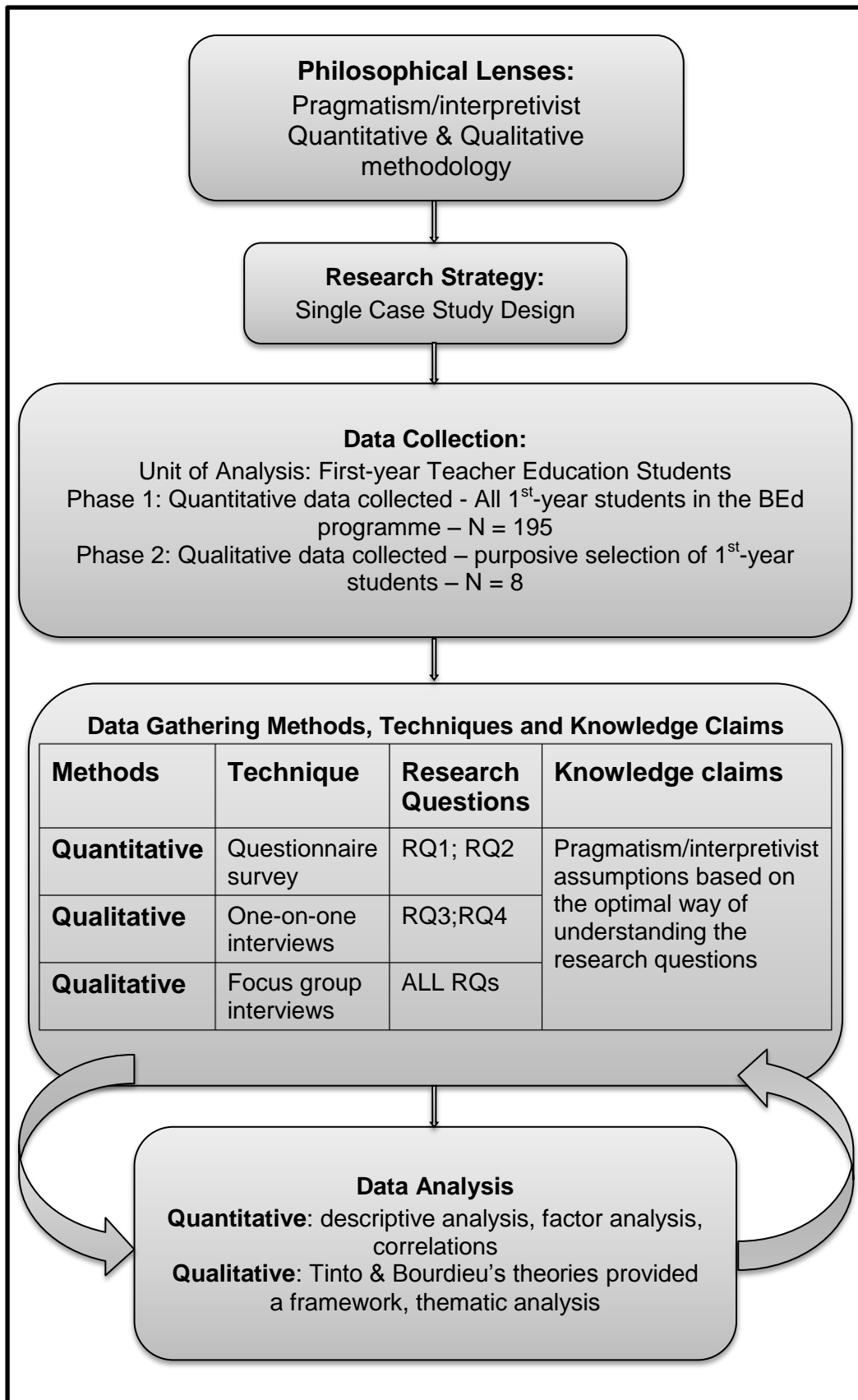


Figure 4:1 Research design

4.5.1 Selection of research participants

It was appropriate to invite all in-coming first-year students accepted for the BEd programme to participate in this research. The research site was the Faculty of Education, where English is the medium of instruction. The total fulltime enrolment figure at this campus for undergraduate teacher education programmes is 2 378. Approximately 500 students are enrolled in the first year of study across the three undergraduate programmes (CPUT, 2014). In 2012, at the commencement of this study, students from the three undergraduate programmes: Foundation Phase (FP); Intermediate and Senior Phase (ISP) and Further Education and Training (FET), which constituted a total intake of approximately 300 first-year students, became the participants for this study.

According to Mouton (1996), sampling in social research refers to procedures which produce a representative selection of population elements. For this study, a purposive sampling procedure was used. A key characteristic of purposeful sampling, particularly suitable for this study, was that not all members of the population are equivalent data sources. Participants selected for the qualitative sample were believed to be information-rich cases: selection was based on prior identified criteria for inclusion (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Participants chosen for inclusion in this study were 'new' first-year teacher education students accepted for the BEd programme. They were prospective students entering their first year at university, and therefore able to provide information on their prior expectations of university and in-depth information on their first impressions of being a first-year university student.

To address the first two research questions, it was essential to include the total first-year cohort accepted in the BEd programmes. The first stage of data collection was quantitative in nature. The total first-year cohort of 300 students accepted into one of the three BEd programmes (FP, ISP and FET) formed part of the quantitative sample. Pre-entry questionnaires were mailed to all students: 195 of the 300 responded. The 195 respondents became participants for the quantitative part of the data collection. The response rate of the mailed questionnaires was 65%, which according to Bryman (2008) is an acceptable response rate. The acceptable sample size guaranteed a minimal risk of bias in the findings as well as a greater opportunity

for the validity of the findings. For the qualitative data-collection phase, a purposive sample was selected from respondents of the mailed questionnaires. There are many variations of purposeful sampling, Wiersma and Jurs's (2005) maximum variation sampling offered the most suitable strategy for the selection of participants for the qualitative data collection. Maximum variation sampling is a strategy by which individuals are selected for the sample: they provide the greatest differences in certain characteristics. Participants who were selected for this phase were chosen from one specific course from the BEd programme, the foundation phase course. Students registered in the programme specialise in teaching Grade R to Grade 3 learners. Characteristics (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005) that prompted my choice of sample from the foundation phase cohort were as follows: the immediate shortage of foundation phase teachers in the country, specifically in rural areas; the low participation rate of black and male students in the programme; and the high first-year attrition rate in this programme. Table 4:2 below indicates the profile of student enrolment in the foundation phase programme over a six-year period, from 2008 to 2012.

Table 4:2 First year enrolment figures for BEd foundation phase students: 2008–2012

Year	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total Female	African	Coloured	Total Male	Total
2008	8	57	2	130	197				197
2009	11	75	3	116	205		2	2	207
2010	9	68		120	197				197
2011	10	77		118	205				205
2012	22	61	2	121	206	1		1	207

These figures represent enrolments according to gender and race on the two satellite campuses offering teacher education programmes at the selected university of technology (CPUT, 2014). It is the only course in the programme that does not reflect the demographics of the country. Another reason for choosing participants from the foundation phase programme is that the selected university of technology is

the only university of technology in South Africa that offers the BEd foundation phase programme. Thus the exclusivity of the foundation phase programme and students intrigued me to focus on first-year students in this particular programme.

Participants for the qualitative data were chosen from the foundation phase cohort of the mailed questionnaire who indicated an interest in participating in the qualitative research. Foundation phase volunteers who provided their contact details formed the initial research pool. From the initial pool of 75 volunteers, a manageable sample of 12 participants was selected. I employed purposive selection to ensure that the sample cohort was representative of the foundation phase group and that information-rich data was collected. Gender and race were used initially to purposively select participants to be representative of the total foundation phase group. The second criterion used to narrow the selection to 12 participants was to ensure that the sample reflected the diversity of the total BEd foundation phase student group with regard to demographics, prior academic performance, and socio-economic characteristics, which were obtained from the completed mailed questionnaires (refer to Table 4:3 on page 94).

I felt that 12 participants would be a manageable number of students with whom to conduct in-depth interviews before the end of the first term of university. However, at the time of the interviews, which was eight weeks into the academic year, two of the selected participants had dropped out of the course, citing teaching as a wrong career choice. An additional two participants were unavailable for interviews owing to their heavy workloads and personal responsibilities; thus only eight of the selected participants became part of the final sample and were involved in the interview process. Table 4:3 on the next page highlights the profile of the participants selected for the study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Table 4:3 Profiles of participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Race	Profile
Joyce	22	Female	African	Single, one child, orphan, lives in Langa, Western Cape, received a scholarship to attend a private school, received a bursary for BEd, first-generation student, part-time job, uses public transport (taxi), does not own a computer.
Thabo	24	Male	African	Single, one child, orphan, mother was a domestic worker (single parent), lives in Dunoon, Eastern Cape, attended public school in rural area (no-fees school), moved away from home, applied for student loan, presently funding his own fees, has a part-time job, lives in student residence, uses public transport (taxi), does not own a computer.
Tasha	19	Female	White	Single, parents have professional jobs, lives away from home, with grandparents in Constantia, Western Cape. From Hermanus, attended public school (ex Model C fee paying), parents paying for BEd, not first-generation student, uses own car to campus and also owns a laptop.
Nadia	20	Female	Coloured	Single, parents divorced, mother remarried, mum professional employment (teacher), lives at home in Ottery, Western Cape, attended public school (ex Model C fee paying), parents paying for BEd, first-generation student, uses public transport (train), owns a computer.
Letti	27	Female	African	Single, father farm worker (semi-skilled labour), mother housewife, lives in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, attended public school (ex Model C fee paying), BEd fees part individual & part funded, first-generation student, has a part-time job, uses public transport (taxi), does not own a computer.
Alley	21	Female	Coloured	Single, parents divorced, mother remarried, parents have clerical jobs, lives at home, Milnerton, Western Cape, attended public school (fee paying), parents paying for studies, first-generation student, uses public transport (taxi), owns a computer.
Katlyn	19	Female	White	Single, parents have skilled jobs, divorced. Mother remarried, lives in Table View, Western Cape, attended public school (ex Model C, fee paying), first-generation student, she and her parents contribute to her fees, has a part-time job, has her own car but also travels with lift club, owns a laptop.
Lisa	19	Female	White	Single, parents divorced, lives with mum – remarried, both parents have professional jobs, lives in Wynberg, Western Cape, not first-generation student, parents paying for BEd studies, attended public school (Ex Model C fee paying), uses private transport (own car), owns a laptop.

The total intake of foundation phase students registered for the 2012 BEd programme consisted of 98% women and 2% men. For the first time since the inception of the programme at this particular campus has the programme experienced such a diverse student population, with 48% being coloured female, 26% African female, 24% white female, and 2% Indian female. The programme has also for the first time enrolled two male African students. The drastic change in the racial diversity of students entering the foundation phase programme was due to the Government of South Africa offering teacher education bursaries to address the shortage of foundation phase teachers in the country. More African foundation phase teachers are needed in rural schools since foundation phase learners at primary school need to be taught in their mother tongue. As reflected in Table 4:2 on page 92, the faculty still has a majority white female student population of 58% in the foundation phase programme, a total from both campuses.

4.5.2 Ethical considerations

Silverman (2011:417) states that ethical considerations have become one of the contemporary tendencies in qualitative research, diverting attention from knowledge production to social justice. Ethical considerations should be sustained during the entire research process (Kvale, 1996), from the start of the investigation to the final writing up of the study. This section uses Silverman's (2011) three main issues identified as ethical guidelines to guide the discussion: codes and consent, confidentiality, and trust.

Codes and consent: Ethical codes guarantee that identities and records of participants are confidential. When findings are published, the participants are not identifiable (Bryman, 2008). Kvale (1996) cautions that ethical codes do not provide definite answers to the normative choices made during a research investigation but can provide guidelines that must be judged according to their relevance to specific situations. Silverman (2011) contends that codes and consent refer to 'informed consent'. In this study there were two layers of informed consent. First, approval was sought from the institution's Faculty Ethics Committee. A formal proposal was submitted to the committee, providing full disclosure of the aim, objectives and procedures of the research project and the participants that would be selected for the project. A research ethical clearance compliance form (see Appendix D), issued by

the Faculty Ethics Committee, had to be completed. Once approval had been obtained from the Faculty Ethics Committee, I ensured that throughout my research process ethical decisions and procedures were followed. The second consent was obtained from the participants. For the mailed questionnaire, prior written or verbal consent could not be obtained. All first-year prospective students who received the mailed questionnaire were informed of the following: the questionnaire formed part of a DEd research project; filling in the questionnaire was optional; no costs would be incurred since a self-addressed envelope was provided; and finally, confidentiality would be preserved with regard to participants' information and identity (see Appendix A: Pre-entry questionnaire).

Participants selected for the one-on-one and focus-group interviews were given a written consent form to sign. Prior to the prospective participants signing the consent form, the following explanation and description, adapted from Cohen et al. (2008) and Bryman (2008), was used to inform prospective participants of the procedures of the research study so that they could make an informed choice as to whether they wanted to participate in the study or not:

- The purpose, aims and procedures of the research were outlined to the prospective participants.
- They were assured that no risk, discomfort or negative outcomes would result from their participation.
- Their participation would be voluntary.
- They were free to refuse to answer any questions.
- They could withdraw from the interview at any time.
- Benefits that might derive from the research to the individual, the researcher and the faculty.
- They were assured of confidentiality in respect of their identity and information.

Once the above had been outlined to the prospective participants, they were given an opportunity to ask questions with regard to any aspect of the research. When the prospective participant was fully satisfied and understood what was expected of his or her role in the research study, the written consent form was signed.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality is linked to the code of ethics and informed consent. Confidentiality means that the researcher is obliged to protect the participants' right to privacy (Silverman, 2011). This entails protecting the participants' identity and protecting the information given as a 'shared secret' (Cohen et al., 2008). Bryman (2008:123) warns researchers that 'the right to privacy is a tenet that many of us hold dear, and transgressions of that right in the name of research are not regarded as acceptable'. Cohen et al. (2008) add that researchers need to keep faith with those who have helped them. In order to ensure confidentiality and keep faith with the participants, I undertook the following actions: verbally before the interview I stated explicitly to the participants that their right to privacy would be upheld at all times; the confidentiality of the participants was once again acknowledged in the written consent form; and finally, the protection of the participants' privacy was sustained by using pseudonyms and changing their identifiable features when I reported on their interviews.

Trust: The third important concern associated with ethics is trust. This refers to the relationship between the researcher and the participants. To build trust between the researcher and the participant, the research procedures should be transparent (Yin, 2011) at all levels. Special care should be taken at the time of recording and reporting on participants' responses. Before the commencement of the interviews, permission from participants was obtained for the use of a tape recorder during interviews. Participants were assured that they could have access to their information at any time requested. Finally, participants were given transcripts of their interviews to revise, add or delete any of their comments.

The three ethical issues of consent, confidentiality and trust are closely linked. Therefore the role of the researcher when undertaking research should be to design, review and undertake the investigation in a way that ensures research integrity and quality.

4.5.3 Data collection methods

Data collection methods refer to a variety of techniques that could be used for gathering information. According to Cohen et al. (2008), there is no single prescription for specific data collection instruments to be used. The choice should be

'fitness for purpose'. This study makes use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) explain that the mixing of methods focuses on quantitative and qualitative data being collected, analysed and interpreted in a single study. Qualitative data is conveyed in words and quantitative data is presented numerically (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2009) advises that researchers can make interpretations and identify patterns from statistical data and themes and patterns can be presented numerically.

Calls for the integration of a quantitative and qualitative research approach have been advanced by many disciplines. Molina Azorin and Cameron (2010) highlight the growing popularity of mixed methods research across all fields or disciplines. This admixture had been recommended mainly because mixing the two data sets provides the researcher with a better understanding of the problem. The study is able to achieve a more superior research outcome than one obtained from exclusively qualitative or quantitative data. The rationale for using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in this study was that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods on their own could capture the complex issue of the students' pre-entry factors and their influence on their first-year experience. When used in combination, both methods complement each other and provide a more complete picture of the research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

The use of quantitative and qualitative methods in this study provided the following strengths to the phenomenon under investigation:

- The use of both methods provided strengths that offset the weaknesses of using either quantitative or qualitative data on their own.
- The mixing of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools provided more comprehensive evidence for studying the research problem.
- Using both methods provided satisfactory answers to the research questions under investigation.
- Using mixed methods encouraged me to collaborate across the quantitative and qualitative divide which occasionally can serve to limit the approaches to enquiry.
- Mixed methods research is 'practical' and allowed me the freedom to use all methods possible to address the research problem.

- The use of mixed methods encourages the use of multiple worldviews or paradigms rather than the typical association of certain paradigms for quantitative research and others for qualitative research. In this study I used both the pragmatic and interpretivist worldviews to understand and interpret the phenomena under investigation.

The strengths of the mixed-methods approach assisted me in obtaining a better understanding of factors influencing teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance. Both the numerical and interpretive methods of data collection assisted in my understanding the way students perceived and experienced the world. Using the mixed-methods approach has value but it also has its challenges. Driscoll et al. (2007) caution that collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data can be time-consuming and expensive, and may lead researchers working under tight budgetary or time constraints to reduce sample sizes or limit the time spent interviewing. Another challenge that could arise and retard the research process is that researchers may have expertise in one data-collection method and not the other. This could adversely affect collection and interpretation of data. These issues are important: Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state that these challenges are not too great to overcome, and that there are strategies that could be used to address these issues.

This study used the sequential method to collect data. Quantitative data was collected first and regarded as phase one of the data collection process. The collection of qualitative data followed and was regarded as phase two. As represented in Figure 4:2 on the following page (page 100), several data collection methods were used to answer the research questions. In Phase 1, questionnaires were used that addressed Research Question 1 and 2. In Phase 2, one-on-one interviews and focus-group interviews collected the qualitative data and addressed Research Questions 3 and 4.

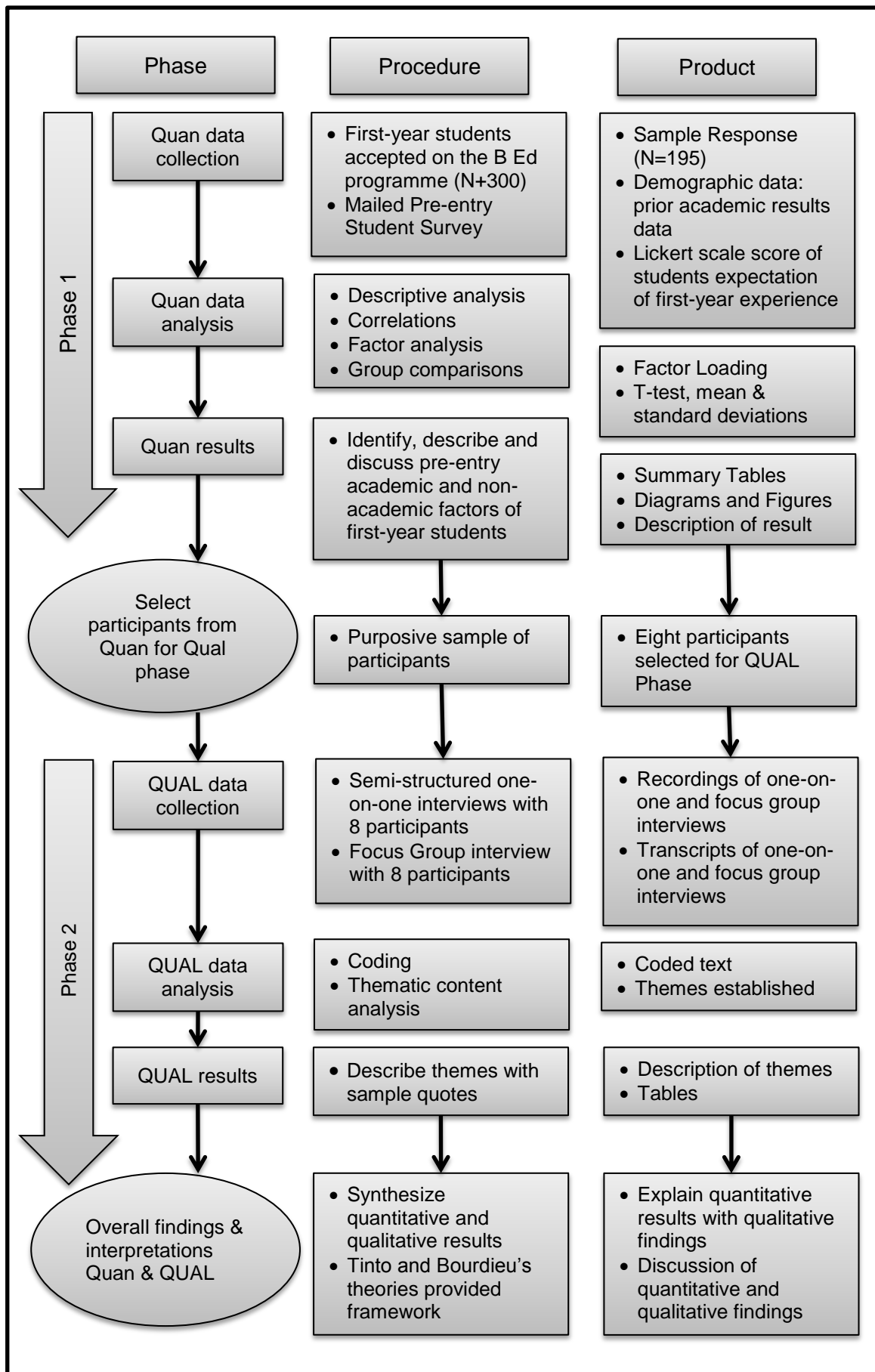


Figure 4:2 Visual model of this study's sequential collection of mixed data

4.5.4 Mailed questionnaire

According to Bryman (2008), the term 'questionnaire' is reserved for contexts in which a series of usually closed questions are completed by the respondents. Questionnaires that are answered by respondents independent of an interviewer are referred to as self-administered questionnaires. Curtis and Curtis (2011) note that increasingly more self-administered questionnaires are completed without any interaction between participant and interviewer, for example, participants complete an electronic survey via a link in an Email or a mailed questionnaire. This study used the traditional mail questionnaire format to gain information from pre-entry first-year teacher education students. Three hundred questionnaires (see Appendix A) were sent by post to all students accepted for entry into the first year of the BEd undergraduate programme in the Faculty of Education at the university of technology which was chosen as the research site. I was cognisant of the fact that the sample population selected comprised new first-year students entering higher education and that some might not be familiar with self-administered questionnaires. Respondents had to read and complete the questionnaire without the interviewer's instructions or guidance. I had to ensure the following design in my questionnaire:

- Few open questions.
- Instructions that were easy to follow and not complicated.
- Unambiguous wording.
- Relatively brief and quick to answer to avoid 'respondent fatigue' (Bryman, 2008:261).

It was hoped that the information received from the questionnaires would provide an overview of the students entering the programmes and allow for more in-depth probing for the follow-up qualitative data collection. The self-administered questionnaire was divided into four sections: Section A, titled *Background Information*, requested mainly demographic and socio-economic information. Section B, titled *Pre-University Academic Background*, enquired about the students' prior school experience, subjects and computer skills. Section C focused on their career aspirations as teachers, and finally section D consisted of 40 statements on students' expectations of their first-year university experience (refer to Appendix A). The first three sections made use of the dichotomous question type which asked

closed questions requiring, for example, a yes/no response. Cohen et al. (2008) acknowledge that dichotomous questions are useful: they compel respondents to make a choice. Such questions funnel subsequent questions. For example, if 'yes', proceed to question X. It is also possible to code responses quickly.

Section D made use of the rating scale question type. According to Cohen et al. (2008:325), this type of question is a reliable device for researchers. The use of rating scales builds in a degree of intensity, sensitivity and differentiation of responses while still generating numbers. It provides the opportunity to determine frequency and correlations, and fuses measurements with opinions from analysing data quantitatively and/or qualitatively (Cohen et al., 2008:327). Section D consisted of 40 statements which sought to gain knowledge on the students' prior expectations of their first year of study. To give respondents a range of responses to the statements, the Likert scale was used which consisted of four categories ranging from 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. The reason for using a four-point scale is that participants are required to make a decision on the statement. As Cohen et al. (2008) note, there often is a tendency for respondents to opt for the mid-point. The rating scale is a powerful tool that offers many opportunities to be flexible, but some of its cautionary factors include the inference of the intensity of feelings between two categories; for example, 'strongly agree' and 'agree' match that of 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree'; there are limited checks on whether the respondents are telling the truth; and finally, there is no way of knowing if respondents wanted to provide additional comments on what was asked. To give respondents an opportunity to voice their opinions/concerns, an open-ended question was provided at the end of the questionnaire that requested students to respond to any concerns/expectations with regard to their first-year experience.

Data collected from the questionnaire survey was primarily used to complement the qualitative part of this study. Much of the quantitative data collected provided a descriptive analysis of the first-year student cohort entering the teacher education programme at the selected campus. It provided a list of pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that were used to follow up in the in-depth interview process. To gain a greater sense of confidence and the maximum benefit from using questionnaires, it was crucial that I piloted the instrument. Bryman (2008) advises

that it is always desirable to conduct a pilot study before administering a self-completion questionnaire: it will ensure that the survey questions operate well (e.g. for clarity, elimination of ambiguities, target audience readability levels). It can play a role to ensure that the research instrument as a whole functions well. The questionnaire used in this study was first examined by my supervisor to check for the appropriateness of the items on the questionnaire for the research study. The modified version was then examined by other colleagues and experts in the field to ensure it was suitable for the study. Finally, the revised questionnaire was piloted on a small group of 30 teacher education students who had completed their first year of study. The students provided feedback on the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout. They provided feedback on the appropriateness of certain groups of questions/themes and use of words and readability levels of the target group. Once the adjusted questionnaire had been completed, it was mailed to all first-year students accepted for the BEd programme in the next year (2012). To avoid any additional costs to the participants, a self-addressed pre-paid envelope was included with the questionnaire.

4.5.5 One-on-one interviews

Kvale (1996) regards the qualitative research interview as a construction site for knowledge. He adds that 'an interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two people conversing about a theme of mutual interest' (Kvale,1996:14). Thus Kvale regards the interdependence of human interaction and knowledge production as central to the social context that provides the multiple perspectives needed for understanding a particular phenomenon. Cohen et al. (2008) concur with Kvale (1996), and add that although an interview enables participants to discuss their interpretations of the world they live in and also express situations from their own point of view, the researcher concerned with collecting data about life is inseparable from human embeddedness: both parties are part of life itself. Thus, in considering my research questions and research design, I opted to conduct in-depth interviews to collect rich data from the participants to better understand the phenomenon under investigation.

Interviewers could apply different approaches to interviewing participants. Interviews could range from being highly structured, questionnaire-driven interviews at one

extreme to open-ended conversational formats on the other (Merriam, 2009). In highly-structured interviews, questions and the order of the questions are determined ahead of time. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but the exact wording and order are not pre-determined. Unstructured interviews involve no pre-determined criteria and are essentially exploratory.

For the purpose of this study, I decided to implement the standardised semi-structured interview technique. In this type of interview the sequence of usually open-ended questions is determined in advance. Respondents are asked the same basic questions in the same order, which provides consistency. An interview schedule (refer to Appendix B) as well as picture cards (refer to Appendix E) was used to conduct the interviews. Patton (1987:116) offers the following strengths and weaknesses of using the semi-structured interview technique:

The strengths of this type of interview are:

- Respondents answer the same questions, so increasing comparability of responses.
- A complete set of data for each respondent on the topic addressed in the interview is produced.
- Interviewer bias is reduced through common questions.
- The instrumentation used in the evaluation is available for review.
- Evidence organisation and analysis are facilitated.

The weakness of this type of interview is that there is limited scope for flexibility should the respondents want to broaden their responses. To overcome the latter, I did not institute any constraints or limits to the way the participants discussed their views and experiences in response to the interview questions.

Formulating interview questions: The interviews were guided by the interview schedule consisting of questions that were divided according to the seven themes related to pre-entry factors and the first-year experience (see Appendix B). The themes included were: family background; pre-entry schooling experience; first-year university expectations; first-year experiences; academic integration; social

integration; and support structures. In devising the questions for the interview schedule, I took into account my main research question of this study. My aim was to draw responses from the participants with regard to the phenomenon under investigation. However, in formulating the questions I did not draw attention to the seven themes, but worded my questions in a general sense to probe the themes. The formulation of my questions was guided by the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 and outlined briefly in the latter part of this chapter. The main objective was that the questions associated with the seven themes should aid in eliciting responses from the participants that would reveal their habitus, forms of capital and prior educational experiences which would facilitate a deeper understanding of how certain pre-entry factors identified by the teacher education students influenced their first-year experience and academic performance.

The use of picture sort cards: For the final question on the interview schedule, participants were shown ten picture cards (see Appendix E). These cards had to be sorted, ranging from the card that had the most significant influence, to the card that had the least influence on their university experience. The use of sorting techniques involves participants sorting such items as physical objects, pictures or cards containing words into different groups, so allowing their item categorisations to be elicited (Whaley & Longoria, 2009). According to Nurmiliani et al. (2004), card sorting is a knowledge-elicitation method used to capture information about different ways of representing domain knowledge. It provides valuable insight into participants' understanding of and perceptions on a particular issue. Österåker (2001) states that picture cards allow participants to be more expressive and verbal. This increases the amount of information given by participants. He elaborates that picture cards allow participants to become informants rather than respondents and to tell stories rather than answer structured questions. Thus, using the sort-card activity concurrently with the in-depth interview provided rich data on the students' perceptions and influences on their first-year university experiences. Saunders and Thornhill (2004) point out that an advantage of using a card sort activity in a concurrent in-depth interview allows the interviewer greater exploration of reasoning on particular issues raised by the participants.

The ten picture themes outlined in the sort-card activity in this study were: family support; financial support; lecturer support; community support; academic student support; new campus friends; school experience; need to succeed; self-confidence; and an open card to discuss any other influence not mentioned. Rugg and McGeorge (2005) recommend that there should be no fewer than eight cards and a maximum of between 20 and 30 cards per sort activity under investigation. The sort-card activity was a crucial component in this study: it was related to the teacher education students' thought processes on important factors either supporting or not supporting their university careers. This activity encouraged participants to reflect critically on situations and sometimes even change their arrangement of the cards.

Participants were free to discuss any issue or link the picture on the card to any of their life experiences. My intention to gather as much knowledge on the students' prior university experience and factors influencing the first-year experience prompted me to implement the picture card technique.

Conducting the interview: The interview was conducted using the following guidelines, adapted from Struwig and Stead (2001:98-99):

- Participants were allowed to go into more detail on those issues they considered to be important in contributing to their first-year experience.
- At no time did I impose my viewpoint on the participants. Instead I assumed a passive role but probed when I thought a certain issue needed clarity.

The length of the interview was dependent on the depth of response from the participants. On average, substantive discussions in the interview, after preliminary introductions had been completed, were between 40 to 45 minutes.

At the commencement of the interview, I thanked participants for being part of the first-year experience study. I offered the participants some introductory remarks on the research study and then requested permission to use the audio tape-recorder.

In addition to the tape-recording, I made notes while the interview was taking place. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), notes taken during the interview are important aspects of enhancing the credibility of research undertaken within the

qualitative paradigm. The review of both the notes taken during the interviews, as well as actual transcripts of the interviews, served to provide a more in-depth and accurate understanding of the interactions with the participants. For example, a transcript will not show that a student's facial expression was negative when speaking about a particular issue.

All interviews were conducted on the campus of the university of technology selected. This was a suitable venue: it was where the first-year teacher education students were located, and it was convenient for the participants. No additional travel time or cost was incurred. The participants were comfortable being interviewed in an environment with which they were familiar.

The one-on-one interviews were conducted in the first term, over a period of one month, in March 2012.

4.5.6 Focus-group interview

The focus-group interview is similar to a one-on-one interview since both are case-centric, meaning there are a few cases and more variables, and both are led by the researcher in semi-conversational format. Curtis and Curtis (2011) acknowledge that there are significant differences. A focus-group interview presents a more natural environment than that of the one-on-one interview because participants in focus groups are influencing, and influenced by, the other participants in the group, just as they are in real life (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Travers (2006) describes a focus group as the term suggests: *focus* having a limited (focused) area of interest and *group* pointing to the number of participants occupied in the interview. Morgan (1988) further explains that a focus group is a form of group interview that depends on the interaction within the group as group members discuss a topic supplied by the interviewer.

In this study, the focus-group technique was used as a follow-up from the mailed questionnaires and the one-on-one interviews. The focus-group interview was conducted with the same participants involved in the one-on-one interviews. The aim of selecting the same group of participants for the focus-group activity was to generate additional opinions and insights on their first-year experience. Since this activity took place at the end of the participants' first year of study, I felt that they

would be able to reflect on the last ten months and provide more in-depth responses. A second aim in using the same sample was to gather the participants as a collective and get them to reflect on and clarify their perspectives on their first-year experience (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The use of this technique with the same participants not only allowed me to gather rich contextualised data, but also was useful for:

- gathering data on attitudes, values and opinions of the participants;
- empowering participants to speak out and voice their own opinions in their own words;
- encouraging groups rather than individuals to voice their opinions;
- providing greater coverage of issues that would not have been possible in the one-on-one interviews and questionnaires; and finally
- triangulating the one-on-one interviews and questionnaires (Morgan, 1988).

Thus a focus-group interview can be regarded as a type of in-depth interview accomplished in a group. Cohen et al. (2008) draw attention to the fact that when conducting group interviews, the unit of analysis becomes the view of the collective and ceases to be that of the individual participants. The focus is on the interaction inside the group.

Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups: The use of focus groups in relation to other research methods has grown in popularity. Early researchers (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Arksey & Knight, 1999), cited in Cohen et al. (2008), have acknowledged the following advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups:

Advantages of focus groups:

- A greater potential for discussion to develop, thus generating a wider range of responses.
- Useful for gaining insights from participants for either a follow-up individual interview or from an individual interview already conducted.
- Quicker than conducting individual interviews and therefore less time consuming.

- Allows the researcher the opportunity to generate data quickly and at a low cost.

Disadvantages of focus groups:

- One participant may dominate the interview.
- Topics that are of a sensitive nature may cause participants to become silent or antagonistic to others in the group.
- There is no scope for individual probing.
- The researcher has less control over the data that is generated.
- The researcher needs to be an expert or well trained to conduct focus-group interviews.

In spite of the disadvantages enumerated above, the use of the focus group method facilitates the collection of rich and interesting data. Patton (2002:386) explains: 'The objective is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others.'

In this regard Merriam (2009) advises that the advantages of focus-group interviews need to be weighed against the disadvantages. In addition, focus-group data-collection methods should be used when the researcher regards them as the best way to obtain the best data that addresses the research questions of the study under investigation.

Participants in the focus group: All eight participants were invited to the focus group interview which was conducted at the end of the students' first year of study. Only six of the participants were available to be part of the focus group. Although there is no hard-and-fast rule with regard to the number of participants to be included in a focus group, Merriam (2009) suggests that between six to ten participants is an acceptable number. Morgan (1988) suggests between four to twelve people to a group. The six participants used in this study's focus group served the purpose of eliciting rich data on the students' first-year experiences and their attitudes, values and opinions on everyday life. According to Macnaghten and Myers (2004:65), 'focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives – but don't'. A key feature of focus groups is the interaction within the

group which can be affected if the participants are not comfortable with one another (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Because of the homogeneity of the group selected for this study's focus group (all the participants were first-year students on the BEd foundation phase programme), it ensured that the discussions were focused on their experiences in their first year of study. The homogeneity of the group ensured that participants had something to say and felt comfortable saying it (Cohen et al., 2008). As participants knew one another from attending the same classes, this ensured good group dynamics. This eased the process of building sound relations which usually occurs at the beginning of a focus-group meeting. This encouraged a frank and open discussion in which the participants were able to add to others' views and opinions and also agree and disagree with one another (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). The use of a homogeneous group of first-year students ensured that the aim of a focus group was achieved:

Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what others have to say. However participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree (Patton, 2002:386).

The role of the researcher: According to Bloor et al. (2001:57), focus groups are naturalistic rather than natural events and therefore cannot be left to chance and circumstance. Their naturalism has to be contrived carefully by the researcher. The role of the researcher, referred to as the moderator or facilitator, is regarded as the core of the focus group (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). The moderator's key role is to encourage all the participants in a focus group to express their opinions with as little direction as possible given by the moderator (Yin, 2011). The questions posed by the moderator are crucial: they will determine interaction among the group. The moderator needs to be able to balance the chairing of the focus group meeting so that the focus group dynamics are not compromised. The moderator should be able to address the following issues that may arise with some participants: being too talkative, too quiet, too noisy, aggressive, and dominating or monopolising the conversation. The moderator's role is to make sure that no participant is either unnecessarily marginalised, subject to blame or ostracised for holding a different opinion (Cohen et al., 2008). Thus the success of the focus group will require the moderator to be vigilant, cautious and polite when managing group dynamics.

However, in this study, I limited my role as researcher in the focus group to primarily directing the questions and ensuring that key topics were discussed (Flick, 2006). For example, I would pose a question and then step aside and observe so that the discussion could take on a 'natural' feel, allowing the participants to discuss the topics highlighted in an everyday, relaxed way. I kept my interruptions to a minimum to create a space in which the discussions on the students' first-year experience could unfold through an autonomous exchange of opinions from the participants (Curtis & Curtis, 2011).

Formulating focus-group questions: The focus-group activity followed from one-on-one interviews so I needed to obtain depth of coverage with certain key issues identified from the earlier interviews. Thus obtaining good data from the focus group meant asking good questions in the most appropriate and effective way. Merriam (2009) advises that the way in which questions are worded is a crucial consideration in extracting the type of information desired. Merriam offers the following guidelines that researchers could adhere to when drafting focus group questions:

- Make certain that what is being asked is clear to the participants.
- Questions need to be understood in familiar language.
- Use words that reflect the participant's worldview.
- Avoid technical jargon or terms and concepts from your particular discipline.

For the focus group activity I made use of the semi-structured interview technique. I wanted to examine students' habitus, capital, and field. I wanted to ascertain how these three concepts of Bourdieu (1984) influenced the way students perceived or interacted/negotiated their first year on campus. However, I could not directly ask the participants to reflect on their habitus, capital, or field: these are theoretical concepts so I had to think of a way of turning the theory into practical questions that the participants would be able to understand and relate to. My best option was to pose the questions in themes. The three themes identified for the focus group questions that addressed Bourdieu's three thinking tools were: background information, students' first-year experience, and student support. In order to stimulate an in-depth response from the participants, I formulated my questions by making use of five of Patton's (2002) suggested six types of questions to achieve a successful interview:

1. Background/demographic questions: these refer to questions that seek to elicit particular demographic information such as age, education, income, job, etc., from participants.
2. Experience and behaviour questions: these types of questions elicit responses that highlight participants' behaviour, actions and activities. For example, asking participants in this study to talk about their first day of orientation, such as they first thing they did.
3. Opinion and value questions: in these types of questions the researcher is interested in participants' beliefs or opinions on a particular issue. For example, following from the above question, a subsequent question would be: what is your opinion of orientation programmes which provide support to first-year students?
4. Feeling questions: these questions draw on the affective dimension of human life. Researchers look for adjectival responses such as: anxious, sad, happy, scared, etc. For example, in this study, a follow-up question would be: How did you feel on your first day on campus?
5. Sensory questions: these are similar to experience questions, but in this type of questioning the researcher tries to elicit more specific data about what the participants saw, heard, touched, etc. For example, when participants responded to a question about group work activity, the information retrieved from the data was what they observed with regard to the group dynamic, the type of conversations they heard from the group or from students in other groups.

However, when questioning, I was cautious in asking the 'why' questions, as Patton (2002) advises that although this type of question can sometimes uncover specific insights or lead to new questions, there is still that danger of the 'why' question leading to speculation about causal relationships and also to dead-end responses.

Conducting focus-group interviews: The focus group interviews took place at the end of the academic year after the students had written their last examination paper. Students were more relaxed at this time. The physical space chosen to conduct the

interview was one of the classrooms that had movable furniture and was secluded and noise free, thus allowing for limited distractions. Taking into consideration that the success of a focus-group interview relies on the interaction between the group participants, I arranged the desk and chairs so that all participants were visible to one another. I had coffee and tea available for the participants.

In order to have a successful focus group discussion I followed Finch and Lewis's (2004) five stages in conducting focus group interviews. These stages are:

Stage 1: Setting the scene and ground rules

Stage 2: Individual introductions

Stage 3: Opening topic

Stage 4: Discussions

Stage 5: Concluding remarks

The focus group commencement time was 10:00. As students walked in, I welcomed them and thanked them for making the time to be present for the focus group interview. Stage 1: setting the scene and ground rules commenced once all six participants were in the room. I officially welcomed the participants once again as a group and then provided them with a brief introduction of what the study was about, the background information, the purpose of the study and what their contributions would be to this study. I had a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation with nine slides. The first two welcomed the students and set the rules for the focus group activity (refer to Appendix F: Focus-group interview) which I went through with the students. Confidentiality was stressed and the need to respect each other's views and allow all participants a voice. I stressed that there were no right or wrong answers and that all views expressed in the focus group would be valued and confidential and would not be discussed outside this venue. I once again informed the participants that this session would be recorded, transcribed and given to them to edit and comment on before using the information. Stage 1 was short and not technical or intimidating in any way. I wanted participants to feel relaxed and comfortable.

Stage 2 involved individual introductions: it was short and slide 3 in Appendix F covers this procedure. Because the main part of this focus group activity was to investigate how habitus, capital, and field played a role in students' perceptions,

actions and interactions in their first year at university, understanding the students' background information was particularly important in gaining the information required. In the first activity, students had to provide a general introduction of themselves to the group.

In Stage 3, the opening topic, the activity chosen, ensured that students felt confident about the topic and comfortable to share with the group. Each student had to reflect on his or her life history and produce a timeline with all the important milestones leading to the day they arrived at university (see slide 4 in Appendix F). Students were given 20 minutes to complete this task and then 5 to 10 minutes to present their timelines to the group. The group could then interact with the participant. This activity provided me with information on the students' capital, habitus, and field. It allowed participants to establish a degree of familiarity; gave each participant an opportunity to speak and listen; and allowed participants to feel valued and an expert in their field.

Stage 4, which Finch and Lewis (2004) label 'discussions', encompassed eliciting conversations with regard to students' prior expectations and present experiences in their first year of university. This activity created robust discussion that sometimes strayed outside the ambit of the topics but produced rich information on how students' cultural beliefs and perceptions influenced their first-year experience.

In concluding the focus-group interview, I thanked participants for their candour and generosity in sharing their personal stories. I assured them once again that the information provided by them would be confidential and that they would have an opportunity to read the transcripts of the focus-group interview and comment or correct any misrecording of the discussions.

4.5.7 Analysis of evidence

This section describes the data processing and analysis used to understand the quantitative and qualitative data collected. As Henning et al. (2004) affirm, data analysis is a process that requires analytical craftsmanship in order to have the ability to analytically capture understanding of the data. I made use of qualitative and quantitative data analysis to process the interpretation of the data about students' first-year experience and pre-entry factors influencing these experiences. However, it

is important to state that the data analysis activity was not undertaken solely at the end of the data collection period, but was an ongoing process throughout the study of the first-year student experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, quantitative data was collected first to provide an overview of the profile of students entering the teacher education programme and to capture their expectations of their first-year university study. The quantitative data collected addressed two of the research questions: 'Who are our first-year teacher education students?' and 'What are the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that first-year teacher education students bring with them to higher education?' The quantitative data collected informed the qualitative data process to answer the study's main research question: 'How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?' More specifically, it contributed to addressing the two sub-questions investigated in the qualitative part of the study: 'To what extent do pre-entry factors that students report influence their social and academic interaction in their first year of study?' and 'To what extent do these factors contribute to the students' first-year experience and academic performance?' The following section discusses the quantitative and qualitative data analysis separately to highlight the importance of both data sets to the study. The quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were supportive of each other and thus intrinsically linked with the success of this study.

4.5.8 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative statistical analysis was conducted by using a computer software package (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences: SPSS version 22.0). The data analysed was collected from the survey instrument: pre-entry questionnaires that were sent to students prior to their entering the first-year BEd undergraduate programme. A variety of data analysis was undertaken to examine the profile of the first-year BEd students entering higher education; explain the reliability of the instrument used; and to answer the research questions framing the study. The following statistical procedures were followed:

- Descriptive statistical analysis
- Statistical inference
- Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)

Descriptive statistics: Descriptive statistics describe a situation by summarising information in a way that highlights the important numerical features of the data. In this study, summary statistics were generated for each of the 138 items included in the instrument. These descriptive statistics included the mean scores, standard deviation and the frequency distribution for each response. The statistics were compiled and expressed in numbers and percentages for all demographic, independent and dependent variables, for example, age, gender, school attended, grades obtained, parents' highest educational level, parents' occupations and students' expectations of their first-year experience. The completed statistical analysis reported on the total sample and the total responses from the three individual BEd programmes. Finally, the results from the descriptive statistical analysis were summarised in the form of text and presented in the form of graphs, cross-tabulations and other figures. The intention of the quantitative data analysis was to describe the phenomena in the study rather than prove or test a hypothesis or research question. The descriptive statistics provided the backdrop to this study as it offered valuable information on the profile of first-year students entering the BEd programme: their pre-entry characteristics, and expectations of their first-year university experience. In addition it allowed for certain matters obtained by the quantitative data to be further probed and explored in the qualitative process of the study.

Statistical inference: The analysis of the quantitative data made use of inferential statistical methods: Fisher's exact test and *t*-test. Fisher's exact test is a statistical significance test used in the analysis of cross-tabulation tables. In this study, Fisher's exact test was used to test significance in relations between demographic data, socio-economic data, prior schooling experience and students' prior expectations of their first-year university experience. Much of the analysis of the quantitative data relied heavily on *p*-value significance testing which Fisher regarded as self-explanatory measures of evidence that did not need further support. Wetzels et al. (2011) explain that Fisher interpreted these *p*-values as evidence against the null

hypothesis which implies that the smaller the p -value, the more evidence there is against the null hypothesis. Wetzels et al. add that most researchers adopt a 0.05 cut-off which indicates a p -value less than 0.05 constitutes evidence for an effect: those greater than 0.05 do not. In this study, various categorical relations were determined and the Fisher test value was used to determine significance of relations between the variables. For example, the Fisher test value was used to determine whether the first-year BEd cohort in the three programmes played a role in terms of respondents being the first in their immediate family to attend university. The Fisher p -value of 0.638 implied that the cohort in the three programmes did not have an effect on their being the first to attend university.

The t -test, which is designed to test if a difference between two means is significant, was applied to the data in this study to make statistical inferences. One example of the use of t -tests to ascertain significant differences between two means was between the mean expectation value and the mean perception value. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether the means between the BEd first-year groups (FP; ISP and FET) were comparable. Statistical testing in this study was undertaken at 0.05 level of significance.

Reliability analysis: Reliability analysis is used to determine the stability of the instruments used to measure the variables in a study. Polit and Beck (2004) add that reliability refers to the consistence of an instrument over time and conditions. In quantitative data analysis, reliability is usually reported as a coefficient with a theoretical range of 0.00 and 1.00, with the 1.00 representing perfect reliability. However, researchers usually strive for reliability coefficients greater than 0.70, but occasionally will settle for coefficients as low as 0.60. Watson and Flamez (2014) highlight that there is no clear-cut indication of what amount of reliability is considered sufficient. However, they provide the following guideline: an estimate of 0.90 is preferred and regarded as a high degree of reliability; a 0.80 can be regarded as highly acceptable, and from 0.7 to as low as 0.60 as acceptable. But a reliability estimate below 0.60 is usually judged to be unacceptably low. As the estimate gets closer to 0.50, it is more likely that the instrument scores are a product of chance rather than a true score of the variance. Finally, a measurement of below 0.50 may

be regarded as being heavily influenced by measurement errors (Mitrushina et al., 2005; Watson & Flamez, 2014).

To determine the reliability of the instrument used in this study, I made use of Cronbach's alpha (α) to determine the internal consistency and average correlation. The reliability calculation made use of 35 instrument items, excluding 5 items which were stated bi-directionally. The Cronbach's alpha for the 35 items ranged from 0.564 to 0.776, with an average measurement of reliability of 0.668 as shown on below in Table 4:4.

Table 4:4 Overall reliability of instrument

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	178	91.3
	Excluded	17	8.7
	Total	195	100.0
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.			

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.668	35

The resultant coefficient score of 0.668 obtained for this study therefore can be regarded as an acceptable score (Watson and Flamez, 2014), bearing in mind that this was a newly developed instrument. Inferences from the quantitative study that had a low reliability were probed and sustained in the qualitative study. This process clarified, verified and enriched the data from the survey questionnaire and positively contributed to the validity, reliability and triangulation of the study.

4.5.9 Qualitative data analysis

At the onset I should like to outline that my engagement with the data proved that the qualitative data analysis activity was not a neat and tidy linear process. I discovered that this procedure was quite challenging and found myself going back and forth, in a cyclical pattern, in order to gain a deeper and more in-depth understanding of the

information retrieved. To be fully engaged with and immersed in the corpus of data of this study, I utilised thematic analysis to guide this process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Holliday, 2007). Thematic analysis provided the most effective means to establish how participants made meaning of their first-year experience. The first-year teacher education students' perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences were analysed in an attempt to approximate their reality.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method suitable for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within a set of data. They acknowledge that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. Thematic analysis was deemed to be an appropriate analytical tool for the qualitative data of this study (Alhojailan, 2012):

- Its ability to detect and identify factors that influence any issue generated by the participants.
- Its flexibility allowed the use of both inductive and deductive methodologies.
- It provided the opportunity to code and categorise data into themes, thus noting patterns and different levels of themes.

In this study the thematic analysis was underpinned by the conceptual framework developed. Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, field, and capital and Tinto's social and academic integration produce codes that consequentially converge to represent themes that emerged from shared experiences among participants. Each participant's data set was explored and positioned in relation to the new field of higher education that they entered. Bourdieu makes explicit that his conceptual 'thinking' tools are not simply theoretical tools but are working tools for empirical application (Bourdieu, 1998:9). New themes and sub-themes that emerged were acknowledged and reported on.

For the development, support and management of the qualitative analysis, the ATLAS.ti computer program assisted, and the Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package was used. CAQDAS is designed not to

undertake the analysis for the researcher, but rather to facilitate the process. The use of ATLAS.ti for this study freed me from the manual methods of coding, comparing and categorising, providing more time for reflecting on the data and identifying or relating concepts pertaining to the study.

The thematic analysis process adopted for this study followed the model described by Miles and Huberman (1994:12) which consisted of three linked stages: data

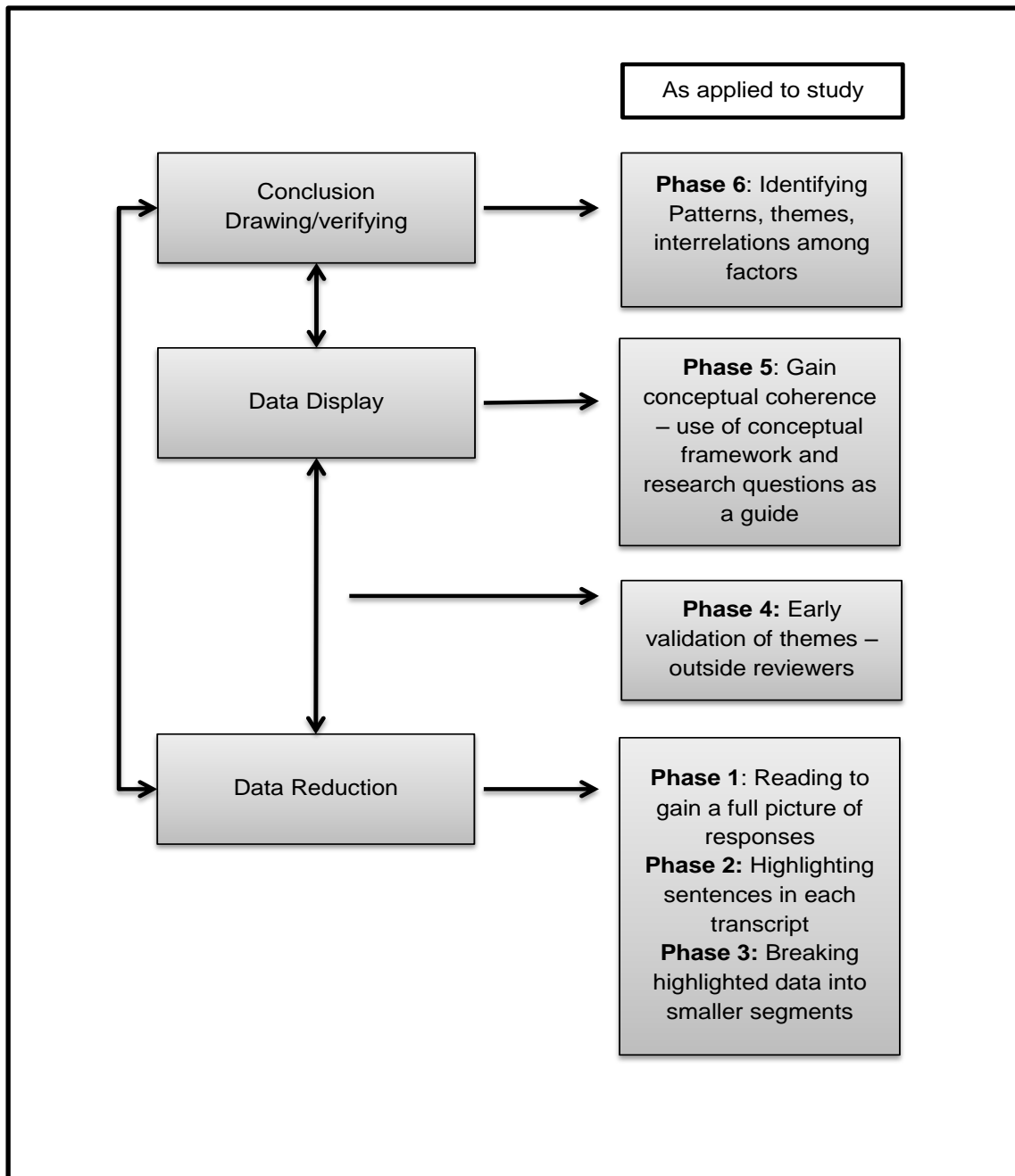


Figure 4:3 Components of data analysis as applied to this study

reduction, data display and data conclusion - drawing/verifying. The illustration in Figure 4:3 on page 120 highlights the components of the data analysis of this study.

The qualitative data included one-on-one interviews with the eight participants and the focus-group interview. In preparation for the data reduction process, the first step entailed transcribing of interviews, providing pseudonyms to all participants, and entering all data onto ATLAS.ti. The first phase of the data-reduction process involved reading through all the transcribed data to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on the overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). While reading the data for a second time, I started recording general thoughts about the data, made brief notes in the margins, and underlined passages that interested me. During this phase I also went back to the recorded interviews to listen to the tone of the conversations and make connections between the participants' thoughts and ideas. This allowed me to appreciate the complete picture of the data collected.

Phase 2 of the data reduction involved highlighting sentences from each participant's transcript relevant to the research. While going through the text, I was mindful of the study's research questions and conceptual framework. In this regard I highlighted excerpts from the respondents' full text that could contribute to this study.

Phase 3 of the data reduction involved my going through all the highlighted sentences/paragraphs and breaking them down into smaller segments. These segments became my first set of themes from the data. As suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003), I read through the full text of each participant once again to compare, contrast and search for information that appeared missing in the first level of themes. I considered the following questions in this process: How is this text different from the next? What kinds of things are mentioned in both? Was there a deeper meaning in one response compared with another? This allowed the data, under the first level of themes, to develop further. Once this process was complete, the data was ready for identifying and classifying according to the second level of themes or codes. But before moving onto coding, I had to ensure that the first set of themes represented the whole text. Thus validity of the themes was the next important step.

Phase 4 involved the validating of the text, as stressed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Validating themes in the early and late stages of data analysis is essential. Outside reviewers, namely colleagues, fellow researchers and experts in the field, were involved in evaluating and confirming that the first set of themes was compatible with the whole text. The main purpose of this process was to build reliability in the themes analysis coding, thus providing accurate and reliable themes for the second level of coding.

Phase 5 involved the data display which is the second main step in Miles and Huberman's model (1994). This step involved organising the data to make sense of the data collected. The following procedures were followed: reviewing the research questions to identify information that relates to similar concepts; utilising the conceptual framework to arrange concepts and thoughts of the data; grouping topics that were related to one another; and finally, using descriptive words to turn these topics into categories. This process allowed me to make sense of the data collected, avoid data overload, as well as view and enhance the data for research more distinctly (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data-display process of the study involved a variety of techniques (tables, graphs, narratives and direct quotations) which afforded me the opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of the data. For example, the direct quotations provided supportive meanings to the interpretation of data (Patton, 2002). The use of tables provided an appropriate and convenient way to draw comparisons between the different themes of the data. By utilising different display techniques, I was able to frame my thoughts and focus, and make the necessary connections from the data to reach justifiable conclusions in this study.

The final phase of this process, titled data drawing and conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994), involved extracting the relevant data and once again verification of the data. In order to generate meaning and interpret the data, this phase could not be separated from the data-reduction phase. The data-drawing and conclusion step included identifying relevance of similar or contrasting statements; emergent patterns; interrelations among factors and variables; and, finally, exploring the validity of the findings by building conceptual coherence and consistency (Alhojailan, 2012), so that they fit the conceptual framework of the study.

4.5.10 Trustworthiness of the study

The case study approach has received considerable criticism regarding its possible lack of accuracy and generalisability compared with quantitative methods (Bessoondyal, 2005). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research; it is equivalent to the concepts of reliability and validity. Reliability is generally understood to concern the replicability of research and the obtaining of similar findings if another study using the same methods was undertaken (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Validity, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), refers to the degree to which the interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings between the participant and the researcher. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there is no validity without reliability and therefore no credibility without dependability. They further state that a demonstration of validity in research is sufficient to establish the reliability of that research. Therefore, according to Lewis and Ritchie (2003), in discussing reliability and validity, qualitative researchers are interested in the confirmation of findings, which can be assessed through examining credibility, transferability and dependability.

Based on the above discussions, Table 4:5 on the next page, page 124 outlines the framework adopted to enhance the reliability and validity of this study.

Table 4:5 Strategies used to enhance the quality of the research outcomes of this study

Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth individual interviews followed by a focus-group interview with the same participants. • Referential adequacy: audio-recording evidence. • Verbatim accounts of interviews, tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. • Member checks: transcripts were checked and confirmed with participants. • Outside reviewers used to evaluate and confirm themes and codes of transcribed text. • Direct quotations of participants were used to illustrate participants' meanings in the discussion section.
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were purposefully selected to maximise the range of specific information for the research.
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit trail: an external audit trail was applied to establish levels of dependability and confirmability of the study. • Audit trail included: audio-tapes of interview, transcripts of interview, field notes and hard copy of all documents coded by qualitative and quantitative software package.

Finally, this methodology chapter underpinned the issues of reliability and validity by making explicit the research process that was followed in this study. In addition, by describing each stage of the research process in detail, it allowed for the transparency of the information and the process.

4.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter the research methodology of the study was explained and the research methods detailed. The chapter was divided into three sections: the first section described the philosophical perspectives of the study; the second section outlined the use of the case study as a research strategy of enquiry; and the final section explicated the research design, which included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and analysis. Finally, this chapter concluded with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study by providing a brief outline of the reliability and validity techniques used in the study. In the next chapter the analysis of the quantitative findings is discussed.

CHAPTER 5 QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents quantitative results obtained from questionnaires administered to all first-year BEd students prior to registration. In total, 300 questionnaires were mailed to all students accepted for the BEd programme and 195 questionnaires were returned. This resulted in an acceptable response rate of 65%.

The questionnaire consisted of 138 items, with levels of measurement at a nominal and ordinal level. The self-administered questionnaire was divided into four sections which measured various themes.

- Section A, titled 'background information', requested mainly demographic and socio-economic information.
- Section B, titled 'pre-university academic background' enquired about the students' prior school experience, Grade 12 results and computer skills.
- Section C, focused on their career aspirations as teachers.
- Section D, consisted of 40 Likert scale statements on students' expectations of their first-year university experience (Appendix A).

The first three sections made use of the dichotomous question type which asked closed questions, requiring for example, a yes/no response. Section D made use of the rating scale question type which consisted of four categories ranging from 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', to strongly disagree.

Results obtained from the questionnaires formed part of Phase 1 of the data-collection procedures. The questionnaire was fundamentally designed to provide an overview of the first-year profile of students entering the BEd programme. Data gathered enabled me to obtain a synopsis of the following research question:

Who are our first-year teacher education students?

The questionnaires led to a general perspective on pre-entry factors, partially to address the following research question:

What are the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that first-year teacher education students bring with them to higher education?

In addition, the 195 respondents from the questionnaire survey assisted with the purposive selection of participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Finally, the completed questionnaires were used to design the one-on-one interview schedule to address inconsistencies and concerns that were identified in the quantitative data collection. This allowed for a more intense and meaningful probe into factors influencing students' first-year experience and academic performance.

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires was analysed with SPSS version 22.0. The results from the descriptive statistical analysis were illustrated in the form of graphs, cross-tabulations and other figures. Inferential techniques were used in the analysis of this study's quantitative data. The data is presented as a total sample and as individual samples among the three BEd programmes: FP, ISP, and FET. To determine whether there was any relation between cohorts of the three programmes and each item analysed, Fisher's exact test was conducted. All *p*-values lower than 0.05 show a significant relation. The test implies that the differences observed are significant, which means that the different groups do not share the same ideas or have similar trends. The presentation of the quantitative data obtained is presented in the next section.

5.2 Presentation of data

This chapter presents the data under two main categories: diversity of first-year students entering the BEd programme and students' expectations of their first-year experience. In the first category, first-year student profiles are examined as a total sample. The diversity between the three first-year BEd programmes is described. In the second category, students' expectations are described as a total sample and also within the three programmes.

The data is presented under the following categories and sub-categories:

- Diversity of first-year students in the BEd programme:
 - *Demographic factors*: age, gender, race, language.

- *Socio-economic factors: academic qualifications of parents, job classification of parents, family support, financial support, mode of transport to university.*
 - *Pre-entry academic factors: type of school attended, year of high school completion, Grade 12 results, first-generation university students.*
 - *Student pathways to higher education.*
- Students' expectations of their first-year experience:
 - *Academic integration: academic preparedness, academic support, and collaborative interaction.*
 - *Social integration: students' expectations of socialising at university, involvement in academic discussions outside of formal class, students' self-perceived expectations of social integration.*
 - *Student perceptions: perceptions of lecturers' expectations of first-year students, students' self-perceived expectations of academic lecturers.*

5.3 Diversity of first-year students in the BEd programme

This section reports on the descriptive analysis of the demographics of the respondents entering the BEd programme, namely age, gender, race and home language. The demographic data analysed is presented first as a total sample and then, according to the three BEd programmes offered at the university of technology, that is, FET, FP and ISP.

5.3.1 Demographic information

5.3.1.1 Age and gender

From the total sample (N=195), 23% (n=45) respondents were male and 77% (n=150) were female. The age groups ranged from: younger than 20 years; 20–29 years; 30–39 years and 40–50 years. The findings showed that a majority of respondents, i.e., 53.3% (n=104) were in the less than 20 years age category; 40%

(n=78) within the 20–29 years age category; 6.2% (n=12) in the 30–39 years age category and 0.5% (n=1) were in the 40–50 age category.

In examining the age and gender results among the three first-year BEd programmes, overall it was noted that a similar trend to the one revealed by the total sample of the study was identified: there were slight differences within the three programmes. Table 5:1 on page 129 indicates all three programmes, FET, FP and ISP had the highest number of respondents in the lower than 20 age category: 60.4%, 48% and 53.7% respectively. The total age mean for the entire sample was 20.91 (sd= 4.478, N=195). A similar trend in age group was observed in the three programmes. The mean and standard deviation for each group was: FET, 21.02 (sd= 5.740, N=53); FP, 21.20 (sd= 4.496, N=75) and ISP, 20.49 (sd= 3.169, N=67).

Table 5:1 on the next page shows the figures and percentage for the younger than 20 years age category and the total of the three programmes. The results indicate that the highest number of male and female respondents was found to be in the younger than 20 years of age category for the FET and ISP programmes. Foundation phase had no male respondents in this age group. The FP group had two male respondents only in the programme. Differences in gender can also be observed from Table 5:1 which indicates the following male to female ratio: FET programme is approximately 1:1 (49.1%: 50.9%); FP is 1:36 (2.7%: 97.3%) and ISP 1:3 (25.4%: 74.6%).

Table 5:1 Age and gender distribution of first-year BEd student respondents

Further Education & Training (EMS)				Gender		Total	
				Male	Female		
FET	Age (Grouped)	< 20 years	Count	13	19	32	
			% within Age (Grouped)	40.6%	59.4%	100.0%	
			% within Gender	50.0%	70.4%	60.4%	
			% of Total	24.5%	35.8%	60.4%	
	Total			Count	26	27	53
				% within Age (Grouped)	49.1%	50.9%	100.0%
				% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
				% of Total	49.1%	50.9%	100.0%
Foundation Phase				Gender		Total	
				Male	Female		
FP	Age (Grouped)	< 20 years	Count	0	36	36	
			% within Age (Grouped)	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
			% within Gender	0.0%	49.3%	48.0%	
			% of Total	0.0%	48.0%	48.0%	
	Total			Count	2	73	75
				% within Age (Grouped)	2.7%	97.3%	100.0%
				% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
				% of Total	2.7%	97.3%	100.0%
Intermediate & Senior Phase				Gender		Total	
				Male	Female		
ISP	Age (Grouped)	< 20 years	Count	10	26	36	
			% within Age (Grouped)	27.8%	72.2%	100.0%	
			% within Gender	58.8%	52.0%	53.7%	
			% of Total	14.9%	38.8%	53.7%	
	Total			Count	17	50	67
				% within Age (Grouped)	25.4%	74.6%	100.0%
				% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
				% of Total	25.4%	74.6%	100.0%

In this regard there was no significant difference in the number of respondents in the three BEd programmes and age (Fisher's exact test, p -value = 0.524), but gender did show significant differences (p = 0.000).

Figure 5:1 below illustrates the results of age and gender distribution for the total study sample.

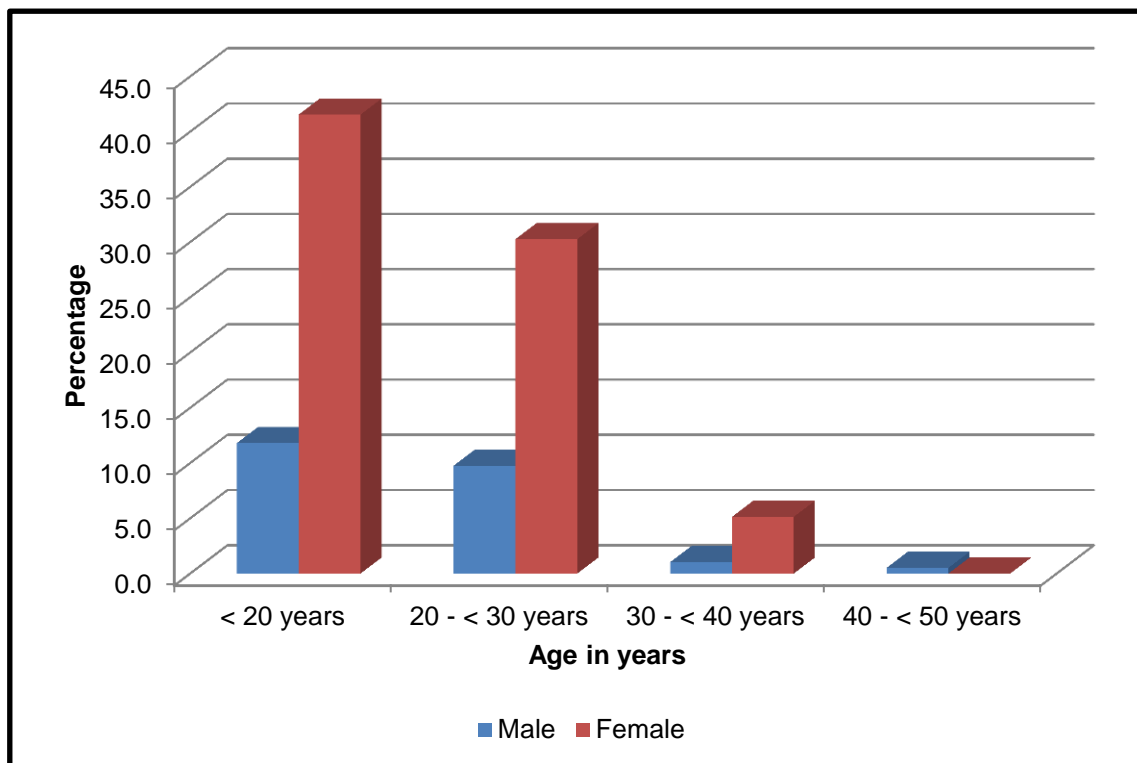


Figure 5:1 Age and gender distribution of respondents

Figure 5:1 above illustrates there is a decreasing ratio of each gender with increasing age. Also evident is that for the first three age groupings, there are approximately three times as many women as men in the BEd programme. The mean age for the total sample is 20.9 and the male to female ratio is 1:3.33 (45:150). This data implies that with the first-year student population having an average age of 20.9 years and the age category for the younger than 20 years being the highest (i.e. 53%), the majority of the first-year student population are either school leavers or gap-year students. The balance of the student population (i.e. >21 years and older), can be regarded as mature students.

5.3.1.2 Race

Figure 5:2 below indicates the racial composition of the respondents in this study.

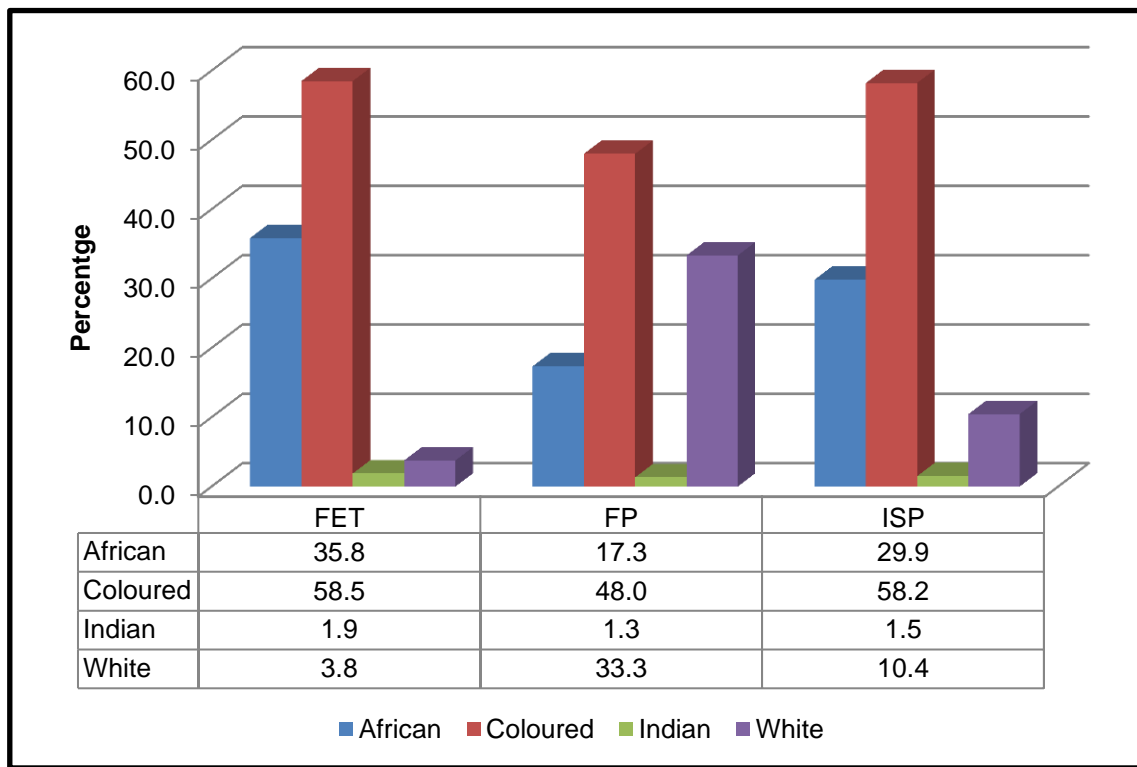


Figure 5:2 Racial composition of the respondents in the study

From the total sample N=195, the distribution of the first-year student population according to race for the total sample was: 54.4% (106) coloured; 26.7% (n=52) African; 17.4% (n=34) white and 1.5% (n=3) Indian. However, the data indicates a significant difference ($p = 0.000$) in the three programmes and race. Coloured respondents comprised the largest grouping in each of the three programmes with 58.5% registered in FET, 58.2% in ISP and 48% in FP. More African students (i.e. 36.5%) from the total sample registered for FET than for any of the other programmes. In a similar but contrasting trend, the majority of the total sample of white participants (i.e. 73.5%) registered for FP; and from the total sample of coloured participants, 36.7% registered for ISP. The Indian respondents comprised the smallest grouping in all three programmes.

5.3.1.3 Home language

From the entire sample of first-year students, the data revealed a total of 52.8% of the respondents were English home-language speakers, while 23.6% (n=46) spoke isiXhosa; 21.5% (n=42) spoke Afrikaans and only a small percentage of 2.1% (n=4) spoke other home languages. Language between the three programmes showed a significant difference ($p = 0.002$). Among the FET group of respondents, English and isiXhosa were the two common home languages spoken: 39.6% and 32.1% respectively. Table 5:2 below summarises the home languages used by the respondents.

Table 5:2 Home language of respondents in the study

Further Education & Training (EMS)						
			FET	FP	ISP	Total
Language	English	Count	21	54	28	103
		% within BEd Programme	39.6%	72.0%	41.8%	52.8%
	Afrikaans	Count	14	9	19	42
		% within BEd Programme	26.4%	12.0%	28.4%	21.5%
	isiXhosa	Count	17	11	18	46
		% within BEd Programme	32.1%	14.7%	26.9%	23.6%
	Other	Count	1	1	2	4
		% within BEd Programme	1.9%	1.3%	3.0%	2.1%
Total	Count	53	75	67	195	
	% within BEd Programme	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

English was the dominant home language among respondents in FP and ISP. For example, FP had the highest number of respondents, 72% (n=54) with English as home language and ISP had 41.8% (n=28). The ISP respondents had a fairly even distribution of respondents with Afrikaans 28.4% (n=19) and isiXhosa 26.9% (n=18)

as home language. The FP group had the lowest respondents with Afrikaans 12% (n=9) and isiXhosa 14.7% (n=11) as home language.

5.3.2 Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors in this study refer to the social and economic experiences and realities that shape the respondents' lifestyles and personalities. This section reports on the following factors: academic qualifications of parents, job classification of parents, family support, financial support, and respondents' mode of transport to university.

5.3.2.1 Academic qualifications of parents

Table 5:3 below illustrates the parents' academic qualifications for the total sample in this study.

Table 5:3 Parents' academic qualifications

		Academic qualifications of parents					
		FET		FP		ISP	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Did your father complete a degree?	Yes	7	13.2%	14	18.7%	11	16.4%
	No	46	86.8%	61	81.3%	56	83.6%
Did your mother complete a degree?	Yes	3	5.7%	14	18.7%	7	10.4%
	No	50	94.3%	61	81.3%	60	89.6%

The overall trend of parents' academic qualifications indicates low completion rates by both parents. From the total sample of participants, 83.6% (N=163) of their male parents and 87.7% (N=171) of their female parents did not obtain a university qualification. The percentages of the male parents ranged from 81.3% (n=61) in FP to 86.8% (n=46) in FET and for the female parents, 81.3% (n=61) in FP to 94.3% (n=50) in FET.

Respondents' male parents in the FET and ISP programmes show a higher rate of completion of a university degree than their female parents. For example, in the

category 'yes' to degree completion, the male parent completion for FET was 13.2% (n=7) and for ISP, 16.4% (n=11), while the female parent completion for FET was 5.7% (n=3) and for ISP, 10.4% (n=7). The male and female parents of the FP respondents showed the highest level of education with an equal number of completion rates among both parents, i.e. 18.7% (n=14). The lowest number of parents who had completed university comprised the parents of the FET respondents with only 13.3 % (n=7) male parents and 5.7% (n=3) female parents.

Fisher's exact test shows no significant differences across all three programmes with regard to the male parents' level of education ($p = 0.758$) while the female parents' level of education across the three programmes showed a significance difference ($p= 0.079$).

5.3.2.2 Job classification of respondents' parents

The guidelines for the job classifications (Appendix G) were extracted from the South African skills structure of the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO) 2012 (DHET, 2012b). Table 5:4 on page 135 makes use of this classification and categorises the respondents' parents' occupations into the three categories: advanced, intermediate, and entry-level jobs.

From the total sample, N=195, similar numbers of male and female parents were classified with jobs in the advanced category: male parents, 24.4% (n=42) and 22.2% (n=41) female parents. However more men, 30.2% (n=52) were classified as having intermediate skills jobs while more women, 28.6% (n=53) were classified with entry-level jobs.

Table 5:4 on the next page (page 135) indicates that parents of respondents from FP had the highest number of advanced and intermediate skills jobs: male parents involved in advanced skills jobs comprised 31% (n=22) and intermediate skills jobs, 35.6% (n=26). Female parents involved in advanced skills jobs were 33.8 (n=25) and intermediate skills jobs, 25.7% (n=19). By contrast, parents of respondents from FET had the highest number of parents that were unemployed (male parents, 13% and female parents, 19.6%).

Table 5:4 Parents' job classification of respondents in the study

			Occupation of parents			Total
			FET	FP	ISP	
Father Occupation by Category	Advanced	Count	5	22	15	42
		% within BEd Programme	10.9%	31.0%	27.3%	24.4%
	Intermediate	Count	14	26	12	52
		% within BEd Programme	30.4%	36.6%	21.8%	30.2%
	Entry	Count	14	7	11	32
		% within BEd Programme	30.4%	9.9%	20.0%	18.6%
	Deceased	Count	4	2	3	9
		% within BEd Programme	8.7%	2.8%	5.5%	5.2%
	Not Applicable	Count	0	4	4	8
		% within BEd Programme	0.0%	5.6%	7.3%	4.7%
	Pensioner	Count	3	1	3	7
		% within BEd Programme	6.5%	1.4%	5.5%	4.1%
	Unemployed	Count	6	9	7	22
		% within BEd Programme	13.0%	12.7%	12.7%	12.8%
	Total	Count	46	71	55	172
		% within BEd Programme	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Mother Occupation by Category	Advanced	Count	5	25	11	41
		% within BEd Programme	9.8%	33.8%	18.3%	22.2%
	Intermediate	Count	6	19	8	33
		% within BEd Programme	11.8%	25.7%	13.3%	17.8%
	Entry	Count	16	17	20	53
		% within BEd Programme	31.4%	23.0%	33.3%	28.6%
	Deceased	Count	1	1	0	2
		% within BEd Programme	2.0%	1.4%	0.0%	1.1%
	Not Applicable	Count	0	2	1	3
		% within BEd Programme	0.0%	2.7%	1.7%	1.6%
	Pensioner	Count	3	2	0	5
		% within BEd Programme	5.9%	2.7%	0.0%	2.7%
	Unemployed	Count	10	3	11	24
		% within BEd Programme	19.6%	4.1%	18.3%	13.0%
	Housewife	Count	10	5	9	24
		% within BEd Programme	19.6%	6.8%	15.0%	13.0%
Total	Count	51	74	60	185	
	% within BEd Programme	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

In addition, Table 5:4 highlight that the male parents of the FET respondents also had the highest number of entry-level jobs, 30.4% (n=14), while female parents of respondents from the ISP programme had the highest entry-level jobs: 33.3% (n=20).

Fisher's exact test shows a significant difference across the three programmes with regard to parents' occupations, with p=0.004 for the female parents and p=0.005 for the male parents.

5.3.2.3 Family support

From the total sample of respondents, 99% (N=192) acknowledged that they had received full support from their families with regard to tertiary studies. All FP respondents indicated they received full support: 100% (n=75), while a high percentage of ISP and FET respondents indicated a positive response to family support: 98.5% (n=65) and 98.1% (n=52) respectively. Table 5:5 below provides information on the nature of family support received by the respondents.

Table 5:5 Nature of support from family

	Number	Percentage
Tangible	62	39%
Financial: paid partial fees; full fees; registration fees	24	15%
Informational: career advice; university selection; context shaping; finding information	25	16%
Assistance: filling in application forms; registration process	13	8%
Intangible	96	61%
Emotional: nurture	21	13%
Personal advice: spiritual; empathy; goal setting	15	9%
Companionship: sense of belonging	6	4%
Encouragement	28	18%
Positive reinforcement	26	16%
TOTAL	158	

Responses from the total sample of first-year students were categorised either as being of a tangible or intangible nature. It is important to note that not all respondents

provided an explanation of the type of support received from their families. From the replies received (N=158), it was evident that most of the respondents received a more intangible (61%) nature of support than a tangible one (39%). The three highest responses with regard to family support were encouragement, 18%; positive reinforcement, 16%; and informational support, 16%.

5.3.2.4 Financial support

From the total sample, the majority of respondents, 93.9% (N=168) were unable to fund their first year of university study. Over 50% of respondents sourced outside funding, with the highest number of respondents receiving bursaries: 43% (N=77) and 10.1% (N=18) securing student loans. The second highest source of payment was from parents: 40.8% (N=73). A small percentage of students, 6.1% (N=11) were able to fund their own first-year university studies. Figure 5:3 below shows the different paths sourced by the respondents to fund their first year of studies.

From the three programmes, the majority of the FP parents, 58% (n=40), paid for their children’s first year of study with only a small number, approximately a third,

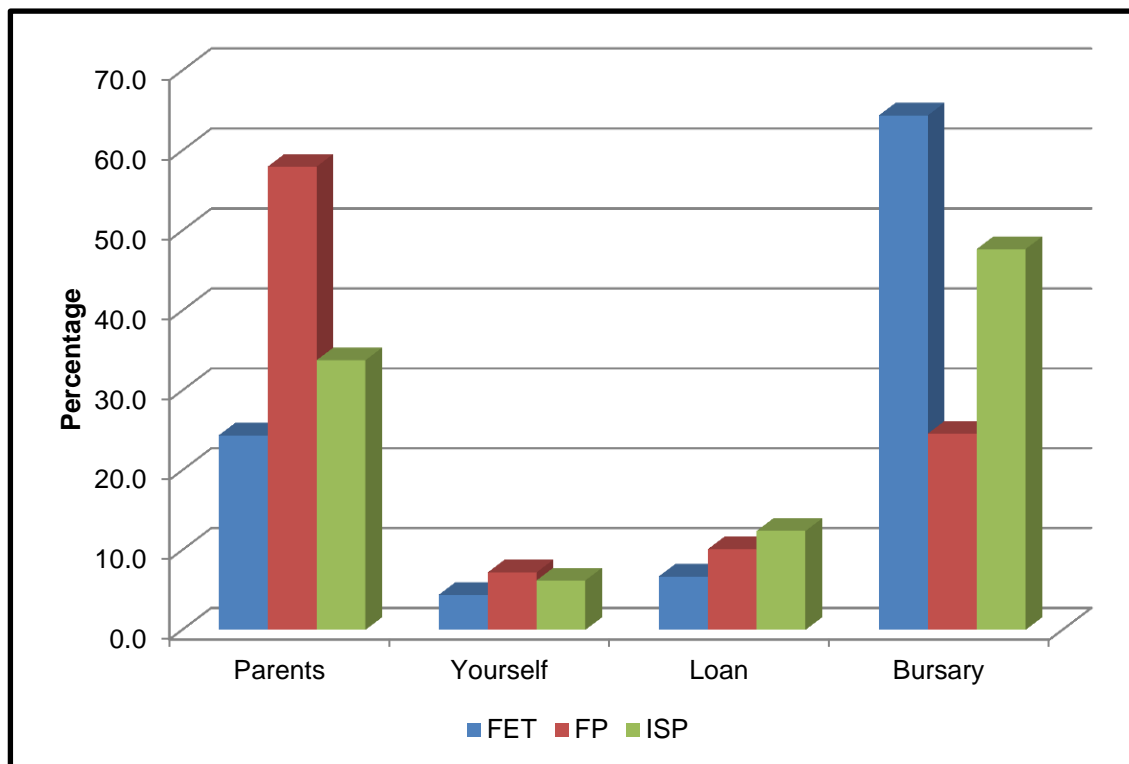


Figure 5:3 Financial support for first-year university fees

34.7% (n=24) of FP respondents relying on external sources to fund their first year of study. By contrast, close to two-thirds, 71.1% (n=32) of the FET respondents relied more on external sources to fund their first-year study, with a total of 64.4% (n=29) obtaining bursaries and 6.7% (n=3) securing student loans.

Fisher's exact test, $p=0.002$, shows significant differences between the three programmes and the type of financial support received for university fees.

5.3.2.5 Mode of transport of respondents to university

From the total sample, the majority of the respondents, 71.2% (N=136), relied on public transport to travel to university: 30.9% (N=59) utilised the public taxi service; 22.5% (N=43) used the public bus service; while 17.8% (N=34) used the train. However 18.8% (N=36) respondents used their own cars to commute to university. Figure 5:4 below illustrates this trend.

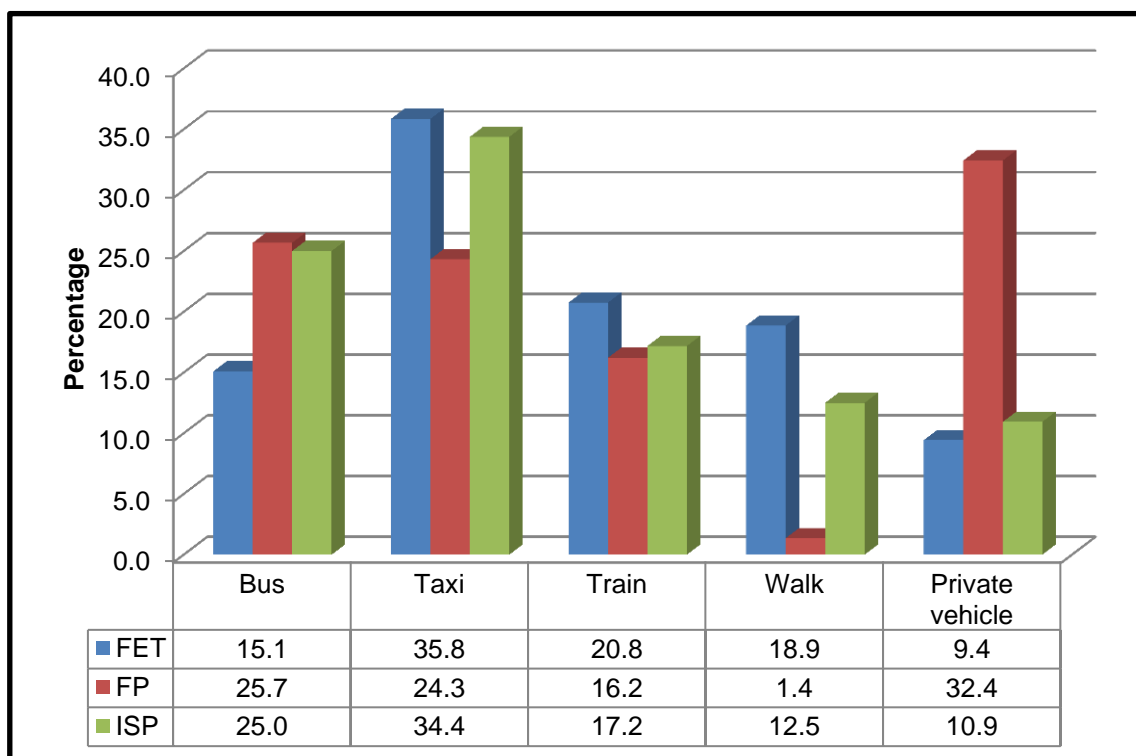


Figure 5:4 Mode of transport of respondents in the study

Figure 5:4 shows a clear pattern among respondents in the three programmes and the mode of transport used. It is evident from the data and visible in the illustration

above that the majority of FET and ISP respondents made use of public transport, some 35.8% and 34.4% respectively, used a taxi to commute to university, while the majority of FP respondents, 32.4%, used their own cars to commute to university. A small percentage of respondents, 9.9% (N=19), walked to university. The majority of these respondents were from FET, 18.9 (N=10) with 12.5% (N=8) ISP and only one respondent, 1.4%, from FP. These students could be students living close to the university or living in university residences.

5.3.3 Pre-entry academic factors

This section refers to the respondents' prior schooling experience and includes the following sub-categories: type of school attended; year of high school completion; Grade 12 results; first-generation university students; and students' pathway to university.

5.3.3.1 Type of school attended

The South African Department of Education has classified public schools into two-category systems: either fee-paying or no-fee schools. The No-Fee School Policy (NFSP) was introduced in 2007 with the Department of Basic Education identifying the no-fee schools and providing them with funding (DBE, 2011). Many of the schools that were classified as fee-paying schools were ex-Model C schools: schools classified as white schools during the apartheid era in South Africa and regarded as well resourced in terms of infrastructure, quality of teachers, teaching and learning resources, and government funding.

From the sample, the majority of respondents, 79% (N=154), attended schools in urban areas. The highest number of respondents were from FP, 83% (N=64); second highest, ISP, 76.1% (N=51); and third FET, 73.6% (N=39). With regard to the two-category school fee system, the fee-paying schools in Figure 5:5 on the following page refer to the 'yes' column and no-fee schools to the 'no' column. The 'not applicable' column refers to respondents who have either attended private schools or Further Education and Training (FET) colleges to complete high school.

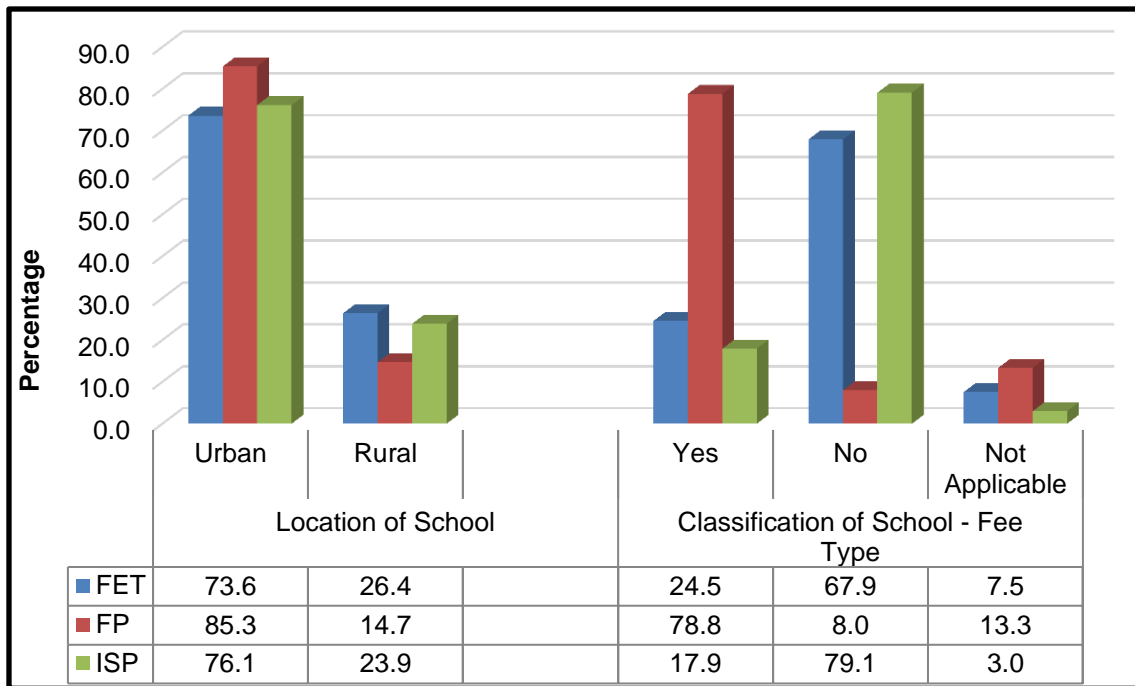


Figure 5:5 Type of school attended by respondents in the study

From the total sample (N=195), 75.9% of the participants attended no-fee schools; 15.9% attended fee-paying schools and 8.2% attended other schools (private and FET colleges). The majority of respondents who attended fee-paying schools were from FP, 78.8% (n=59), while the highest number of respondents who attended no-fee schools were from ISP, 79.1% (n=53). The largest number of respondents in the 'not applicable' category (private school and FET college) were from FP, 13.3% (n=10).

Fisher's exact test, showed that there was no significant difference between the three programmes and location of schools, $p=0.208$. However a significant difference was evident between the three programmes and fee school type attended by respondents, $p=0.024$.

5.3.3.2 Year of high school completion

Figure 5:6 on the next page (page 141) illustrates the period in which respondents in this study completed Grade 12. It is important to note that data was collected from respondents in the year prior to the commencement of their first-year 2012 academic programme.

Results show that the majority of respondents, 57.9% (N=113) completed Grade 12 in the year 2010 and 2011: 31.8% (N=62) and 26.2% (N=51) respectively. Between the periods 2001 to 2009, a total of 37.4% participants completed Grade 12. A total of 26.2% (N=51) of respondents entered first-year university directly from school and can be regarded as school leavers. The gap-year students represent participants who finished Grade 12 in 2010, 31.8%. The FET cohort had the highest number of respondents entering university directly from school, which represented almost half of the FET cohort, 43.3% (n=23). FP had 25.3% (n=19) and ISP had 13.4% (n=9) respondents.

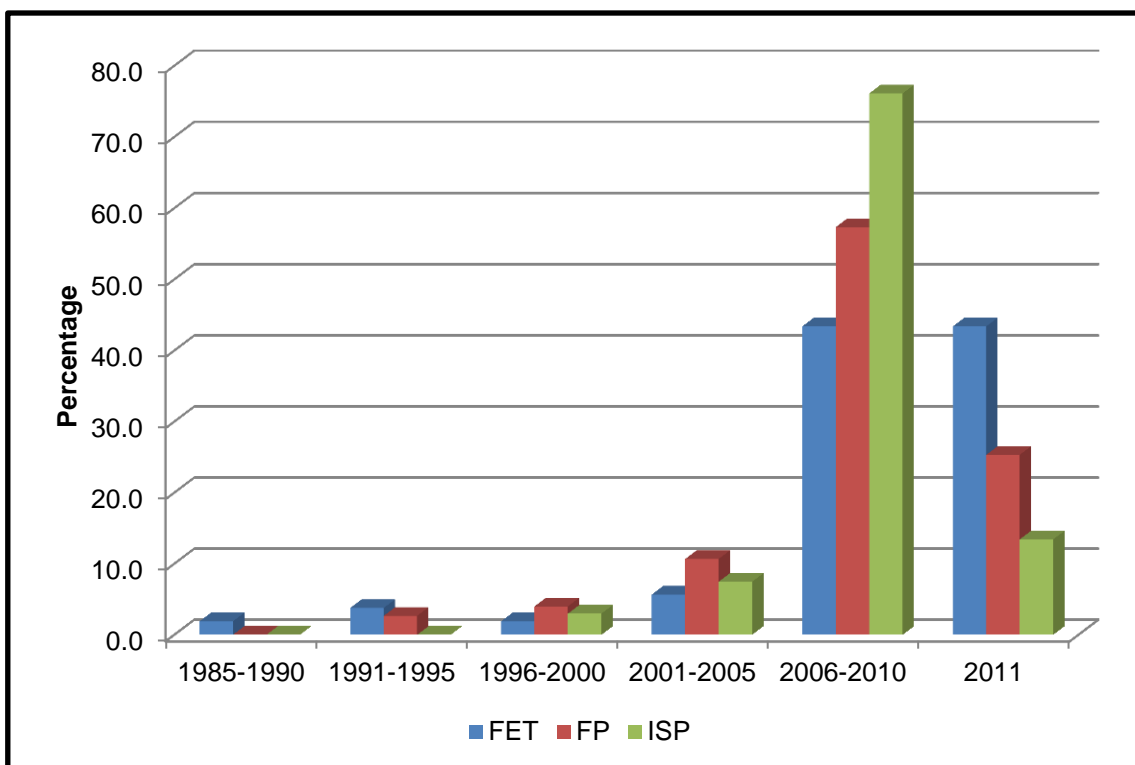


Figure 5:6 Period in which respondents completed Grade 12

5.3.3.3 Grade 12 results

Taking into account the low literacy and numeracy rates among pupils in South African schools, this section focuses mainly on respondents' Grade 12 performance in the following subjects: English as a Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL); and Mathematics and Mathematics Literacy. A subsequent intention of reviewing these two subjects is the fact that they are mandatory courses for all first-year students in the BEd programme. Students have a choice either to

register for English HL or FAL; and Mathematics, either as a major or an elective. These courses are compulsory courses in the first two years of study. Figure 5:7 below illustrates participants' performance in Grade 12 English HL and FAL within the three programmes.

The majority of the respondents from the total sample obtained a D symbol for both language categories: 50% (N=41) in HL and 33.7% (N=28) in FAL. The second highest scores in all three programmes obtained a C symbol for both language groupings: 28% HL and 30.1% FAL.

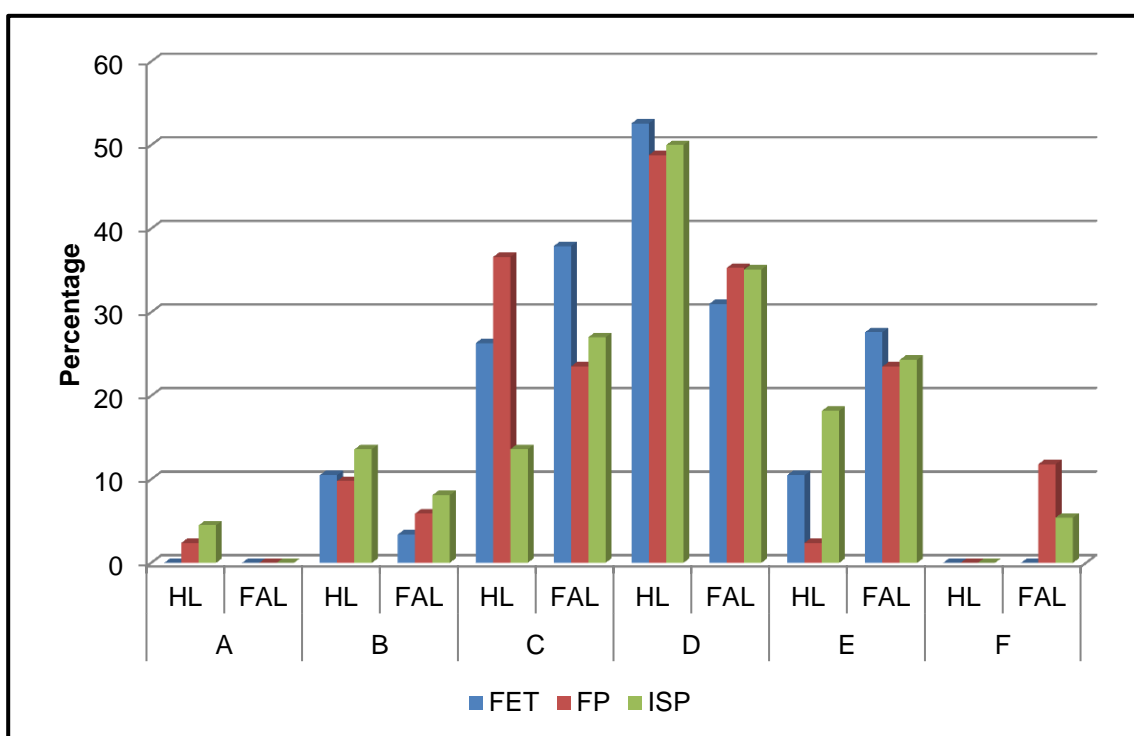


Figure 5:7 Grade 12 results for English Home Language and First Additional Language

Fisher's exact test reveals no significant difference between the three programmes and the results obtained from English Home Language ($p=0.342$) and English First Additional Language ($p=0.803$).

Mathematics and Mathematics Literacy results: From the study sample a total of 70.2% (N=137) respondents had either taken Mathematics or Mathematics Literacy at Grade 12 level: 41.6% (N=57) respondents completed Grade 12 Mathematics and 58.4% (N=80) respondents completed Grade 12 Mathematics Literacy.

The following two figures, Figure 5:8 below and Figure 5:9 on page 144 illustrate the respondents' Grade 12 results for Mathematics and Mathematics Literacy respectively.

Figure 5:8 illustrates the Grade 12 mathematics results of the 57 respondents. As a total sample, the highest score obtained by the majority of respondents was a C symbol, 28.1% (N=16); the second highest score was an F symbol, 21.1% (N=12)

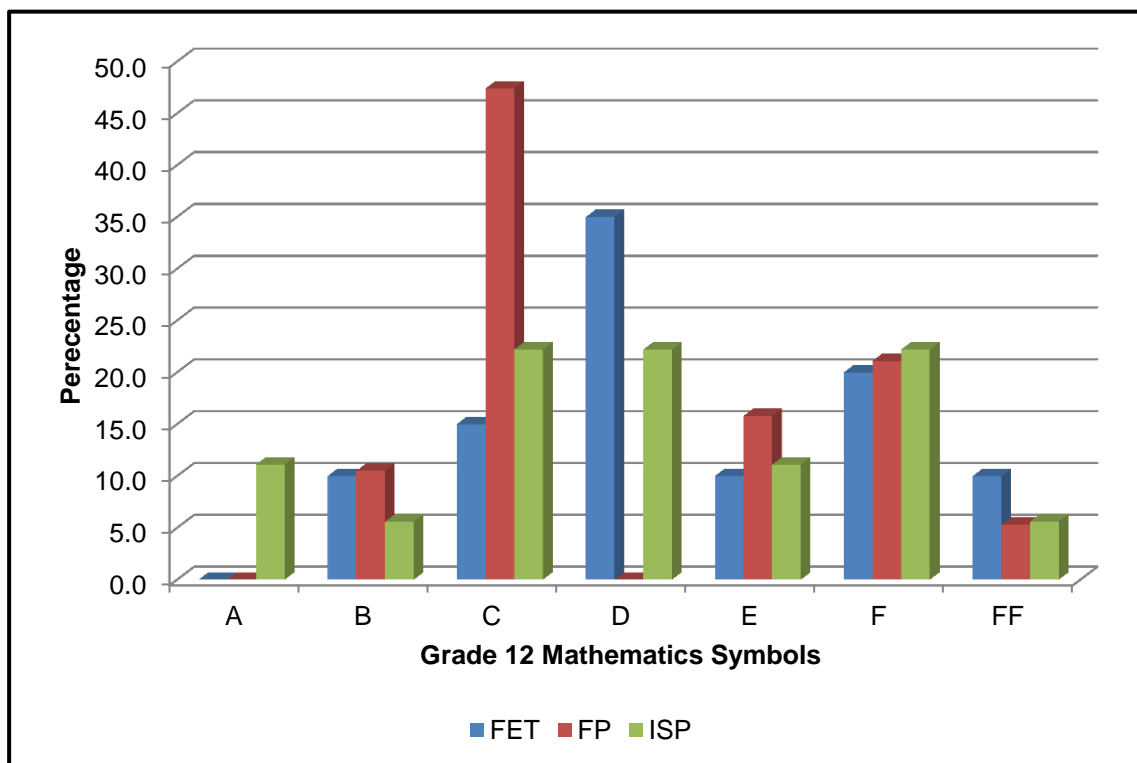


Figure 5:8 Grade 12 Mathematics results

and the third highest was a D symbol, 19.3% (N=11).

The high frequency of scores obtained for Grade 12 mathematics was located in the lower symbols. As individual programmes, the highest numbers of scores for each programme cohort were: FP, 47.4% (n=9) with a C symbol; ISP, 22.2% (n=4) with a C symbol and FET, 35% (n=7) with a D symbol. Fisher's exact test, $p=0.164$ indicates no significant difference was identified between respondents in the three programmes and their Mathematics results.

With regard to the Mathematics Literacy results, from the total sample of 80 respondents who completed Mathematics Literacy in Grade 12, the scores were

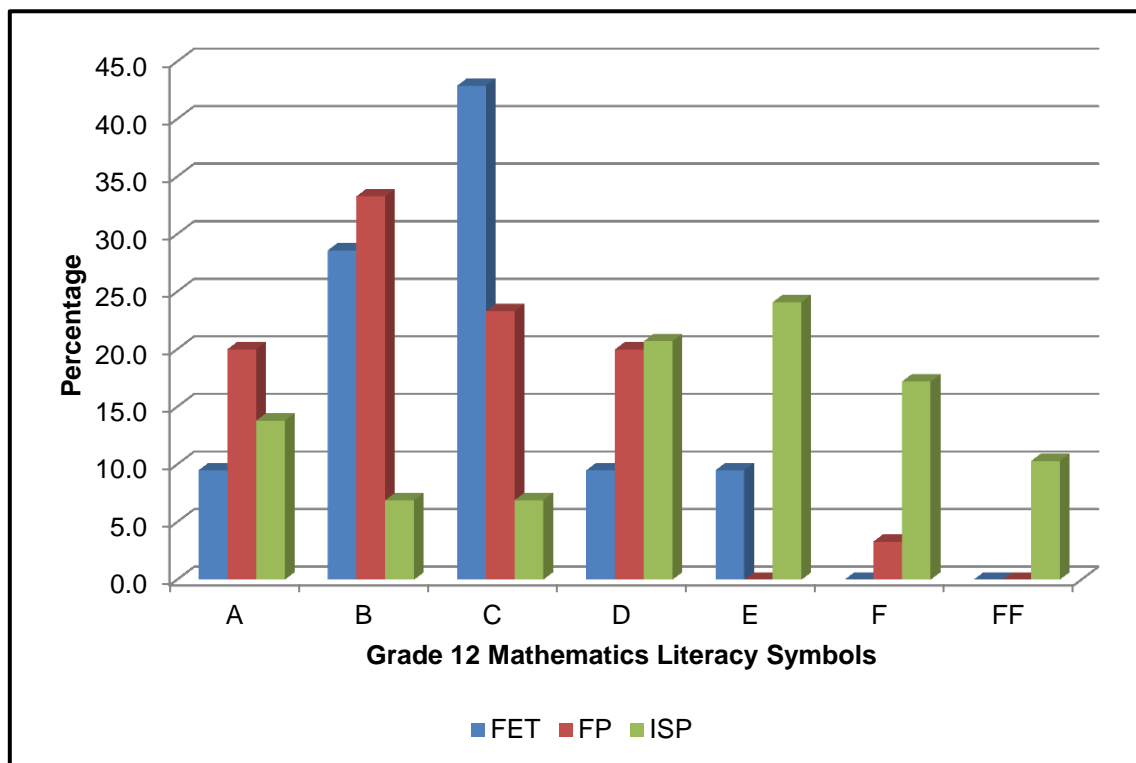


Figure 5:9 Grade 12 Mathematics Literacy results

much higher than those of the respondents who completed Grade 12 Mathematics. The frequency of the Mathematics Literacy scores was located in the higher symbols, an equal number of respondents, 22.2% (N=18) scored either a B or a C symbol and 15% (N=12) scored A symbols. Within the individual programmes, FET and FP had the highest number of respondents who obtained A, B and C symbols: 81% (n=17) and 76.6% (n=23) respectively. By contrast, ISP had the highest number of respondents, 62% (n=18) who obtained D, E and F symbols. Fisher's exact test showed a significant difference, $p=0.001$, among the respondents in the three programmes and the Mathematics Literacy scores.

5.3.3.4 First-generation university students

For this study, 'first-generation university student' refers to a student who is the first member of his/her immediate family to attend university. The status of respondents

in terms of being the first in their immediate family to attend university is illustrated in Table 5:6 below.

Table 5:6 First-generation university students

			Which BEd Programme will you be registering for?			Total
			FET	FP	ISP	
Are you the first in your immediate family to attend university?	Yes	Count % within BEd programme	36 67.9%	48 64.0%	48 71.6%	132 67.7%
	No	Count % within BEd programme	17 32.1%	27 36.0%	19 28.4%	63 32.3%
Total		Count % within BEd programme	53 100.0%	75 100.0%	67 100.0%	195 100.0%

From the total study sample, a high majority of 67.7% (N=132) indicated they were first-generation university students. As evident in Table 5.6 above, FET respondents showed a similar trend to the total study sample: 67.9% (n=36) were first-generation students and 32.1% (n=17) non-first-generation students. Comparing first-generation students among the three programmes reveals the ISP programme had the highest number of first-generation students: 71.6% (n=48). By contrast, FP had a high majority of non-first-generation students: 36% (n=27). Fisher's exact test, $p=0.638$ indicates no significant difference in the respondents across all three programmes.

5.3.4 Students' pathway to university

Results show that the majority of the respondents, 39% (N=75) were neither at school nor engaged in paid employment a year before commencing university. Only 26.6% (N=51) of the total sample were school leavers who entered university directly after completing high school. Of the 34.4% (N=66) respondents that were working, data confirms they were involved in entry-level paid employment. Table 5:7 on the following page (page 146) illustrates the results.

Table 5:7 Year prior to entering university

Year prior to entering the BEd programme at university		FET	FP	ISP	Total
Student	Count	21	20	10	51
	% within BEd programme	39.6%	27.0%	15.4%	26.6%
Working	Count	8	35	23	66
	% within BEd programme	15.1%	47.3%	35.4%	34.4%
Unemployed	Count	24	19	32	75
	% within BEd programme	45.3%	25.7%	49.2%	39%
Total	Count	53	74	65	192
	% within BEd programme registering for.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Comparing students' pathways to university among the three programmes, the data displays the FET programme to have the highest number of respondents, 39.6% (n=21) entering university immediately after completing high school. The FP group had the highest number of respondents, 47.3% (n=35) entered university from paid employment, while both the FET and ISP groups indicated a high number of unemployed respondents entering university: 45.3% (n=24) and 49.2% (n=32) respectively. Fisher's p-value=0.000 shows a significant difference in respondents' pathways to university among the three groups.

In spite of the different pathways to university, a high number of respondents, 96.9% (N=189), as illustrated in Table 5:8 on page 147, indicated a positive response to preparedness for university study. A similar pattern was confirmed by the respondents in all three programmes, FP, 97.3%; ISP, 97% and FET, 96%.

Table 5:8 Academic preparedness

			FET	FP	ISP	Total
Do you feel that you are prepared for university life?	Yes	Count	51	73	65	189
		% within BEd Programme	96.2%	97.3%	97.0%	96.9%
	No	Count	2	2	2	6
		% within BEd programme	3.8%	2.7%	3.0%	3.1%
Total		Count	53	75	67	195
		% within BEd programme	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

5.4 Students' expectations of their first-year experience

This section analyses the scoring patterns of respondents obtained from the expectation survey which formed part of the pre-entry questionnaire. Respondents had to rank each statement from: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', to 'strongly disagree'. In this study, the levels of disagreement were collapsed to show a single category of 'disagree' and a similar procedure was followed for the levels of agreement to show a single category of 'agree'. This is allowed because of the acceptable levels of reliability.

In this section, the students' expectation responses are divided into three categories: academic integration, social integration, and student perceptions. All figures below are a summary of the variables that constitute the sub-sets of the three categories. The figures below represent only the level of agreement percentages. To determine whether there was any relation between the three programme cohorts and each statement, Fisher's exact test was used in this section. The test results are shown in the tables below. All *p*-values lower than 0.05 show a significant relation, which implies that differences observed are significant and therefore suggests that different groups do not share the same ideas for a particular statement.

5.4.1 Expectations of academic integration

Academic integration in this study is described as the students' academic associated perceptions and experiences with regard to their learning and activities necessary for

their learning. This section examines respondents' expectations of academic integration under the following sub-headings: academic experiences; academic support; and academic collaborative interaction.

5.4.1.1 Academic experiences

Results show that the levels of agreement are similar across the statements. Some statements have high levels of agreement, while others are low. However, they are consistent because some statements are negatively worded. Figure 5:10 below illustrates the results.

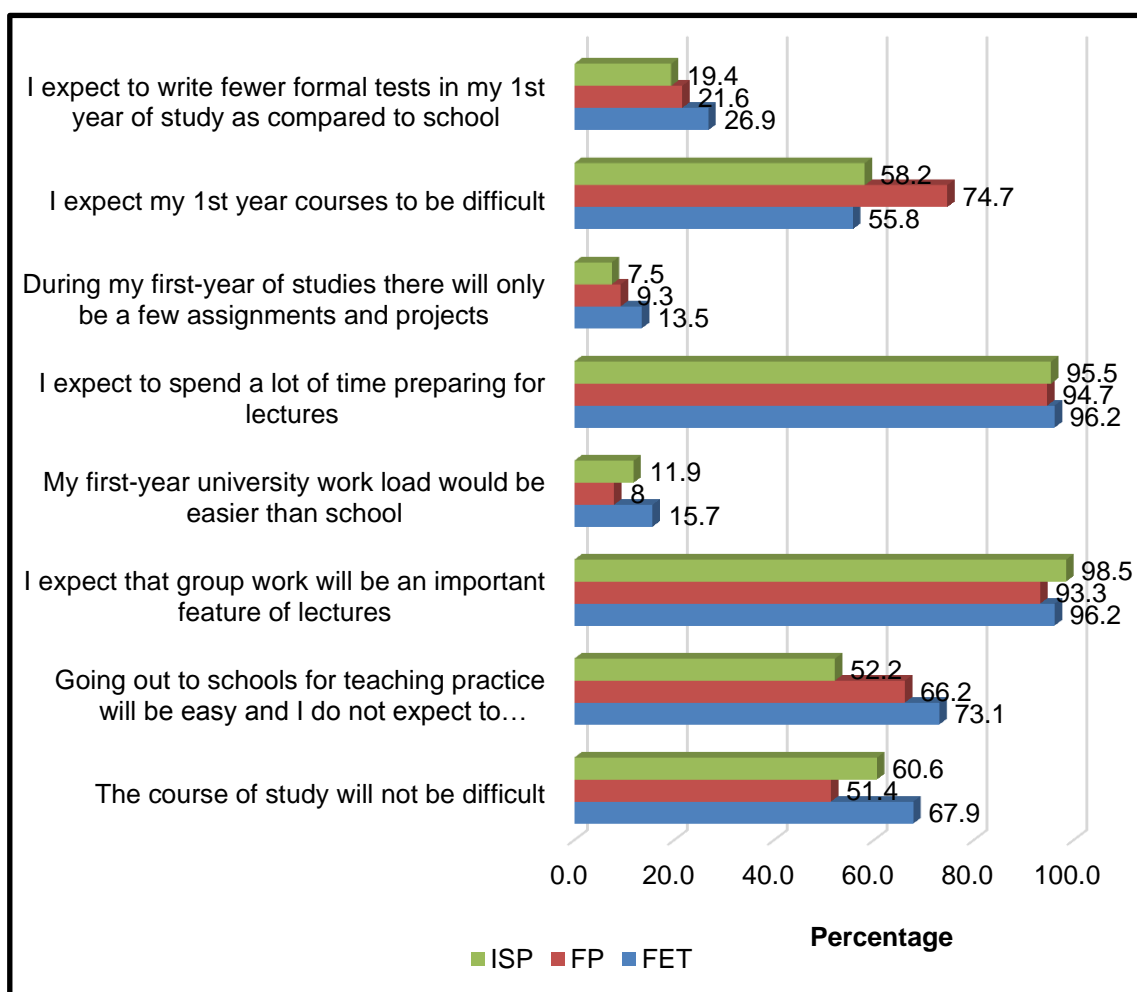


Figure 5:10 Expectations of first-year academic experiences

Fisher's exact test results for the above statements are displayed in Table 5:9 on page 149, the test reveal five statements have p -values lower than 0.05, indicating that first-year students' expectations of academic experiences in the three BEd programmes are dissimilar with regard to academic activities. For example, the

percentages for 'Going to schools for teaching practice will be easy and I do not expect to encounter any difficulties' ($p = 0.028$) for the different groups range from 52.2% for ISP to 73.1 for FET and the percentages for 'My first-year university work load will be easier than school' were all low, ranging from 8% for FP to 15.7% in FET; the p -value 0.017 indicated a significant difference amongst expectations in the three programmes.

Table 5:9 Academic experiences

	Fisher's Exact p -value
Going to schools for teaching practice will be easy and I do not expect to encounter any difficulties	.028
I expect that group work will be an important feature of lectures	.056
My first-year university work load will be easier than school	.017
I expect to spend a lot of time preparing for lectures	.731
During my first year of studies there will only be a few assignments and projects	.009
I expect my first-year courses to be difficult	.018
I expect to write fewer formal tests in my first year of study compared with school	.025

5.4.1.2 Academic support

All the results reveal high percentages with regard to students' expectations of academic support statements. The highest agreement scores were for the following statement: 'I will seek academic help from senior students assigned as peer tutors in the various subjects if I have difficulties with my courses'; the percentages ranged from 93.3% for FP to 98.1% for FET. The lowest scores were from the statement relating to the student's awareness of academic services offered at university: 'I am aware of academic support services, e.g., writing centre, peer tutors and tutorials that are available on campus to support students that need help'. The percentages ranged from 75.8% for ISP to 84% for FP. Figure 5:11 on page 150, illustrates the results.

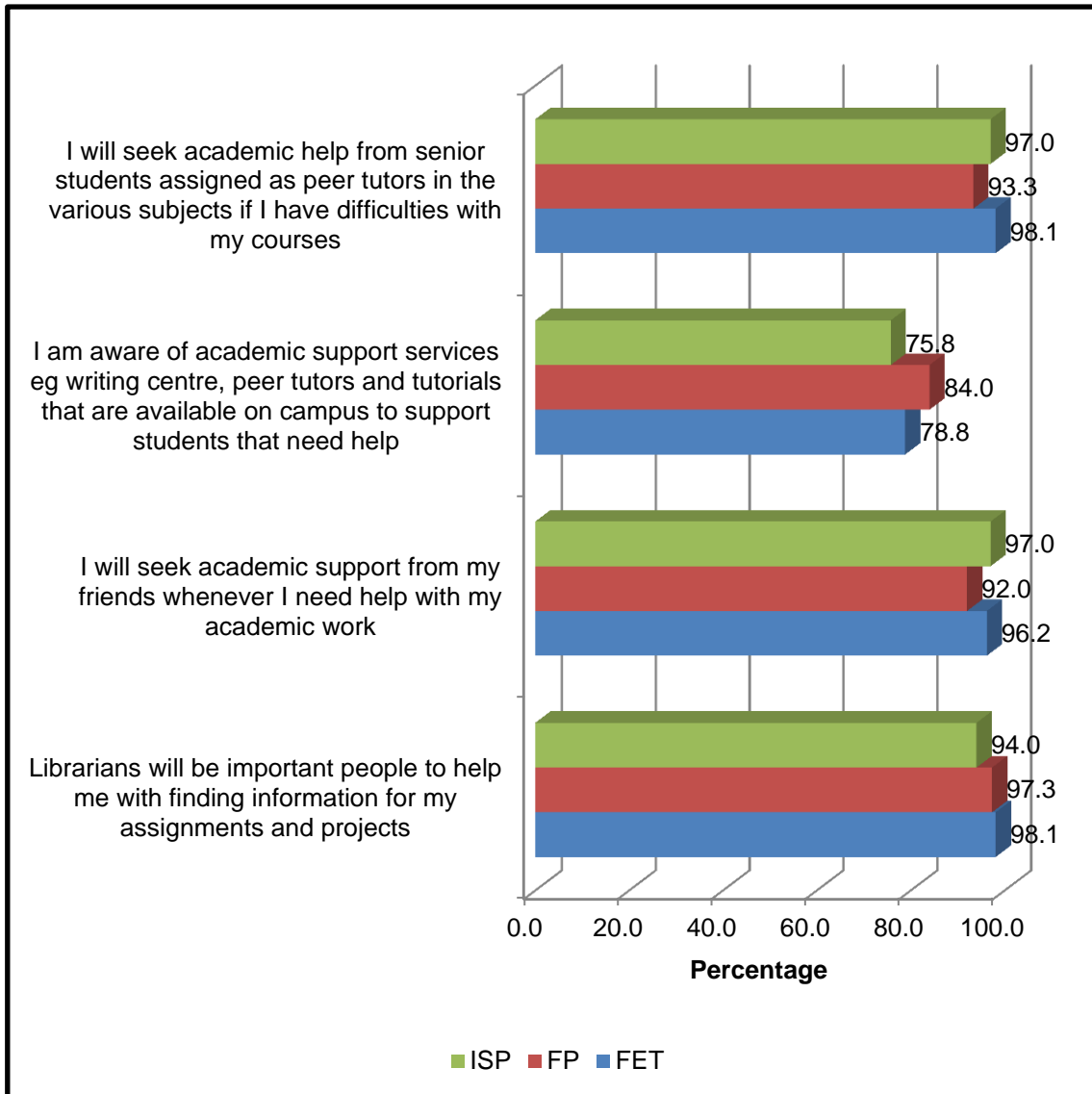


Figure 5:11 Expectations of first-year academic support

Fisher's exact test for the above statements is illustrated in Table 5:10, on page 151. The table shows that none of the p -values are lower than 0.05. This implies that the differences observed are not significant and respondents from all three programmes share similar views with regard to academic support.

Table 5:10 Academic support

	Fisher's Exact p-value
Librarians will be important people to help me with finding information for my assignments and projects	.212
I will seek academic support from my friends whenever I need help with my academic work	.713
I am aware of academic support services: writing centre, peer tutors and tutorials that are available on campus to support students that need help	.620
I will seek academic help from senior students assigned as peer tutors in the various subjects if I have difficulties with my courses	.134

5.4.1.3 Academic collaboration

Figure 5:12 below illustrates the results for academic collaboration. The results reveal that the level of agreement across all statements was high. The majority of respondents were positive and looked forward to participating in class discussions: 'I am looking forward to contributing to lively classroom discussions and debates'. The percentages ranged from 100% for FET to 94.7% for FP. The negative statement scored the lowest, 'It will be a challenge for me to participate in group work during class lessons', implying that a small percentage of the respondents from all three

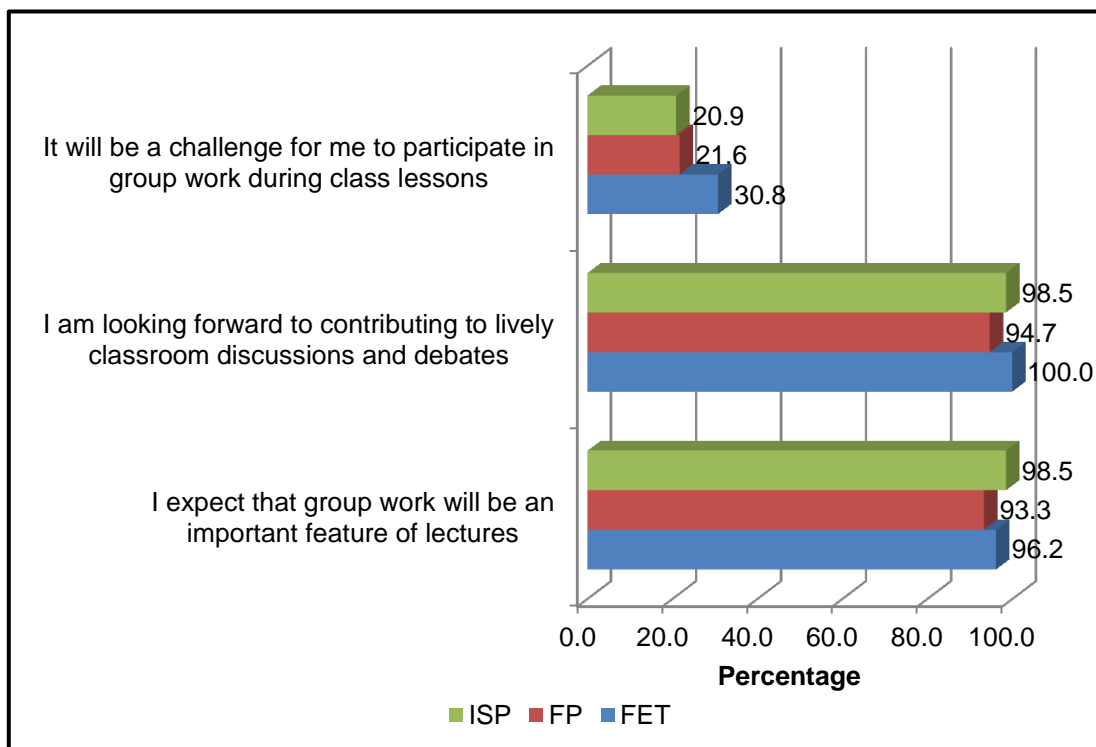


Figure 5:12 Expectations of first-year academic collaboration

programmes expected group work during class time to be a challenge: 30.8% in FP; 21.6% in FET and 20.9% in ISP. Fisher's p -values in Table 5:11 below indicate there were no significant differences between respondents' responses in the three programmes and their views on academic collaboration.

Table 5:11 Academic collaboration

	Fisher's Exact p -value
I expect that group work will be an important feature of lectures	.347
It will be a challenge for me to participate in group work during class lessons	.862
I am looking forward to contributing to lively classroom discussions and debates	.228

5.4.2 Expectations of social integration

Social integration in this study is described as the students' socially associated perceptions and experiences that arise from their social involvement with other students and lecturers in or out of formal lecture time. This section presents the results under the following sub-headings: student's expectations of socialising at university; involvement in out-of-class academic discussions; and students' self-perceived expectations of social integration.

5.4.2.1 Socialising at university

Figure 5:13 on the next page (page 153) illustrates the results of first-year students' expectations of socialising at university. The results for the total sample revealed that positive statements related to making friends: 'I will make many new friends' and 'I will make friends from different racial groups' scored highly: 91.2% and 99.5% respectively. The statements relating to joining social clubs and attending social functions scored a slightly lower score of 88.9% and 89.5% respectively. The negatively worded statement, 'It will be more difficult to make friends at university than it was at school or work', had the lowest level of agreement, implying respondents expected that making friends on campus would be easier than at school.

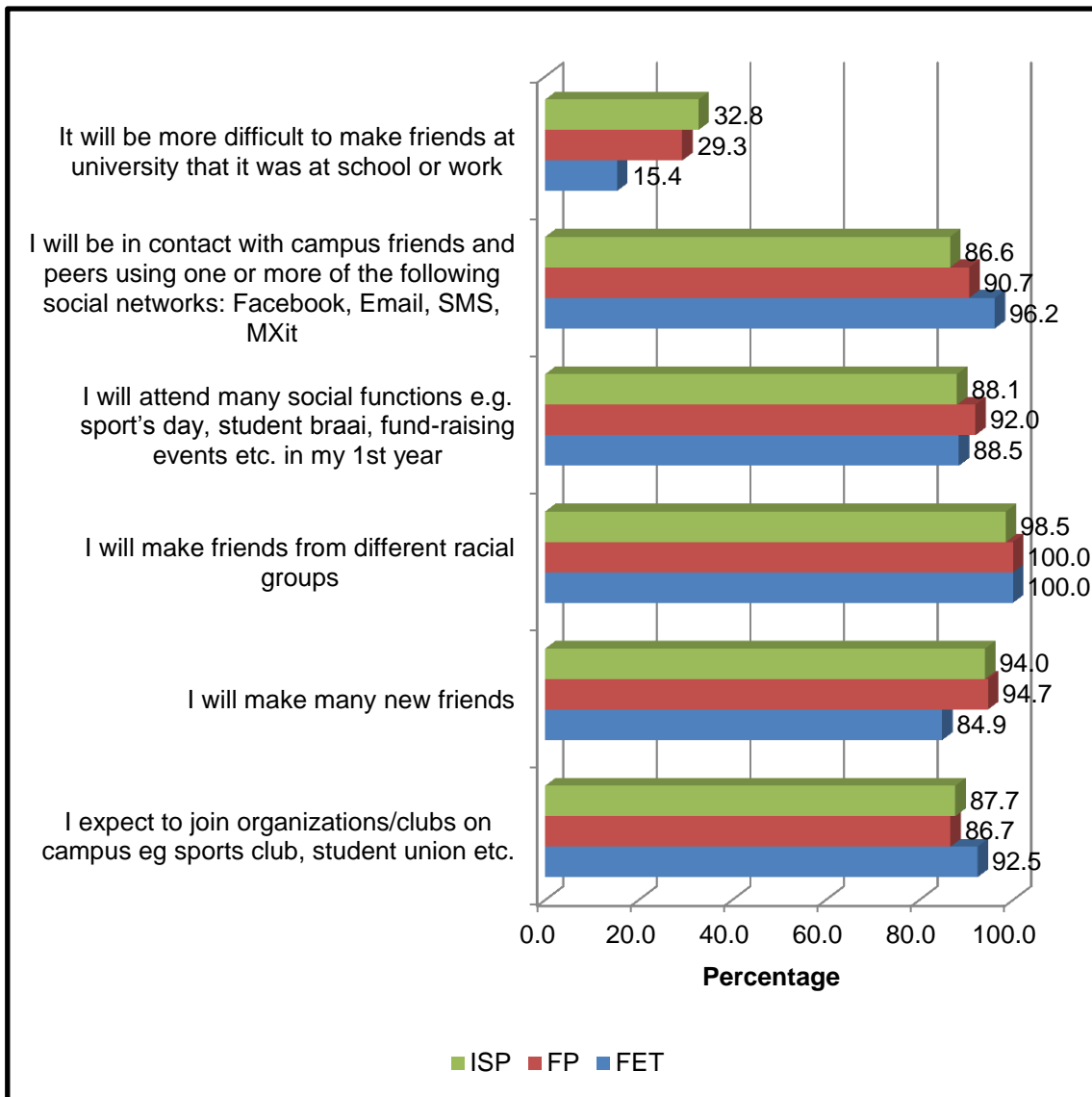


Figure 5:13 First-year students' expectations of socialising

For the statements from the above figure, Fisher's exact test In Table 5:12 on the following page (page 154) indicates there were no significant differences between the respondents' answers from all three programmes and the statements on socialising at university, with the exception of one statement, 'I will make friends from different racial groups', which indicated a significant difference of $p = 0.015$. Although the percentages seem close, the test implies that there is a difference in terms of the ISP group's expectations of making friends from other racial backgrounds compared with those of FET and FP groups.

Table 5:12 Expectation on socialising

	Fisher's Exact <i>p</i>-value
I expect to join organisations/clubs on campus, e.g. sports club, student union, etc.	.101
I will make many new friends	.280
I will make friends from different racial groups	.015
I will attend many social functions, e.g. sports day, student braai, fund-raising events, etc. in my 1st-year	.827
I will be in contact with campus friends and peers using one or more of the following social networks: Facebook, Email, SMS, MXit	.237
It will be more difficult to make friends at university than it was at school or work	.486

5.4.2.2 Out-of-class academic discussions

The levels of agreement for respondents from the three programmes were similar for all statements. Respondents' perceptions of lecturers' availability to assist them out-of-class time, 'Lecturers will make themselves available outside of the formal lecture time to assist and advise me', scored the highest in all three programmes: 83.6% for ISP, 81.1% for FP, and 80.8% for FET. In contrast respondents' perceptions of being in contact with their lecturers through social networks scored the lowest out of all three statements. The scores for the statement, 'I expect to be in contact with my lecturers using any of the following social networks: Facebook, Email, SMS, MXit' were 63.1% for ISP, 60.8% for FET, and 54.7% for FP. The negatively worded statement, 'I will not be involved in academic discussions with my peers outside of formal lectures', varied slightly with 89% of FP, 75% of FET, and 70% of ISP respondents indicating that they would be involved in academic discussions with their peers outside of formal lectures. Figure 5:14 on page 155 illustrates this result.

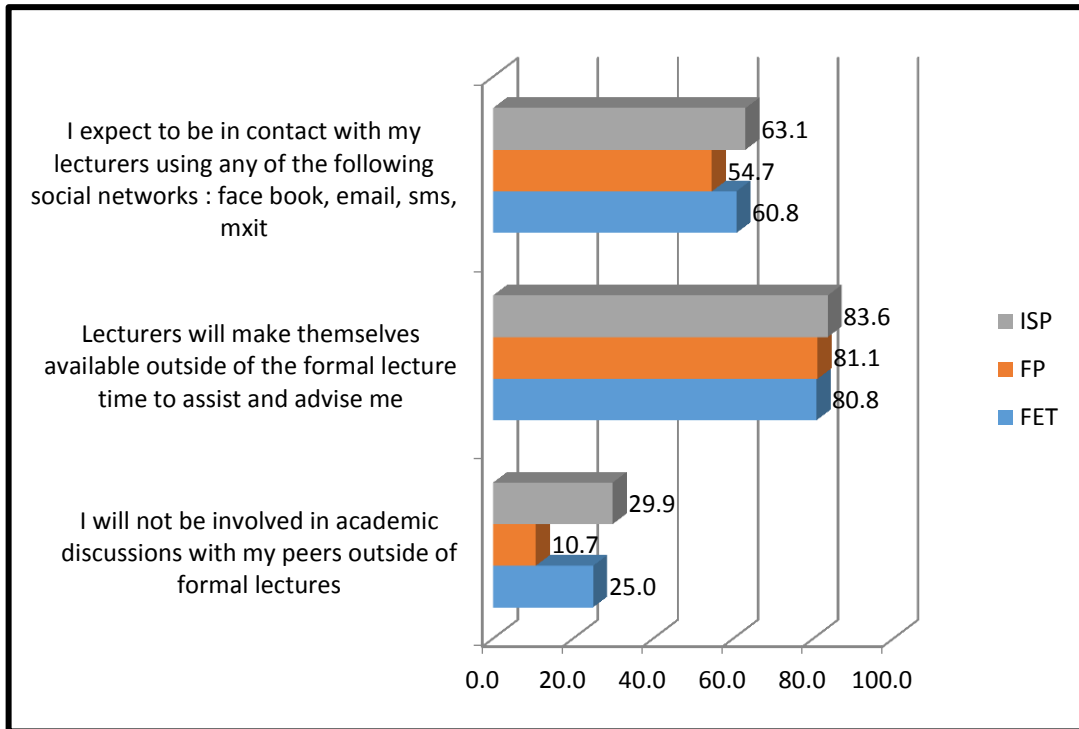


Figure 5:14 Expectations of out-of-class academic discussions

In Table 5:13 below, Fisher's exact test indicates that none of the p -values is lower than 0.05. This implies that the differences observed were not significant and that respondents in all three programmes shared similar views with regard to out-of-class discussions

Table 5:13 Out-of-class discussions

	Fisher's Exact p -value
I will not be involved in academic discussions with my peers outside of formal lectures.	.084
Lecturers will make themselves available outside of the formal lecture time to assist and advise me.	.917
I expect to be in contact with my lecturers using any of the following social networks: Facebook, Email, SMS, MXit	.603

5.4.2.3 Self-perceived expectations of social integration

The results in Figure 5:15 below indicate that respondents' replies for all the statements were consistent. All respondents perceived themselves as being sociable and having a positive reaction to socialising with peers and lecturers outside formal classes. They responded that they felt more comfortable with engaging in conversation with peers than lecturers (89.4% and 71.8% respectively). Respondents perceived themselves to be focused and not easily distracted by socialising at university, as indicated in the results for the following statement, 'Joining social clubs/organisations at university will distract me from academic work'. The low levels of agreement: FP, 14.7%; FET, 21.2%; and ISP, 25.4% confirm the respondents' level of focus. The results indicated a stronger response with regard to the following statement, 'My friends can easily persuade me to bunk lectures', showing a low level of agreement from all groups: 0% (FET), 2.7% (FP), and 4.5% (ISP). The above result indicates that respondents perceived themselves as not easily influenced by their friends.

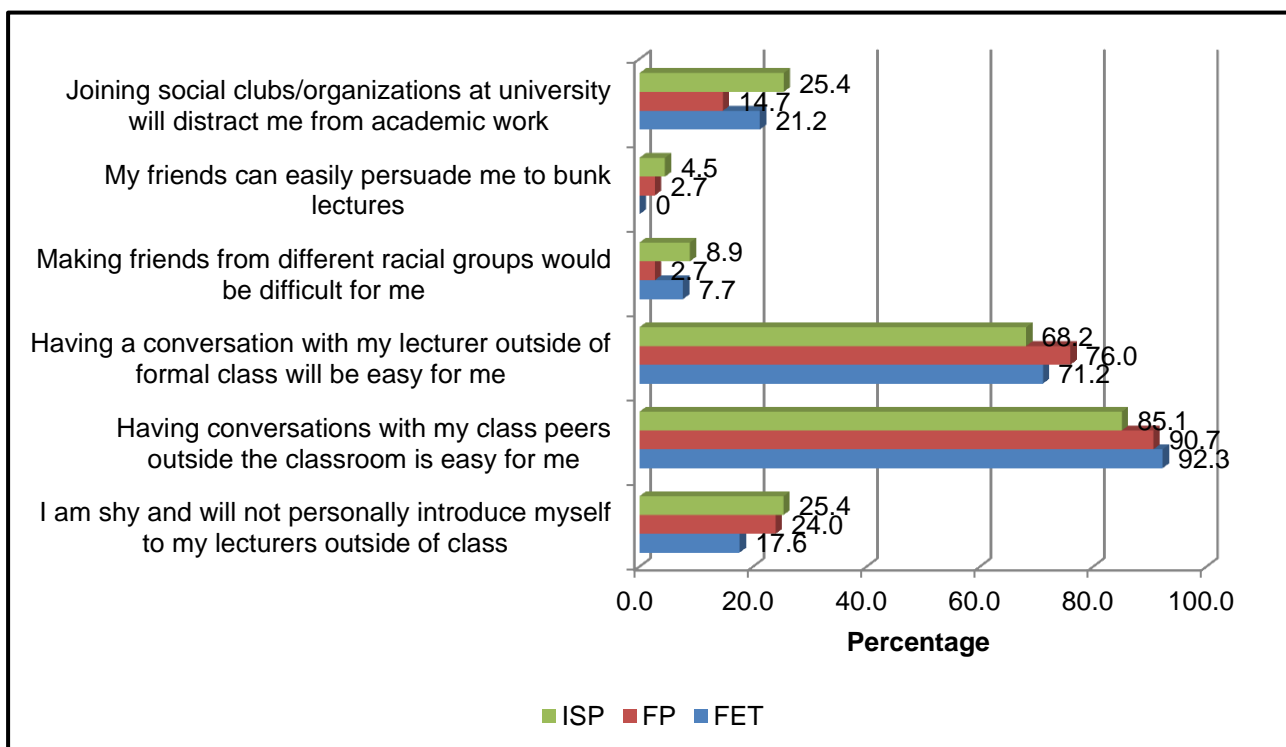


Figure 5:15 Self-perceived expectations of social integration

From Table 5:14 below, Fisher's exact test shows no significant difference for all the statements on students' perceptions of social integration with the exception of the following statement, 'Making friends from different racial groups would be difficult for me', which showed a significant difference, $p=0.023$. The percentages of level of agreement ranged from 2.7% in FP, 7.7% in FET, and 8.9% in ISP.

Table 5:14 Self-perceived expectations of social integration

	Fisher's Exact p -value
I am shy and will not personally introduce myself to my lecturers outside of class.	.942
Having conversations with my class peers outside the classroom is easy for me.	.889
Having a conversation with my lecturer outside of formal class will be easy for me.	.828
Making friends from different racial groups would be difficult for me.	.023
My friends can easily persuade me to bunk lectures.	.376
Joining social clubs/organisations at university will distract me from academic work.	.269

5.4.3 Students' perceptions

The students' perceptions of academic staff are presented under two sub-headings: students' perceptions of what their lecturers expect of them as first-year students, and the students' self-perceived expectations of what is required of them from their lecturers, with regard to academic activities.

5.4.3.1 Perceptions of lecturers' expectations

The results show that the respondents' replies for both the positively worded statements and negatively worded statement, were consistent. All the positive statements scored high percentages, ranging from 100% to 94% and the negative statement: 'My lecturers will not expect me to attend every single lecture', scored low percentages ranging from 1.5% to 5.8%.

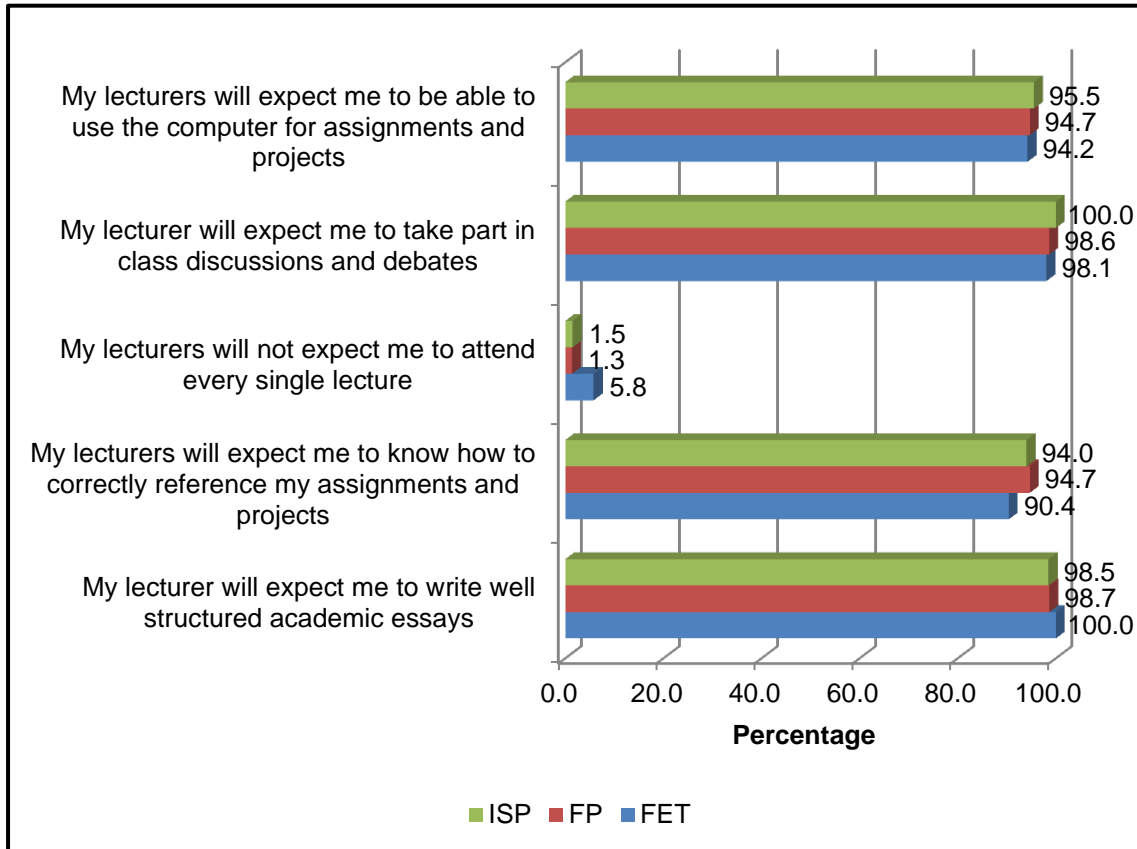


Figure 5:16 First-year students' perceptions of lecturer expectations

Figure 5:16 illustrates that in all three programmes, respondents' perceptions of their lecturers' expectations of their academic activities were high. Fisher's exact test indicates the same outcome observed in Table 5:15 below. None of the p -values was lower than 0.05, implying that respondents shared similar views with regard to their perceptions of lecturer expectations.

Table 5:15 Perceptions of lecturer expectations

	Fisher's Exact p -value
My lecturers will expect me to write well-structured academic essays	.072
My lecturers will expect me to know how to correctly reference my assignments and projects	.066
My lecturers will not expect me to attend every single lecture	.549
My lecturers will expect me to take part in class discussions and debates	.833
My lecturers will expect me to be able to use the computer for assignments and projects	.940

5.4.3.2 Self-perceived expectations of lecturers

The results in Figure 5:17 below show that all respondents rated the following two statements highly: 'I expect that my lecturers will provide regular feedback to me on class work, assignments and tests' and 'I expect the lecturers to prepare/equip me before I go to schools for my first teaching practice session'. The scores for these statements ranged from 86.6% to 96.2%. However, respondents' reactions to lecturers' knowing them by their first name scored the lowest, with the following responses from the three programmes: 55.8% in FET, 68.7% in ISP, and 72% in FP.

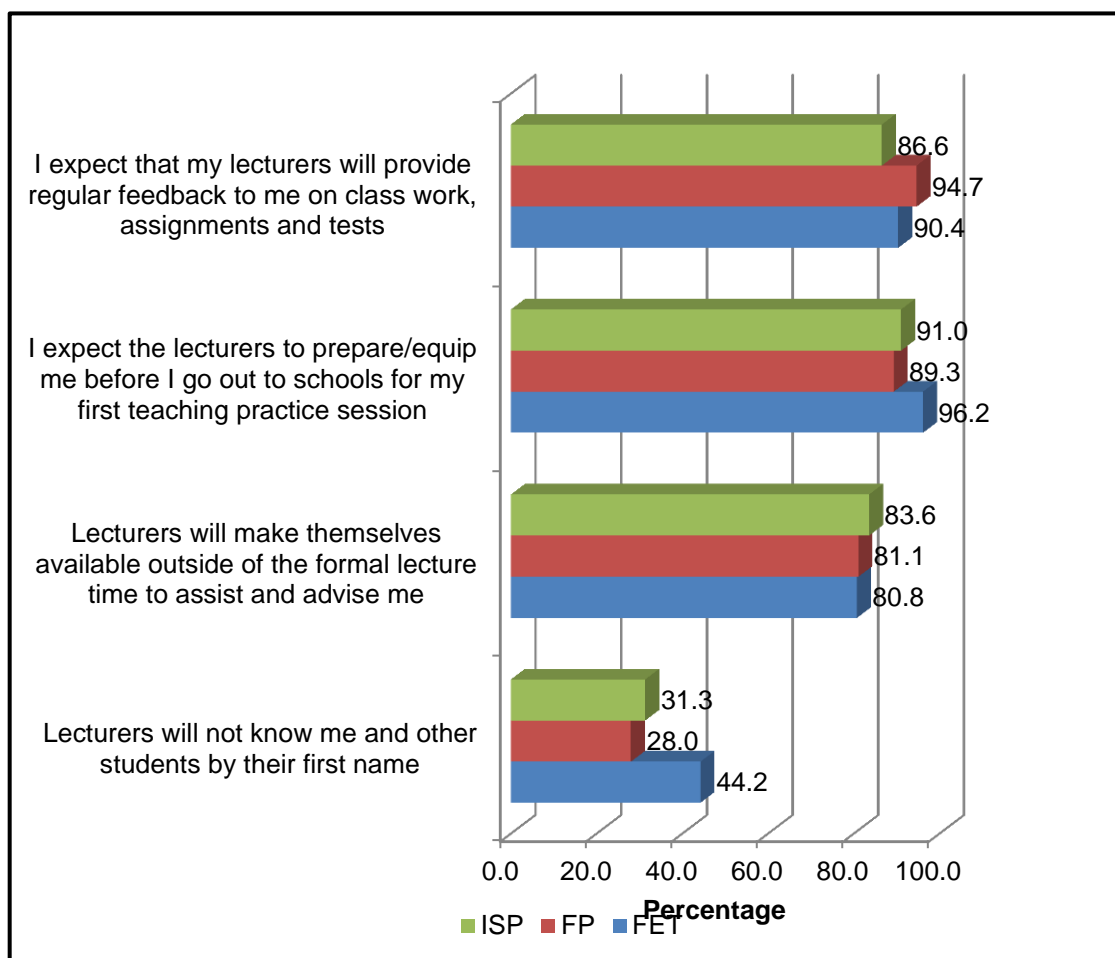


Figure 5:17 First-year students' self-perceived expectations of lecturers

None of the p -values was lower than 0.05 in the statements below, implying that there was no significant difference in the way the different groups responded to the statements in Table 5:16 below.

Table 5:16 Expectations of lecturers

	Fisher's Exact p -value
Lecturers will not know me and other students by their first name	.501
Lecturers will make themselves available outside of the formal lecture time to assist and advise me	.764
I expect the lecturers to prepare/equip me before I go to schools for my first teaching practice session	.633
I expect that my lecturers will provide regular feedback to me on class work, assignments and tests	.081

5.5 Summary of findings

The quantitative findings are summarised under the following two headings: Who are the first-year students entering teacher education programmes? and What are first-year students' expectations of university life?

5.5.1 *Who are the first-year students entering these teacher education programmes?*

The data for this section is discussed under the following sub-headings: demographic factors, socio-economic factors, and pre-entry academic factors.

Demographics factors: The demographic factors took into account the age, gender, race, and home language of the sample. From the total sample of 195 respondents, the gender ratio for male and female participants was approximately 1:3 with a total of 45 men and 150 women. The findings reveal the majority of male respondents (57.7%) preferred the FET programme, while the majority of female respondents (48.6%) preferred the FP programme. The age of participants from the total sample ranged from 19 to 45 years. Just over 50% of the sample population represented a young student population (53.3%, N=104) which belonged to the lower than 20 years of age category, while the balance represented 20 years and older. These results indicate that there is a growing number of mature students returning to formal

education. The growing diversity in the student population was evident in the racial composition of first-year students. The majority of respondents in the sample were identified as coloured (54%), with Africans representing 26.7%, white participants constituting 17.4%, and Indian only 1.5%. An interesting finding is that certain race groups appear to dominate a particular BEd programme. For example, of the total sample of 52 African participants, 36.5% were registered in the FET programme; of the 34 white students, 73.5% were registered for the FP programme; and from a total of 106 coloured participants, 36.7% were registered in the ISP programme. Finally, from the total sample, the majority of the participants were English first-language speakers (52.8%), with isiXhosa being the second largest and Afrikaans the third largest at 23.6% and 21.5% respectively.

Socio-economic factors: This section summarises the quantitative data from parents' education, parents' employment type, financial support, mode of transport, and family support. The overall trend in parents' education reveals that the majority of the parents of the respondents, 83.6% of the male parents and 87.7% of the female parents, do not possess a tertiary qualification. The findings disclose that parents of FP participants showed the highest level of completion rates among the total sample of participants' male and female parents: 43.7% and 58.3% respectively. In this regard the finding of parents' employment type clearly signposts that parents of FP participants had the highest number of advanced and intermediate skills jobs, while the male parents of FET participants had the highest number of entry-level jobs and FET female parents had the highest unemployment numbers.

The participants' parents' qualifications and jobs impinge on financial support. The majority of the participants (93.9%) were unable to fund their first year of university studies. Over 50% of participants sourced outside funding: 43% received bursaries while 10% secured student loans. From the three programmes, the findings indicate that the majority of FP participants (58%) had their studies paid for by their parents with only a small number, approximately around a third (34.7%), relying on external sources of funding. By contrast, close to two-thirds (71.1%) of FET respondents relied more on external sources to fund their first-year studies. The majority of the total sample population (71.2%) relied on public transport to commute to university. A small percentage of 18.8% made use of private transport and 9.9% walked to

university. Of the total sample of 36 participants using their own vehicles to travel to university, the percentages of participants within the three programmes are as follows: 66.6% FP, 19.6% ISP, and 13.8% FET. Finally, the type of support received by the participants from their immediate family reveals that most of the support was intangible (61%). For example, participants acknowledged their families for the following intangible support: emotional, encouragement, positive reinforcement; personal advice, and companionship. The nature of the tangible support (31%) was mainly financial, informational and assisting with registration.

Pre-entry academic factors: This section focuses on type of schooling; year of school completion; Grade 12 results; first-generation students; and student pathways to university. From the total sample, 79% of participants attended urban school while only 21% attended rural schools. Results indicate that the majority of FP respondents attended fee-paying schools (ex-Model C schools), while the highest number of respondents from the ISP cohort attended no-fee schools. The findings disclose that the majority of respondents from the total sample (57.9%) completed Grade 12 in 2010 and 2011. From the 2011 cohort, 26.2% could be referred to as school leavers: they entered university directly after completing Grade 12. From the 2010 cohort, 31.8% could be regarded as gap-year students since they entered university a year after completing matric. Between the periods 2001 to 2009, and the period prior to 2000, a total of 37.4% and 4.6% participants respectively completed Grade 12. These participants could be referred to as mature students.

The data on participants' Grade 12 academic performance reveals average scores for English Language and Mathematics. The majority of participants from the total sample obtained a D symbol for English Home Language and First Additional Language. The results of the participants that completed Grade 12 Mathematics Literacy revealed a high frequency in the upper scores: A, B and C category. Participants who completed Mathematics in Grade 12 showed a high frequency in the lower scores: D, E and F. The findings further disclosed that the majority of the participants in the sample were first-generation students (67.7%). From the total sample, ISP had the highest percentage (36.3%) of first-generation students, while FP had the highest percentage (42.8%) of non-first-generation students. Finally, although the majority of participants were not school leavers (34.4% employed in

fulltime jobs and 39% unemployed) prior to entering university, a substantive number of participants (96.9%) responded positively to preparedness for university studies.

5.5.2 What are these first-year students' expectations of university life?

The findings from this section were drawn from the Likert scale survey on student expectations of first-year university experience. The summary of the data for this section includes the following sub-headings: students' expectations of academic integration; students' expectations of social integration; and students' perceptions of academic staff.

Expectations of academic integration: The findings are summarised under the following divisions of expectations: academic experience, academic support, and academic collaboration. The statements referring to first-year students' expectations of academic experience consisted of seven statements. The participants within the three programmes shared similar views on only two statements: importance of group work activity in class and time spent on preparing for class. Students' expectations of five statements showed a significant difference in views: difficulty of teaching practice; difficulty of course; number of formal tests written; number of assignments; and work load. These results indicate that many participants' expectations of academic experience were varied, thereby indicating a discrepancy against their actual experiences.

With regard to participants' response to the four academic support statements, the findings reveal there was no significant difference among the three programmes. This implies that all students shared the same view with regard to their expectations of academic support. Although all students scored highly on the statements referring to academic support, all had equally low scores on the statement of their awareness of the different academic support services offered by the university. The findings bring to light the willingness of the participants to make use of academic support to improve their performance.

There was no significant difference in academic collaboration between the participants in the three programmes. All participants felt positive about class discussions and debates, but some participants were apprehensive and scored a low response for the statement on 'participating in group work will be a challenge'.

Expectations of social integration: participants' expectations are summarised under the following divisions: socialising at university; out-of-class discussions; and self-perceived expectations of social integration.

Overall the responses from participants in all three programmes had a high level of agreement with the statements on socialising at university. There was no significant difference for four of the five statements. One statement that indicated a significant difference of $p=0.015$ related to making friends from different race groups. The ISP responses varied from the responses of FET and FP.

The out-of-class statements did not score as highly compared with the academic integration statements. Low levels of agreement were found in all of the out-of-class statements: contact with lecturers on social media; lecturers' availability out-of-class time; and out-of-class discussions with lecturers and peers. All the statements showed no significant difference among the three programmes, implying that all participants in the three programmes shared a similar view.

From the six statements on participants' self-perceived expectations of social integration, five statements showed no significant difference. This implies that participants shared similar views on these four statements that were highly rated. The one statement that showed a significant difference of $p=0.023$ related to 'making friends from different race groups may be difficult for me'. The FP score varied from FET and ISP.

Expectations of academic staff: The summary of the findings of this section is addressed under two areas: students' perceptions of lecturers' expectations; and students' self-perceived expectations of lecturers.

There was no significant difference between the five statements relating to students' perceptions of lecturers' expectations and participants' rating in the three programmes. The statements related to the following perceptions of lecturers' expectations of participants: use of computer; class participation; class attendance; correct referencing; writing well-structured essays. Participants rated all the positive statements with high levels of agreement and the negative statement with low levels of agreement. The results reveal that participants shared similar views with regard to their lecturers' expectations of them as first-year students.

Finally, the results from the statements on students' self-perceived expectations of their lecturers indicated there were no significant differences between these statements and the participants in the three programmes. All participants shared similar views with regard to the following statements: regular feedback from lecturers; lecturers equipping students for first teaching practice; lecturers' availability; lecturers' knowing their names. Although all statements were rated highly, participants did score one statement relatively low compared with the other statements: lecturers knowing the students by their first name. These results disclose that participants had high expectations of their lecturers.

5.6 Concluding remarks: who are the first year students entering these teacher education programmes?

The use of descriptive statistics together with the use of figures, tables, cross-tabulations and inference statistics provided a more detailed and realistic overview of the diversity of the respondents entering first-year teacher education programmes. The quantitative data provided a good synopsis of who our first-year teacher education students are, highlighting student demographics, socio-economic status, prior schooling, and expectations of the first-year university experience. Results from this chapter provided a backdrop to this study and allowed for a more in-depth qualitative investigation of first-year students and factors influencing their university experience and academic performance. The qualitative findings are presented in the next chapter, Chapter 6. Discussions from both the quantitative and qualitative data are discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents qualitative findings obtained from one-on-one interviews which included a sort-card activity and data from the focus-group interview. The qualitative process was designed to obtain a more in-depth understanding of pre-entry factors influencing students' first-year experience and academic performance. One-on-one interviews with the eight participants, who were purposefully selected, allowed me to probe more deeply into participants' backgrounds to gain a better understanding of how their habitus and different forms of capital supported and/or challenged their first-year integration.

Chapter 5, to a degree, addressed the first two research questions. The primary purpose of the quantitative data was to gain an overview of the profile of first-year students entering the teacher education programme. In this chapter all four of the sub-questions are addressed to provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and to answer the main research question with more clarity and focus. Thus the following research questions will be considered when presenting and discussing the qualitative data analysis:

Main RQ: *How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?*

The following sub-questions were addressed:

Sub-RQ1: Who are our first-year teacher education students?

Sub-RQ2: What are the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors that first-year teacher education students bring with them to higher education?

Sub-RQ3: To what extent do pre-entry factors that students report influence their social and academic interaction in their first year of study?

Sub-RQ4: To what extent do these factors contribute to the students' first-year experience and academic performance?

6.2 Presentation of qualitative data

The qualitative findings are presented and discussed under three main sections in the remainder of this chapter:

- The first section provides a description of each of the eight participants' backgrounds including their habitus and capital: social, cultural, and economic.
- The second section discusses the results of the sort-card activity and factors influencing participants' first-year experience.
- The final section discusses themes and sub-themes that emerged from the one-on-one and focus-group interviews. The five main concepts from the conceptual framework: habitus, capital, field (institutional context), academic integration, and social integration, provided a lens through which to analyse and understand the data.

6.3 Description of participants

Providing a description of each participant is a fundamental feature of qualitative research. Patton (2002:437) acknowledges that 'a thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting'. In this study, a detailed description of each participant provides a context in which to analyse the influences of their pre-entry factors, including habitus and forms of capital in relation to the way each participant reported on his or her individual first-year experience. The rich description also assists by putting into context the quotations used in the latter part of this chapter. This section provides a description of all eight participants by highlighting one broad theme for each participant. The broad theme selected is not exclusive to the selected participant only. The broad themes identified give rise to several sub-themes that focus on the complexities of the participant's experiences as parts of a whole. This section concludes with a table providing an overview of the participants, together with broad themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. These themes and sub-themes are expanded on, taking into consideration participants' one-on-one interviews and focus-group interview discussed later in this chapter. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

6.3.1 Joyce

Theme: Determination – *I am here to get a degree.*

Joyce is a 22-year-old African, female student. She was born in the Eastern Cape. There are five members of her family: her parents, one sister, her twin brother and herself. Joyce is from a working-class family. Her parents separated when she was five years old and she does not have much recollection of her time with her father. For most of her childhood she was in the care of her grandmother since her mother moved to Johannesburg to increase her chances of finding a job. When Joyce was eleven years old, her grandmother died. She and her siblings had to move to Johannesburg to live with their mother. A year later, Joyce's mother had died. Once again Joyce and her younger siblings had to relocate, and they moved to Cape Town to live with her aunt.

While in Cape Town, Joyce was fortunate enough to gain a scholarship to attend a private high school in Cape Town. She considered this experience to be a life-changing experience. Everything she learned about life was gained from her experiences at this school. While at high school Joyce fell pregnant and her son was born in 2006. Her aunt was disappointed with her and requested she move out of the house. Joyce moved in with her son's father and his family. In spite of these challenges, Joyce completed Grade 12 in 2008 and enrolled at university the following year. With limited knowledge and advice on what career path to follow, Joyce within a few months into her first year of study dropped out of university. She found herself a job as a salesperson in a departmental store. Joyce's life was not without personal trauma. Her twin brother died in 2007 and her sister in 2010. She felt alone and her only solace was from her boyfriend and son: the only two people she now regards as family.

Joyce embraces her culture and traditions, but she has a conflict with how her culture expects her to behave and think. She stated that in her culture, grandparents and parents 'groomed' them to respect elders and other people. The elders in the family prescribe how to relate to people. Joyce feels such prescription becomes a 'personal thing' as you grow up. She feels that growing up in today's society, being

exposed to different races or cultures and observing how people perceive themselves, encourage you to see people in different ways.

Joyce recalls missing out on her childhood and taking on adult responsibilities at a young age. Now that she has a son, Joyce feels she needs to provide for him. She does not want him to go through the same hardships that she experienced as a child. Her decision to go back to university, to increase her chance of getting a better job and uplifting their lives, was based on this belief. In 2012 Joyce was back at university and enrolled in the BEd programme. She felt confident about her studies and knew exactly what she wanted from life. Her decision to go back to university was an easy one: she wanted a better life for herself and her son. She felt teaching was the best job for her now that she had a son. Joyce feels secure in her choice of career and highlights that the country will always need teachers. Joyce is aware that among her race group there is no respect for the teaching profession, but she is determined to make this her career and successfully complete her studies.

Joyce is the first in her family to attend university. She wishes her mom were alive to witness this event. She is enjoying her campus experience and feels comfortable on campus. Talking to her lecturers and peers comes quite naturally to her: being in a private school has prepared her for university life. Joyce was surprised at the multi-racial composition of the student population in her course. She certainly did not expect to see so many white students at this university studying to become teachers. Her perception was that white students would choose better courses since they had better education and would certainly be attending the more 'prestigious' universities. From Joyce's previous university experience she expected more autonomy as a student. But, she is happy to have her lecturers fully engaged in her studies.

Joyce feels confident that her school experience has equipped her to adapt academically and socially to the university environment. She has experienced schooling at a township school and a private high school and therefore can clearly see the disparities in the quality of education in the two types of school environments. She pities students with township education who are entering university. She believes that they are entering university without a good educational experience and will therefore struggle to fit in. She believes that township school students are not equipped with the 'right attitude towards their work'. She is strategic

when it comes to choosing peers for group work and projects. She is determined to succeed in her studies and wants nothing or nobody to hold her back. She emphasises that her choice of peers for group assignments is determined by her peers' prior schooling and their commitment to their studies.

Joyce feels comfortable communicating with diverse students in her course. She feels that having been in a good school which had students from different race groups equipped her to engage with students from different race groups. She feels privileged in this regard. She observed that her African peers do not feel comfortable mixing with students from other race groups. She attributes this situation to their home environment and prior school experience. Joyce is focused on her studies and regards herself as a motivated and determined person. She tries to instil some of these qualities in her African peers. She feels they need to be more focused and know the privileges and opportunities of attending university.

Joyce does not have many friends at university: her main focus is on her studies and her son. This has resulted in her restricting her time for friends or socialising although she does regret missing out on her childhood when she was growing up. Joyce believes if she wants to be successful in her studies she needs to make certain sacrifices. She has no issues with time management and effectively manages to balance her university work, duties at home and responsibilities as a mum. Joyce is grateful that she does not need to work part-time to support her family or pay for her studies. She received a bursary for her studies which helped ease her responsibilities as a parent and student. Joyce's financial stability has afforded her the privilege to dedicate herself to successfully completing her studies and obtaining her teaching degree so that she can take care of her son and herself.

6.3.2 Thabo

Theme: *Resilience – The need to be financially stable.*

Thabo is a 24-year-old African male student from the Eastern Cape. He is from a working-class family and was raised by his mother who was a domestic worker. His father died when he was young; his mother took care of his older sister and him. His mother died of HIV/Aids when Thabo was ten years old. Thabo and his sister went to live with his aunt. He attended a public school in a small rural town. After the death

of his mother, Thabo and his sister were cared for by his extended family. They did not have a permanent home and moved around between their three aunts and grandmother. Thabo's childhood memories are of economic hardships and social ills. He was surrounded by uncles who came home at weekends and engaged in drinking alcohol, smoking drugs and fighting. He was grateful that they gave him pocket money. Thabo used the money to buy cigarettes, which he sold to pupils at his school to make some money to purchase his school uniform and stationery.

When Thabo turned 18, he moved to Cape Town to look for a job to support his sister, aunts and grandmother. While working, he completed a part-time computer course to procure a better job and send more money home to his extended family. He worked for a company doing data capturing and managed to save some money. When Thabo was retrenched from his job, he decided he needed to obtain a stable job with a good salary. These circumstances motivated him to attend university as a fulltime student. His decision to enrol for a BEd degree was influenced by his aunt. She told him he should be a teacher because she had watched him take care of her children and do homework with them. His passion, however, is to be a psychologist. Thabo is the first in his family to attend university. He applied for a student loan and hopes he will get it: he finds it difficult to balance being a fulltime student and having a part-time job. He works night shifts as a security guard to try and support himself and his family back in the Eastern Cape. He says it does not really affect his concentration because he tries to get a quick nap now and then at work. He finds the academic work somewhat challenging: he regards himself as a mature student who completed Grade 12 in 2006. He believes that his rural school education did not equip him for university life. His teachers at school never motivated them to study further. He recalls his teachers being content if the learners at school reached Grade 12. He has a few peers at university whom he regards as friends. They all work together and help one another, but they don't socialise away from campus. There is little time or money for socialising since he has to juggle his fulltime studies and part-time job commitments. However, Thabo is focused on his goal of completing his degree and getting a permanent, secure job. He feels positive, motivated and self-driven. He says his tough upbringing with limited resources, money, food, good clothes and a stable home, has made him deal with challenging situations. Thabo's behaviour is governed by his strong cultural and traditional beliefs which influence

the way he interacts with his peers and lecturers. He does not make contact with his lecturers unless they request to see him. He regards them as elders. In his culture you do not have much contact with your elders. He believes his lecturers should be respected and not approached unnecessarily. This behaviour affects his interaction with his lecturers in and out of class; he will not debate or challenge them in any way; neither is he confrontational about issues relating to his academic work.

Thabo's restricted exposure to other race groups due to his rural schooling experience and home environment resulted in him having difficulties in interacting with students and lecturers from other race groups. Initially, when Thabo arrived at university, he found this situation awkward and soon found out that many of his African peers felt the same way. Thabo and his African peers/friends discussed this issue and realised that these students from other race groups were students just like them, with similar academic concerns and goals. Thabo has a few friends from other race groups that he chats to in class, but his friends look at him strangely when he gets too 'friendly' with them. They pass funny remarks, laugh and sometimes call him a 'coconut'. Thabo says this banter does not bother him as it is a new experience for him and his friends. Thabo is passing all his courses, but struggles with English language studies. He is not doing well in academic literacy: he is afraid he is going to fail that course. He says lecturers assume that students know how to write an essay or do referencing. Not much support is given in class and he cannot make use of academic support services because he is involved in part-time employment that demands a lot of his time. Thabo sometimes wishes he did not need to be so self-reliant and had hoped that his extended family would contribute towards his education. He firmly believes that if he was financially stable he would have been able to focus on his studies and obtain better marks instead of worrying about supporting himself, his extended family and his studies. Thabo is hopeful that next year he will get a student loan or bursary if his first-year results are good. This will allow him to complete his studies in the required time of four years and then he can look forward to a well-paid stable job as a teacher. He says his family would be proud of his achievement: this would allow them to brag about his success in their home town, but more importantly he would be able to take care of them financially.

6.3.3 Letti

Theme: *Determination – Self-improvement: key to being someone.*

Letti is a young 27-year-old African female student. She belongs to a working-class family. Letti's father is a labourer on a wine farm in Stellenbosch on which she and her five siblings were raised. Her mother is a seasonal worker on the wine farm but her main responsibility is to take care of the household duties. Letti presently has two older sisters and two younger brothers. In 1999 her eldest sister was shot dead in a tragic incident which was traumatic for the whole family. Letti does not feel comfortable talking about the incident. In spite of this traumatic incident, Letti recalls her childhood as being fun and exciting. Her parents were happy people who always wanted the best for their children. Letti regards her father as a hard worker, who has never missed a day at work. Letti grew up in an extended family environment. Her parents took on the responsibility of raising two of their daughters' children and Letti's cousin when her uncle died. She proudly acknowledges that her mother is presently taking care of eight boys and three girls, including herself.

Letti's mother tongue is Sesotho, yet she regards Afrikaans as her first language. She attended schools where Afrikaans was the language of instruction. She recalls her primary school experience with mixed emotions. Letti attended a coloured primary school during the time of apartheid in South Africa. She remembers the racial tension and being subjected to racial slurs from other learners at school. Her fondest memories of primary school were taking part in beauty pageants and winning prizes. She ascribes the pageants to contributing to her sense of self-confidence. Letti's recollection of high school is one filled with gratitude and joy. She regards her high school experience as most memorable. She attended a Model C high school, which was regarded as a white high school during apartheid. It was an all-girls school with the majority of students and staff white. She recalls a total of four black students in her school. She is grateful to her parents who had sent her and her sister to this school. Letti is aware of the financial sacrifice her family had to make to send her and a sister to such a well-resourced school with high school fees. She felt guilty about being selected to go to this school. She did not want to waste her parents' money and believed the only way she could show her appreciation to her family was

by working diligently and passing each year. Letti did not regard herself as a bright student – rather as a dedicated and hard-working one.

She appreciated being in a well-resourced school and exposed to new experiences and cultures. She found her teachers to be highly motivated: they encouraged learners to study further. The vice-principal of her school inspired her to be career oriented and she played a major role as Letti's mentor and advisor. Letti completed Grade 12: many of her friends were going to university, yet, she chose to work and contribute financially to her family. She felt guilty about spending her parents' savings. She worked as a cashier and a waitress for two years. Letti soon realised that these types of entry-level jobs would not give her the stability and security that she needed to better her standard of living. She approached the vice-principal of her high school, who advised her to consider furthering her studies. The vice-principal also secured a sponsor for Letti's first year of study. Letti enrolled in a college close to home and after a successful first year, she was given a bursary to complete her diploma in Early Childhood Development (ECD). Letti found a job at a primary school close to home and taught Grade R for two years. She taught in English which was a challenge for her, but one that she was willing to embrace. Letti was earning a good salary and had a stable job. She was a motivated and ambitious person. She wanted more from her life; she felt she needed to better her qualifications and decided to enrol at a university to obtain a teaching degree.

In 2012 Letti arrived in Cape Town to attend university. She felt nervous, anxious and scared. She had only heard about university from her friends, but had never visited one. In addition this was her first experience of being away from her home and family. Although Letti was confident that her high school experience, her training in ECD and her teaching experience as a Grade R teacher would be a sound support in her university studies, she still felt nervous owing to being unfamiliar with university expectations. She was afraid of failing her first year, but to her surprise, she passed all her courses with good grades. Her expectations of university were not quite what she experienced. She expected university work to be much tougher than she had experienced. She did not expect to see so many mature students at university. She easily fitted in with the older students and expressed that she 'liked it as it made her feel comfortable'. In this regard, Letti felt she could identify with the

mature students; they were more focused and determined to succeed, just as she was.

Letti regarded herself as shy and would not ask questions in class. She felt being an Afrikaans first-language speaker also contributed to her non-participation in class. She considered the language barrier confusing at times: it restricted her from answering questions in class since she did not want her answers to come out incorrectly and cause her to look 'stupid'. Letti is aware that non-participation in class may sometimes be misinterpreted by some of her lecturers as her not understanding the academic work.

Letti stays at the university residence and has good support from her peers at the residence with regard to her academic work. They help one another and have formed a study group. They do not socialise out of residence: going out to movies, clubs or dinner. Financially, she and her friends cannot afford to engage in such activities. Letti paid for her first year of studies and residence fees with the money she had saved from working as a Grade R teacher. However, Letti is concerned that her savings will soon be exhausted. She has applied for a bursary and hopes her application will be successful. She urgently needs extra money for food, to purchase stationery and other resources needed for academic projects. Letti goes home on weekends: she has a part-time job as a cashier at the farm stall on the wine farm where her father is employed.

Letti's father is so proud of her and talks highly of her to the people in the community. She is the first in her family to attend university. Letti feels honoured when she is in her community and children refer to her as 'teacher'. Letti wants to be successful in her studies so that she can take care of her parents, buy them a house and make them feel comfortable and secure.

6.3.4 Nadia

Theme: *Fitting in – This is where I am supposed to be.*

Nadia is a 20-year-old coloured student who completed matric in 2010 and took a gap year before enrolling at university in 2012. She is from a middle-class family. There are five members in her family: her parents, younger brother, sister and she.

Nadia was born in Mitchell's Plain, an area once classified as a coloured residential area during the apartheid era, but soon moved to Ottery which she regards as a good area. It was designated a white residential area before 1994. She recalls her childhood as perfect, attending many family functions and outings. Nadia and her siblings attended a good primary school, stating it was an ex-Model C school. She remembers her first day at primary school, quite vividly, being accompanied by her mother. She remembers the period in which her perfect life was ruined. She was twelve years old when her father walked out on their family. Nadia recalls that moment as being 'sad, disappointing, emotional and crucial', a day she will never forget. Nadia attended Belgravia High school which she regards as a well-resourced school with dedicated teachers who prepared them adequately for university life. She recalls her teachers motivating and encouraging them to work hard. Her teachers informed them that university studies are much tougher than school. In 2010, Nadia delivered the valedictory speech on behalf of the Grade 12 class. She was proud of her achievements and matriculated with good results. It was Nadia's intention to attend university but she decided to take a gap year. In that year she obtained her driver's licence and worked at Edu-care, a childcare centre. It was work experience gained at this centre that inspired her to pursue a career in teacher education.

Nadia is not the first in her family to attend university: her mother has a teaching qualification. Nadia feels comfortable at university: her expectations of campus life were influenced by her mother and friends at university. She feels her school experience prepared her for university study, but more importantly her mother being a teacher and having done the same degree is able to give her sound advice and help her with her course work. Nadia and her mother have daily conversations about her activities on campus. Nadia's mother provides emotional and instructional support. She goes through day-to-day university activities with ease. She does not feel stressed or pressured and regards her academic performance as mediocre. Nadia admits that she is lazy and leaves work till the last minute and thus does not get the high marks that she has the ability to obtain. She acknowledges she does not put in the effort needed to produce good results: if she devoted more time to her studies this would be possible.

Nadia has many friends at university. She regards herself as a social person and therefore making friends on campus was quite easy for her. She feels social interaction is an important part of university life. Nadia believes that having friends at university provides a source of information when it comes to academic work. Nadia regards herself as a sociable person, yet in class she regards herself as shy. She does not feel confident enough to participate in or contribute to class discussions, but adds that if she was directly asked a question she would respond. She asserts that she is not afraid to approach her lecturers if she has any academic issues. Nadia is enjoying her first-year university experience and is determined to be successful even though she is just passing her courses. She admits she needs to create a better balance between her social and academic life: she feels challenged when it comes to managing her time with regard to academic activities.

In her personal life, she is trying to balance her home commitments and academic work. Nadia and her mother are constantly quarrelling about house chores. Nadia refuses to do chores around the house because she feels her studies should take priority over house chores, which she regards as her mother's responsibility. This constant bickering has put a strain on their relationship although Nadia does appreciate that it is difficult for her mother, who is a single parent and the breadwinner of the family. Notwithstanding, Nadia feels her mother needs to be more tolerant of her situation as a student. In addition, Nadia's estranged father has made contact with her on Facebook. Nadia refuses to respond to his request: she believes the first year of study is crucial, it requires her full attention and therefore precludes her father's request.

Financially, Nadia seems to have little anxiety. She is grateful that she does not have to worry about money issues. She is well catered for at home and all her university expenses are covered by her bursary, which she acknowledges gives her financial independence. Nadia is aware that without the bursary it would have been difficult to pay for her university fees since her mother is the only person with an income in her family. Nadia feels she needs to succeed in her studies as she is mindful of her bursary and feels an obligation to do well. She feels the sponsors of the bursary have invested in her and she needs to succeed.

6.3.5 Alley

Theme: *Out of habitus experience – Culture shock.*

Alley is a 21-year-old coloured, female student from Cape Town. She is from a middle-class family and she lives at home with her mother, stepfather and two younger brothers. Her brothers are from her mother's marriage to her stepfather whom Alley regards as her 'own father': he is the only father she knows. Her parents divorced when she was three years old and her mother married her stepfather when she was four years old. Alley's biological father died when she was seven. Alley is the first in her family to attend university. Neither of her parents has ever been to university and they do not have any formal tertiary qualifications. Alley describes her upbringing as being well structured: she was taught to be disciplined and to respect people. She was brought up in a religious household: all members of her family are actively involved in the church. Alley herself is a group leader at her church. Her upbringing was guided by the teachings from the Bible and she adds that this has given her focus and a purpose in life.

Alley completed Grade 12 in 2009. She attended a Christian school and had nuns as her teachers. Alley enjoyed her schooling. She believes that having been in a Christian school environment, which had a strict work ethic, has not only prepared her for university studies and the real world, but has given her boundaries in which to live her life. Her teachers at school had constantly told them that university was not like school and that they had to work independently at university: 'nobody is going to baby you like we do at school'. Her school experience had taught her to be disciplined and focused. At the end of Grade 12, Alley decided to take a gap year which turned into two years before going to university. Alley was not sure what career path she would pursue and therefore needed the time off. She did a lot of volunteer work in the first gap year. During the second gap year she volunteered as a teacher assistant at a pre-school that her step-brother attended. It was this experience that made her realise her calling in life: she wanted to be a teacher to make a difference to the lives of the next generation. Alley consulted with her mother, her aunt (who was a teacher), her pastor at the church and friends to ensure that she was on the right career path. Her decision was supported by her family and

friends. Her friends also assisted her in choosing a university that was best suited to her choice of course.

Alley entered the first year of university with mixed feelings. Although she was motivated and goal oriented, she felt nervous, scared and anxious: she had been out of the learning environment for two years. Alley was unsure as to whether she would be able to fit into her new environment. Alley's strict upbringing, strong religious beliefs and rigid school experience influenced the way she perceived university life. She anticipated that the university environment would be similar to the military with strict rules and procedures to be followed with regard to academic work and social behaviour. She was taken aback during orientation when issues with regard to HIV/Aids, pregnancy, and health and personal services offered at the university were discussed. She could not believe that she would be interacting with students who, although the same age as herself, had more life experience than she did. She was surprised to learn that many of the students her age were sexually active, some pregnant and others with children. This was a culture shock to Alley. She began to reflect on her own life and realised that she had lived a very sheltered life; however she was willing to embrace these new experiences of her peers, although she did feel out of place and uncomfortable.

Alley's interactions with her lecturers and peers were limited. She did not make contact with her lecturers in or out of formal class time. She felt there was no need for her to make contact with them. Alley was friendly with students in her class, but she did not have many friends. She felt they were not of the same faith as her and found socialising with them difficult. Alley had no intention of going out to clubs or pubs; she regarded these activities as ethically out of her comfort zone. Her life revolved around university, home and church. Besides being a full-time student at university, Alley was engaged in Bible studies in the evenings. She found it difficult to cope with both studies at the same time. It became demanding and confusing at times. However, Alley is a motivated and goal-oriented person. Although not very confident, she is determined to complete her studies within the required time and cannot wait to make a difference to the lives of the next generation. In addition, earning an income will assist her family financially.

Alley has been faced with many challenges in her first year of study. Besides trying to adjust to the culture shock of student life on campus and the mismatch of her expectations and actual experiences of university, her family received news that her mother has cancer. Alley is trying to be strong about the news and take each day as it comes. But she says her faith in God will help her to cope with whatever happens in the future. Her mother's illness has resulted in her resigning from work. This has created a problem for Alley: her mother was paying her tuition fees and now she has to depend on her stepfather to take over the payments. She intends to either secure a student loan or bursary for the following years of her studies.

6.3.6 Katlyn

Theme: *Challenges – Being a student again!*

Katlyn is a 20-year-old white female student from Table View in Cape Town. She completed high school in 2010 and decided to take a gap year in 2011 before commencing university in 2012. Katlyn acknowledges her upbringing as one from a middle-class family, she acknowledges that they do have financial issues but recognises that they are not poor. Katlyn indicates that her family life is not that of a typical family. She elaborates by stating that she has six members in her unusual family: her mother, step-brother, three 'father figures' and herself. Her biological father divorced her mother when she was two years old. Katlyn remembers being raised by her mother's second husband. She regards him as one of her fathers: he made her feel loved and special. Her mother's relationship with her second father lasted ten years. Katlyn's mother's present husband is warm, loving and protective of Katlyn. She feels fortunate to have all three father figures in her life: all of whom support and care for her in special ways. Katlyn's mother works long hours and only gets home at 7:30pm every day. Although Katlyn knows that her mother cares for her and will support her in any way she can, she acknowledges that her mother did not play a major role in her schooling and university education compared with her fathers.

Katlyn enjoyed her high school experience. She regarded it as fun, but regrets that she was not very 'study orientated'. She claims that many of her peers at school regarded her as very 'talkative, silly and a party person', which she states is not who

she really is. One of her intentions in going to university is to show her school friends that she does have a serious side to her and will be successful. Katlyn had a teacher at school whom she regarded as her mentor; someone that was firm, but honest and approachable. She trusted her mentor teacher and respected her opinions. Although Katlyn knew she wanted to go to university, she was unsure of what course she should study. Her parents were unable to help her make that decision: they had not been to university. It was her mentor teacher who had arranged for Katlyn to meet with a career counsellor to help her make an informed choice. The career counsellor advised her that she would be suited to a career in teaching, social work or psychology. Katlyn decided to take a gap year before enrolling at university the following year. During her gap year she worked as an au pair. Earning her 'own money' empowered Katlyn to be financially independent and self-sufficient. She got her driver's licence, bought herself a car, and was able to buy her own clothes and have money for entertainment and socialising.

When Katlyn entered university for the first time she was excited and motivated; her intention was to 'do really well, get all A symbols, make plenty of friends and have a great student social life'. Her expectations did not match up to her actual university experience. Katlyn describes her university experience as 'driving a car'. she explains: 'Initially you are all excited and very cautious and careful, making sure you follow the rules and then after a while it becomes second nature to you, it is boring and routine and you don't need to really give it much thought!' Katlyn is funding her own university studies. She has opted for a student loan instead of a bursary: she wanted the freedom to decide what she wants to do when she graduates from university and therefore not be obliged to pay back her bursary in service. She feels she needs to be successful in her studies and cannot disappoint her 'real father': he believes in her and has signed surety for her student loan. Katlyn regards him as her 'biggest supporter'.

Returning to studying after taking a gap year resulted in serious challenges in Katlyn's first year at university. Her internal conflict at not being financially independent was a difficult adjustment for her. She has to rely on her family for partial financial support. One of her fathers has opted to assist by providing Katlyn with an allowance towards her petrol bill and stationery for university. Her biological

father purchased her a laptop and cannot provide her with much financial support since he has to support her stepbrother, who is still at school. Katlyn feels her family's contribution is not sufficient: she does not have money to socialise with her friends or buy expensive clothes needed for campus. She has taken on a part-time job as an au pair that keeps her busy from 5pm to 6:30pm three times a week and full days during weekends. She feels this is affecting her academic and social life at university. Katlyn finds it challenging to balance university studies, her part-time job and socialising with her friends. This difficult situation has caused Katlyn to contemplate whether it would be a good idea to go back to her full-time job as an au pair and study part-time through correspondence. Katlyn acknowledges that she is not a person who can motivate herself to work diligently and needs the support of her peers. Katlyn is experiencing external challenges with regard to her home and personal life. She receives no support with regard to her academic work from her parents. She wishes her parents had been to university so that they could understand what it entails to be committed to succeed academically. She complains that they have a beautiful big study at home that is in a mess: her mother uses the computer in the study mainly for social media and this has priority over Katlyn's university work. Katlyn uses the study from 6pm, when she returns from her part-time job, until 7:30pm, the time her mother gets home from work. Katlyn feels her mother supports her going to university but adds that her mother does not understand the dynamics of studying at a university. Katlyn is grateful that her biological father has given her a laptop so that she can sit in her room and do her assignments and projects. Katlyn is appreciative that her father with whom she lives is caring: he will often take the time to enquire about her day and how things are going at university.

Academically, Katlyn is passing all her courses at university although she feels guilty that she is not giving herself 100% to her studies. She is aware of the rules and assessment criteria for each course and ensures that she satisfies the minimum requirements to pass the course. Katlyn claims her main intention in attending university is to earn a good salary and be financially independent. Katlyn does not make contact with her lecturers outside of formal class time, neither does she feel the need to be actively engaged in class discussions. She is mindful that her

lecturers may not be aware of her or know her name, but she is aware that lecturers do seem to have their favourites with whom they regularly converse with in class.

Katlyn is grateful to her new campus friends: she feels they have motivated her to focus on her studies compared with her school friends who were not interested in school work and had a negative influence on her. She feels that her new campus friends have been academically more supportive than her parents or lecturers. Katlyn socialises with her campus friends outside university, which she finds financially challenging. She acknowledges that her friends come from 'well-off homes' and spend money on socialising which is not an issue with them. Katlyn finds it challenging to go out with them: she has to consider her financial circumstances and her commitment to her part-time job. She explains that even going out to dinner with her friends or for a quick bite during campus hours puts a strain on her budget. Her experiences with her new friends have made her reflect on her own life. She wishes that her parents had a university degree that would have allowed them to get good jobs and earn respectable incomes like her friends' parents. This she feels would have made her life much easier on campus. She is having second thoughts about her present boyfriend, which was not an issue before she came to university. Watching her friends with their boyfriends on campus made her envious: her boyfriend is older than she is. He has a fulltime job and cannot afford to study at university. Although her boyfriend treats her well, she feels she needs to have a boyfriend who is more ambitious and at university. Although Katlyn is confident she will be successful in her first year of study, she still feels that her home, personal and financial circumstances prevent her from having the full university experience. Katlyn is determined to complete her degree and earn a decent salary that will give her a good life. She recalls her childhood days of not having a lot of money and vows never to struggle the way her mother did when they were growing up.

6.3.7 Lisa

Theme: *Positioning – Getting ahead at university.*

Lisa is a 19-year-old white student from Cape Town who, immediately after leaving school, enrolled at university. Lisa has five members in her family. She is from a middle-class family and both her parents are professionals. Her twin sister is

studying at another university in Cape Town and her brother is in a private school. Lisa and her sister attended a 'good' school; her parents wanted them to get the best education and moved them to a school in the southern suburbs of Cape Town, a move Lisa does not regret. Lisa believes that attending a school that is regarded as one of the best does make a difference to one's academic ability, especially when preparing for university life. Lisa received all A-symbols in her Grade 12 examinations which qualified her for a bursary to study teacher education. Becoming a teacher is Lisa's passion which she says many of her relatives and school teachers cannot understand since she is so 'smart'. She could get into any other profession and attend any university in the Western Cape, like her twin sister who is studying towards her social science degree at a 'prestigious' university in Cape Town. Lisa is happy with her choice; she acknowledges we need 'smart' people to be teachers since they play an important role in advancing our society and country.

The present tertiary institution that Lisa attends was not her first choice of university. She, like many other members in her family, was concerned about attending a university of technology instead of a traditional university. She completed her research and consulted many teachers, friends and ex-students of the university of technology, all of whom informed her that her present institution was the best in the Western Cape for studying teacher education. Lisa enjoyed her first week of orientation and made a few friends. She admits that she was quite surprised to see so many white students; it was not what she expected. She was surprised by the course content. She expected it to be more challenging and difficult. Lisa found the first-year course easy and says she obtains A symbols without even working hard. She remembers doing an assignment the night before and thinking she would get an average mark, but got an A. This frustrated her since she felt she was not really being challenged sufficiently and could not understand how her peers were struggling with the course. The only stimulation was in practice teaching. She says this activity kept her on her toes and was interesting, inspiring and tiring at the same time. She has a new-found respect for all the teachers in the country, especially those in schools that are under resourced. Lisa is a self-driven, highly motivated and competitive person. She is aware of university life, the social and academic activities, and the requirements needed to be successful. She is focused and would like to gain the full benefit of being a university student. Lisa has thus opted to move out of her

family home to an apartment close to the university. Lisa's mother, however, was not happy about this decision. Lisa says her bursary covers all of her expenses and she does not need to share a flat with anyone or worry about money. Her sister also has an apartment close to her university. She proudly admits that both her parents have given her and her sister their full support with regard to university studies. Lisa acknowledges that having parents who have been to university is an advantage: they know about study commitments and how important a good education is for their future. Her mother calls her in the evenings to find out about her day and query about her academic work but, 'not to tell me to work hard or be focused'.

Lisa says her mother has never had to check up on schoolwork, assignments or projects: it is just something she and her siblings had picked up on their own from watching her mother studying for her part-time postgraduate degree while working and taking care of them as children. Lisa has good relations with her lecturers and students on her course. She has three close friends and their friendship came about because of their similar work ethic and dedication towards their academic studies. She says all of them are from good schools, are hardworking, committed and they all obtain good results at university. Lisa confesses that these are just her friends on campus and she really has no time to socialise with them off campus. Lisa adds that she would not mind working with other students in her class if she was required to. But if she was given a choice, she would chose people like herself since her priority is to excel in her studies.

Lisa is serious about her academic work and gets frustrated when her time on campus is not maximised to its full potential. For example, they have long breaks between classes and sometimes have to wait two hours before the next class. In addition, Lisa complains that the lack of academic resources and space to work hampers her study programme. Most of the time the printing lines are too long; the printers are not working; there is no available computer to work with; and no space in the library. This situation bothers Lisa. She explains if she was at home she could get a lot more work done: there she has her own printer, computer and internet access. Lisa gets frustrated with the lack of preparedness among her peers. She cannot understand why her lecturer has to explain what she believes are basic concepts and terms that her peers should have learned at school.

Lisa has built good relations with all her lecturers and addresses them by their first names. Lisa says she makes sure she talks a lot in class; asks a lot of questions and contributes to class discussions. She feels you have to be noticed by the lecturers and therefore will be taken more seriously when it comes to assignments and projects. She feels it is a good thing when the lecturer knows you personally. Lisa passed all her courses with distinctions; however, she did not feel challenged and dropped out of the course at the end of her first year.

6.3.8 Tasha

Theme: *Challenges – Moving away from home.*

Tasha is a 19-year-old, white female student from Hermanus who, immediately after completing school, enrolled at university. Tasha is in the upper middle-class financial category. Her father is a qualified engineer and her mother worked as a legal secretary. There are four members in Tasha's family: her parents, younger brother and herself. Tasha talks fondly of her home town because that is where her family, friends and memories are. She enjoyed her schooling experience and feels that her high school experience has equipped her to handle university studies. Tasha is not the first in her family to attend university. This helped when she was deciding to further her studies. She acknowledged that her parents sat down with her and had a discussion about her choice of career and supported her decision to enrol at a university to pursue a career in teaching.

The biggest challenge for Tasha was moving away from home. She lives with her grandparents in Constantia. She found the adjustment to her new environment difficult. She explained: 'It is fine ... but we have arguments all the time and it's ... uh it's the generation and ... they didn't grow up with me and ... yeah that's been a big change yeah!' Her second challenge was making new friends in Cape Town; she described this process as difficult because most friendships were formed during high school and none of her friends from high school attends this university. Tasha does not have any close friends at university and goes home to Hermanus every weekend. She socialises with her friends from back home.

Tasha was quite disappointed with her new university environment: it was not what she had expected. She visited other universities and her present one did not match

up to her expectations. She complained about the lack of services offered by the institution. She was disappointed that there were no student activities and no 'social life' of the kind she had seen at other universities. She complained that the campus was small in size and overcrowded. It frustrated her that there was no cafeteria on campus, which meant that she had to get up early to pack her own lunch or snack.

In the first few weeks on campus Tasha was excited with her new experience, but everything quickly diminished and become old and boring. She regards herself as a diligent student who always gives of her best. She expected the same kind of commitment from her peers. She was disappointed with the students in her course: she found them to be academically below average, as she states: 'They're not as ... I won't say as intelligent as eh, that's rude, they are not as intellectual as I thought they'd be.' This was certainly something that she did not expect of university students. Tasha has a few like-minded friends on campus: they support one another and work on group projects and class tasks together. Tasha achieved distinctions in all her courses and felt disappointed that her course was not challenging. She was contemplating changing her course the following year. She hoped to transfer to the intermediate and senior phase programme: she assumes that course will be more challenging for her. Tasha is a confident student and believes there is no need for her to make contact with her lecturers outside of class time.

Tasha's study is financed by her parents and therefore she can focus her full attention on her studies. She has her own car that she drives to campus every day and does not need to depend on friends or public transport. She looks forward to going home to her friends and family every weekend.

6.3.9 Synopsis of participants

Table 6:1 on page 188 provides a synopsis of the key characteristics of the participants. The table highlights the broad themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes and sub-themes are further explored and discussed in detail in Section 6.5 of this chapter.

Table 6:1 Synopsis of participants with emergent themes and sub-themes

Participants' Age & Race	Student Grouping	Socio-economic Status	1 st Generation Yes/No	Broad Themes	Sub-themes
Joyce (22) African	Mature students	Working-class	Yes	Determination: I am here to get a degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broken family • Social ills • Culture and tradition • Racial stereotyping • Family influence • Economic hardships • Connectedness to family • Parents' educational aspirations • Sacrifice • Need to be someone – identity • Religious influence • Social connections • School experience • Coping mechanism • Dialogue with lecturers • Peer support • Job security • Upward mobility • Better life
Thabo (24) African			Yes	Resilience: Need to be financially stable	
Letti (27) African			Yes	Determination: Self-improvement	
Nadia (20) Coloured	Gap students	Middle-class	No	Fitting in: This is where I am supposed to be	
Alley (21) Coloured			Yes	Out-of-habitus experience: Culture shock	
Katlyn (20) White			Yes	Challenges: Being a student again	
Lisa (19) White	School leavers	Middle-class	No	Positioning: Getting ahead at university	
Tasha (19) White			No	Challenges: Moving away from home	

6.4 Sort-card activity: Factors that positively contributed to first-year experience

The sort-card activity took place during the one-on-one interview session. Participants were given ten picture cards and were requested to sort them by

arranging the cards from the factor that made the most significant contribution to the least contribution in influencing their first-year university experience. After ranking the factors, participants discussed the influence or contribution of each factor as related to their first-year experience. The ten picture themes that were outlined in the sort-card activity included:

- family support
- financial support
- lecturer support
- community support
- academic learning support
- new campus friends
- school experience
- need to succeed
- self-confidence
- an open card on which to write any other influence not mentioned

The sort-card activity during the one-on-one interview allowed participants to take the lead in the interview. This activity allowed participants time to reflect on the cards and contemplate on the order before discussing the influence of each factor on their university life. The sort-card activity provided rich data on the students' perceptions and influences on their first-year university experiences.

In the sort-card activity, participants were free to use all or selected cards from the pack. Table 6:2 on page 190 indicates the ranking and the use of the sort cards by the participants.

Table 6:2 Participants ranking of factors influencing first-year experience – Sort-card activity

	Participants' ranking of sort-card activity							
Grouping of participants	Mature students			Gap students			School leavers	
Categories	Joyce (22)	Letti (27)	Thabo (24)	Nadia (20)	Katlyn (20)	Alley (21)	Lisa (19)	Tasha (19)
Academic support	1 st	-	-	8 th	-	8 th	6 th	-
School experience	2 nd	-	8 th	1 st	6 th	4 th	3 rd	2 nd
Lecturer support	3 rd	7 th	6 th	6 th	7 th	6 th	5 th	5 th
Need to succeed	4 th	2 nd	4 th	5 th	1 st	3 rd	1 st	1 st
Self-confidence	5 th	6 th	1 st	3 rd	3 rd	5 th	4 th	6 th
Financial	6 th	4 th	9 th	4 th	5 th	9 th	7 th	7 th
Family support	7 th	1 st	2 nd	2 nd	4 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Community	8 th	5 nd	3 rd	9 th	8 th	2 nd	-	4 th
Making friends	-	3 rd	5 th	7 th	2 nd	7 th	8 th	-

None of the participants chose to use the open card provided in the pack. Therefore this card was not used in the ranking process. Other sort cards that were not identified as factors influencing the first-year experience for some of the participants included: the 'academic support' card which was omitted by 50% of the participants, while the 'making friends' card was omitted by 25% of the participants. A further 12.5% omitted the 'school experience' and 'community' card. The highest percentage of the participants (50%) that omitted the academic support card dismissed it with either no explanation or as having no bearing on their first year of study.

Of the four participants who did give the academic support card a ranking, three participants gave it a low position, placing it in the bottom three positions; two participants ranked it in 8th place; while one put it in 6th place. All the participants that used the card gave the following explanations for their low scoring of the card:

- *it's not for me, I don't need it. (Nadia)*
- *I don't have the time to utilise the service. (Alley)*
- *Nice to know it's there, I used it once only and it helped, but I really don't need it. (Lisa)*

Joyce was the only participant who ranked the academic support card as number one in her sort-card activity. She is a returning student to the institution and therefore is familiar with accessing the service and understands the importance of such a service in enhancing her academic performance.

Joyce provides the following explanation:

- *Assisted me with referencing my work.*
- *The writing centre helped me with my academic essay writing.*
- *To better my marks I ensured that I made full use of the academic services and peer tutors ... they are there to help you.*

The other sort cards omitted were negligible with only two participants not using the making friends card and only one participant discarding the following two cards: school experience and community.

A significant finding from the sort-card activity related to the financial support card. The activity revealed that one of the challenges hindering participants from experiencing a successful first year was primarily due to their financial circumstances. Two of the participants had ranked financial support in 9th position, while four of the participants ranked it in 5th, 6th and 7th place. The remaining two participants ranked it in 4th place.

Six of the eight participants acknowledged that their circumstances were created by economic hardship and resulted in financial support's being a challenge in their first year, which negatively impacted on their studies. Many of the participants were involved in part-time employment to try to fund their tertiary education. Some participants were actively trying to source loans or bursaries either to supplement their first-year tuition fees or secure funding for the following academic year. The following were some of the remarks of the participants with regard to financial support in their first-year experience:

Letti:

- *This bursary thing is hanging over my head, I just wish I could get it as it would really help; at least it could pay part of my res fees.*
- *I need to work weekends to try and pay part of my fees and buy food. It is really difficult to balance work and studies.*

Thabo:

- *I have received no financial support from my family or the university; I have to work night shifts to try and pay my fees and also send some money home to my family.*
- *If I had the financial support from my family I would have done much better in maybe some of the work; it's no excuse, I could do better if I had this support.*

Nadia

- *Financial aid has really helped me; however it has created an added pressure because now I have to make sure I get good results to maintain the bursary.*

Two of the participants that ranked the financial support card in 9th position explained that their parents were funding their studies and therefore regarded the paying of fees as 'taken for granted' and not a factor that was either enabling or hindering their first-year university experience.

Table 6:3 on the following page (page 193) indicates the frequency and the top three ranking positions (1st, 2nd and 3rd) of the sort cards. The table highlights the factors that participants indicated as making the most significant contribution to their first-year experience.

Table 6:3 Identifying the top three factors influencing first-year experience from the sort-card activity

Factors ranked according to the top three positions of the sort card	Frequency of card use (N=8) in the top three positions	Number (N=8) ranked factor in first three positions			Frequency of card use (%) in the sort-card activity
		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	
Family support	6	2	3	1	100
Need to succeed	5	3	1	1	87.5
School experience	4	1	2	1	87.5
Self-confidence	3	1	-	2	100
Community	2	-	1	1	87.5
Making friends	2	-	1	1	75
Lecturer support	1	-	-	1	100
Academic support	1	1	-	-	62.5
*Financial support	-	-	-	-	100

* The financial support card did not feature in the top 3 positions

Eight of the nine sort cards were ranked in the top three positions during the sort-card activity. The financial support card was the only card that was not ranked in the top three positions, as indicated in Table 6:3 above.

All the factors that were ranked in the top three by the majority of participants were factors external to the university: family support, need to succeed, and school experience. The highest ranking was accorded to the family support card with 75% of the participants ranking it in the top three, indicating that their families had positively influenced their first-year experience. The second and third highest rankings were the need to succeed and school experience, with a percentage of 62.5% and 50% respectively. The three factors that ranked the lowest in the top three categories were related to factors within the institution: making friends (25%), lecturer support (12.5%), and academic support (12.5%).

Some of the remarks from the participants which reflected that their family had positively influenced their first-year experience related to the following support: financial, emotional, and academic support received from their parents, siblings or extended families. For example:

Thabo: My extended family is very supportive, my aunt's sisters and my aunt's children play a part in saying that this is good for you, keep doing what you are doing. They ask me about what is happening on campus and stuff like that so I call them my family, they care about me.

Lisa: My twin sister is studying Bachelor of Social Science at the University of Cape Town and my mum just completed her Master's in Psychology – cum laude. So we have academic discussions all the time. We are able to discuss our assignments and help each other if needed.

For the majority of participants, the 'need to succeed' seems to have developed from their economic, social and life circumstances, and a willingness to improve their own circumstances to help their families. For example:

Thabo: For me the need to succeed ... is just the need to take care of my family and putting it onto the map as well, I need to succeed for them.

Letti: I want to make a success of everything, whatever it takes I want to be successful and be able to help my mom, my dad, my family and support myself if I'm done.

Other participants' need to succeed was purely for personal reasons:

Lisa: I need to succeed, my sister and I were very competitive even though it was never mentioned, I have to make sure I succeed.

Katlyn: The degree, the course that I've chosen shouldn't be overlooked and I wanted to succeed for myself and to prove to other people that I'm not stupid and I'm doing well and you know I can do anything.

However, the outcome for all the participants from the sort-card activity was evidently either to obtain a better life; be someone; have a stable job and/or as a stepping stone to further their qualifications.

6.4.1 *Synopsis of sort-card activity*

Table 6:4 below provides a synopsis of the mostly highly ranked sort card selected by the participants. It provides a clear indication of the factors that were most beneficial in supporting a positive first-year experience. The table classifies the factors into two categories: factors external to the institution and factors within the institution. The most beneficial factors that contributed to a positive first-year experience were factors external to the university. The external factors related to the participants' family circumstances and the environment in which they were raised, which had either supported or given the participants the motivation and drive to succeed in their first year of study: need to succeed; family support; school experience; self-confidence. The only sort card that referred to a factor within the institution that was ranked first was the academic support card.

Table 6:4 Factor ranked as the No. 1 sort card by participants

Ranking of No. 1 Factor	% selected card as No. 1	Category	Theme/sub-themes that emerged
Need to succeed	37.5	External institutional factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic circumstances • Emotional & moral family support • Teacher influence • Social connections
Family support	25		
School experience	12.5		
Self-confidence	12.5		
Academic support	12.5	Internal institutional factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to succeed

The sort-card activity contributed in reaffirming and strengthening themes and sub-themes that emerged from the one-on-one interviews and focus-group interview, which is further elaborated on in the next section.

6.5 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews

This section of Chapter 6 focuses mainly on the last two research questions. The aim of this section is to explore, understand and interpret how certain pre-entry academic and non-academic factors identified by the participants have influenced their first-year experience and academic performance. The conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis is used as a lens to focus the gaze on the following constructs: students' prior dispositions and experiences taking into account Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital; and students' integration into the field of higher education, that is, the transfer of their dispositions and experiences in the way they socially and academically integrate into their new higher education environment. These are relational structures which will determine the influence of the participants' circumstances on their first-year experience and academic performance. Owing to the complexity of the factors influencing the participants' first-year experience and the interconnectedness of the influences, this section is presented thematically. Emergent themes and sub-themes were derived from reading and re-reading the transcripts of participants' one-on-one interviews and the focus-group interview. The themes and sub-themes are thus data driven and closely connected to the conceptual framework to provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Table 6:5 on the following page (page 197) highlights the 6 key themes and 15 sub-themes that emerged from the qualitative data.

Table 6:5 Key themes and sub-themes

Six key themes	Sub-themes
Determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family influence • Broken families • Taking charge of one's own destiny
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic hardships • Social ills
Fitting in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School influence • Parents' educational aspirations
Out-of-habitus experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious influence • Racial stereotyping • Culture and tradition
Positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue with lecturers • Choosing peers for group work • Making friends
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing work, study and family commitments • Dealing with diversity

In order to foreground the students' first-year experience and to acknowledge the importance of their voices in this study, direct quotations from the participants were used in presenting the findings. The following sub-sections highlight the key theme and then employ the sub-themes to further explain and give meaning to each of the six key themes.

6.5.1 Main theme 1: Determination

Bourdieu (1993) acknowledges individual histories to be extremely important in understanding the concept of habitus, which he defines as a complex interplay between past and present circumstances and a place where cultural capital is acquired. The data revealed that there were key events in the participants' past circumstances that had created a sense of determination among them. The participants were determined to overcome the challenges of their present circumstances and expressed a desire to attend university and assume responsibility for their own success. All participants spoke of determination as a key factor to their first-year experience and academic success. The driving force that shaped participants' determination varied between working-class and middle-class participants. The following sub-themes appropriately articulate these contexts: family influence, broken families, and taking charge of one's own destiny.

6.5.1.1 Family influence

Participants from middle-class families displayed a positive attitude towards university and were determined to succeed. Two of the participants were from stable homes, where both parents had attended university and were employed in skilled jobs. This environment contributed to the participants' awareness of the value of success and preparedness for hard work. Participants gained first-hand knowledge of such behaviour from their parents.

Tasha: ... because of my upbringing, having hardworking parents, who have been to university and have good jobs, it's forced me to be like that. I am very focused and determined to be just as successful.

Lisa: You know the fact that my mum used to get up at 5 o'clock when she was doing her Master's and then she still got a cum laude, so like now we have that in us ... my sister and I are also very focused. My mum always says, 'Well I managed to get a cum laude with like three kids so you can do better than me!' This makes me want to work harder; I am competitive and determined to get top results.

On the contrary, participants from working-class families did not have first-hand experience or knowledge from their parents with regard to university studies. Their strong determination to succeed at university was based on their family struggles as indicated in the following quotations:

Letti: I knew there was [sic] times that my mom said, 'I don't have money for your fees.' Then I told myself I'm just gonna pass every year to show them I'm not gonna waste their money on me and they feel like yeah they paid for it and I messed up. So I am determined to work hard; I'm not smart, I promise I'm not smart but I must work hard to succeed in my studies.

Katlyn: I have to think of what's going to earn me money because my mom, she really struggled, we never had a lot growing up so I didn't want to struggle like that. I want to be financially independent and being successful in my studies will help me achieve this goal.

6.5.1.2 Broken families

Six of the eight participants had varying degrees of broken family experiences including: single-parent upbringing from a very young age; death of parent/s at a young age; and living with extended families and step-families. The participants' awareness of growing up in a broken family environment and the socio-economic struggles of their parents made them more determined to improve on their own circumstances.

Joyce grew up surrounded by female members only in her family and this influenced her upbringing. Her mother was a single parent who struggled financially to support her and her siblings. The loss of Joyce's mother at a young age and her extended family circumstances made her determined to be independent and self-reliant:

I have never met my father, he lives somewhere. I grew up living with my grandmother while my mom worked in the city. My grandmother died and I moved to live with my mom, who died a year later ... so my aunt took us in as she didn't want us living with my mom's boyfriend. She wanted us with family ... we moved to Cape Town to live with her. It was tough, my aunt and I, we didn't get along! I needed to take care of me! I needed to be independent!

Thabo's determination to succeed was different when compared with Joyce's experience. Thabo's determination to succeed was primarily to improve his economic status so that he could take care of his extended family. He grew up in an all-female environment and felt the need to provide for them:

Thabo: I lost my mother when I was little. I never knew my father, so my mother ... I think she died of HIV and uhm we are only two, there's only two of us. Our aunts took over and took care of us. We had three aunts, my sister was with a much older one, and me, I was with the little one; it was difficult, we moved around a lot ... I need to do this for them and my little daughter, they are depending on me.

Nadia's determination was driven by her mother's circumstances. Nadia grew up in a single-parent environment. Her mother was a central figure in her life who kept her focused and motivated her to be someone and change her life circumstances:

Nadia: *My mother, brother, sister and I live together now. So I think my mum ... because of all the years of struggling and all of that drama she had in her life, like she also kind of played a big role in like me being at university studying and wanting me to study. She would always like say, 'If you don't study and succeed you are going to end up like where we were,' and like that, so I'm like no! I'm not going to, so I'm like I'm going to do this, study hard and be a success! Be someone.*

Katlyn's determination to succeed in her studies was not self-motivated. Her 'unusual' family situation, with three male figures in her life, was her main motivation. They had all supported her financially and emotionally and she wanted to make them proud of her and not let them down:

Katlyn: *I kind of have three father figures, it's my biological dad and then it's my stepdad who has shown what a man should treat a woman like, which is amazing and there is my present dad, I just call him my uncle. So it's three totally different people but it's kind of awkward for me but they all contribute to my studies and want me to be successful and I don't want to let them down, especially my biological dad.*

6.5.1.3 Taking charge of one's own destiny

The majority of participants interviewed articulated that their determination to succeed at university was primarily driven by the need for them to change their life circumstances; this was motivated by their family struggles and socio-economic circumstances. Many of the participants regarded university as a way of improving their lives and taking charge of their destinies.

Thabo: *I wouldn't say like completely I'm enjoying myself at university; we came here to work, we want this degree, that's what we want, that is what I want. I want it so bad so I will do whatever it takes to make sure that I get the work done. I want to prove to myself that I can do this, even with all of the challenges that I have, but it's just that the need to succeed goes into supporting my family and putting them onto the map as well.*

Joyce wanted to change her circumstances, especially for her son. She didn't want her son to experience the upbringing that she had:

Joyce: *I don't have a family, let me just put it like that. I decided I want to study, I'm gonna quit work because it's not the life I want for me and I just said to myself 'No! You need to change your life, you need to go back to study.' I wanted to do something better for me and my son to have a better life.*

Letti felt the same way as Joyce; however she wanted to further her qualification to improve her socio-economic status and take care of her parents:

Letti: *So um, yeah then last year I quit, I like just didn't quit, I resigned from my job as a Grade R teacher and decided I want to come study fulltime to get my teaching degree. I wanted to improve on my qualifications and I want to make a success of everything, whatever it is I want to be successful and be able to help my mom, my dad, my family and support myself.*

The next two participants were determined to change their destiny for themselves:

Katlyn: *The degree, the course that I've chosen shouldn't be overlooked and I want to succeed for myself and to prove to other people that I'm not stupid and I am doing well and you know I can do anything.*

Alley: *Uhm ... I feel that I need to become someone who is something and I need to make a difference in someone else's life and not only mine.*

6.5.1.4 Summary: determination

The three sub-themes: family influence, broken families and taking charge of one's destiny helped to articulate and deepen the understanding of the participants' experiences that had led to their determination to succeed in their studies. The majority of the experiences conveyed by the participants' involved family struggles that were either explicitly or implicitly expressed in the interviews.

6.5.2 Main theme 2: Resilience

From the qualitative data analysed, there was strong evidence of resilience and the ability to cope with adversity by the participants. According to Kobasa (1979), there are three elements essential to resilience: challenge, commitment, and personal control. She explains that resilient people view difficult circumstances as a challenge

and not a stumbling block; they are committed to their goals and work towards them; and finally resilient people take control of their personal lives, they feel confident and empowered and spend their energy on situations they can control. Such qualities of resilience and coping with adversity were evident among the participants and are further described in the following two sub-themes: economic hardships and social ills.

6.5.2.1 Economic hardships

Evidence of economic hardships was a strong factor identified mainly among the working-class participants, having faced disadvantaged and difficult challenges in their upbringing, was influential in their decision to succeed at university. These participants viewed these challenges as 'making the best of a bad situation'. Evidence of commitment and taking control of their personal circumstances and challenges is revealed in the following quotations:

Thabo reflects on his economic hardships while growing up and his ability to thrive in such challenging circumstances:

Thabo: I grew up very poor: at school, I would run out of shoes. I made a choice to sell cigarettes so that I could buy myself a uniform: like shirts, pants, tie and everything. At school, sitting in a crowd, they couldn't tell this boy comes from this kind of family because my own business was yah good, it gave me money to look like I wasn't poor and also my stepfather helped me a lot, he would come from PE and maybe buy me 20 packs of Stuyvesant cigarettes and then say, 'You can sell this to keep pocket money,' and stuff like that. They were very helpful in terms of that.

Joyce's experience provides an example of her commitment to her family and ability to take control of her challenging circumstances:

Joyce: My mom moved to the city with her boyfriend to find a good job. My grandmother took care of us and the other grandchildren; you know being without a parent at a young age you have to grow up so quickly so it's like you know ... I ... I had to grow up, sometimes I felt like I wanted to be a child, but I couldn't ... I had to be there for my sister and brother; I had to take responsibility for their safety.

Letti's economic hardships forced her to take control of her personal circumstances and get a part-time job to pay for her studies:

Letti: I'm working every weekend now to pay like for my food. So every weekend I work on a wine farm in Stellenbosch. So every Friday I take the taxi home and I work the weekend and then my dad brings me back Sunday night because the hours are long and there is no taxi so late into the city. I take my university work with me and then when it's quiet and when there is [sic] no customers I would take my bag and quickly do something and then when a customer comes I will leave it aside; however now with the new manager... she is not very nice. I won't be able to do that. So I must make another plan.

6.5.2.2 Social ills

Participants from both middle-class and working-class families were faced with social issues that were beyond their control. Participants were exposed to social issues within their immediate and extended families from a very young age, such as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and the tragic death of family members. Participants expressed that these incidents had made them more determined and gave them the courage to take control and deal with tough situations in their own lives. Some of the social ills experienced by the participants are noted below:

Joyce:

I started high school and then I got pregnant and my aunty wasn't happy so I had to move out of the house.

My parents separated because my father was an alcoholic and he was very abusive to my mother so my mother said: 'No this is enough'.

Lisa:

We adopted this baby, he was abandoned. He was found in a toilet in Delft and our family felt we needed to adopt him ... so that is the other addition to our family.

My dad got retrenched like and we almost lost our house. Uhm ... yes, we've been through a lot!

Thabo:

I grew up with uncles who were ... they smoked weed/dagga and stuff like that. We hated Fridays after work ... they would make the house so corrupt and chasing people, every member of the family would run at night looking for places to crash and sleep and it was very very hectic.

I felt like an outsider in my house because I was a child whose biological father I didn't know and then sometimes my aunts would sit and talk and it felt as if I didn't belong there.

I lost my mother when I was little. I never knew my father, so my mother I think died of HIV and uhm we are only two, there's only two of us.

Letti:

So I attended a coloured school, a typical farm primary school and I must say the children that were there were very racial [racist] so it was the 'k' word but I went through it and so yeah.

When I started high school in 1999, yeah that's when she [sister] died. She was shot and we never found the people who did it. That was a bad year for me but I managed.

Katlyn:

Yeah, my dad's dad like hits my granny so, and my dad use to hit my mom. So that's why my mom divorced him when I was two. So my mom didn't want me growing up thinking that's the way a man treats a woman because I think that's a pathetic excuse from a man.

Some of the participants were able to use their experience with social ills to better their own circumstances. Dealing with these adversities had made them stronger and more resilient:

Thabo: *Luckily for me, I'm coming from a family I was not so like uhm how would I put this eh not so good upbringing uhm suffering economically and ja financial stuff that's why these challenges I'm facing at the campus here I feel that I am overcoming them bit by bit; because of my difficult life, it helps.*

Joyce: *I know why I'm here, ... so I have come here to study because I want to be that, I want to do something with my life, something better for me and my son so basically I just said to myself ...*

Alley: *My religious uhm background has given me the discipline to cope with any challenging situation.*

Lisa: *Uh ... I just said to myself; oh well this is what you've gotten yourself into so deal with it.*

Letti: *Then I told myself I'm just gonna pass every year to show them I'm not gonna waste their money on me ...*

6.5.2.3 Summary: resilience

The main theme of resilience revealed that participants, in spite of their difficult upbringing, were positive and determined to change their circumstances. Their challenging experiences, due to economic hardships, and their first-hand experience with social problems motivated participants to take control of their personal circumstances. They were committed to make a positive change and to use their challenging socio-economic circumstances as a catalyst.

6.5.3 Main theme 3: Fitting in

For some of the participants, the transition into university was an easy progression. They felt comfortable and fitted in effortlessly into academic work with peers and the university environment. From the data analysed, it was evident that participants' prior school experience and parents' educational aspirations had influenced their expectation of university, thus creating a match between their expectations and the actual university experience. Participants felt familiar with their new university environment. The responses of participants are explored further under the following two sub-themes: school experience and parents' educational aspirations.

6.5.3.1 *School experience*

Of the eight participants, Thabo was the only participant who had attended a rural school with exclusively African students at his school. Two participants had attended private schools: Joyce attended a special school for mathematics and science achievers while Alley attended a Christian-based school run by nuns. The five remaining participants attended ex-Model C schools: these are schools that were classified as 'whites only' schools during the apartheid era in South Africa and at present are still regarded as privileged schools, that are well resourced and have mostly qualified teachers. Learners in ex-Model C schools pay high school fees, thus making entrance into such schools restricted and selective. Participants from both working-class and middle-class families who attended this type of school felt grateful to their parents for sending them to such schools, as expressed by the following participants:

Letti is from a working-class family, her parents are farm workers: she felt privileged to be in an ex-Model C school. She understands and fully appreciates the sacrifice her parents made to send her to such a well-resourced school:

Letti: I feel my family tries really had to support me but financially they are not able to really support me but I can see they want me to succeed because they made sacrifices and yeah they put me in a school which was very good; it was a Model C school and it was expensive and yeah they wanted me to get the best education even before I came here.

Lisa, however, is from a middle-class family, her family understands the importance of a good education and in this regard they had done their homework and selected the best school for their children:

Lisa: Eh, without my family support I would not have had the great school experience because I would have been sent to a bad school. My mom said, 'There is no way, you're going to a bad school', so we moved to the southern suburbs so my sister and I could attend the best school and get the best education.

Other participants described positive school experiences, supportive of an easy transition into university. They spoke about being exposed to diversity, the discipline

at school, awareness of university expectations, and exposure to English as the medium of instruction. Experiences of these participants explained their easy adjustment to a new university environment.

Joyce: I went to a very good school and I was exposed to white teachers, I even had a white lady teaching me isiXhosa. I was mainly with other races and this helped me as I don't have a problem with mixing at university ... Even with English I don't have a problem; everything that we did at school was English first language so yeah that gave me an advantage because we did all sorts of things in that school ... I am very confident and they groomed me very well to be the person I am today in terms of academic and socially.

Letti expressed a similar experience:

Letti: I must say I've been to the best high school ever. It was an all-girls high school and it was white. We were like five blacks in the whole school which made it easy for me at university. They prepared us well for university even not just the education or the quality of the education, but the teachers and like the vice-principal, they inspired me to be who I am today. And yeah I must say my mom and dad worked really hard to put me in that school.

Katlyn spoke about teacher support:

Katlyn: In my high school the teachers cared about you. I think I was very grateful to be in a good school. I had my favourite teacher. She was very supportive but she was like supportive in a gentle and firm way so she motivated me to go to university, I kind of grew to respect her more, and didn't want to let her down.

Alley articulated how her school environment had influenced her behaviour:

Alley: I think my high school actually did a very good job preparing us for university, because we were a very disciplined school, because it was a Christian school so it was like the nuns were like really strict and set in their ways and because of that discipline and what they taught us it helped at university. So at university it's easy for me to have that discipline and actually do the work and not be distracted by the normal things.

The following two participants voiced their opinion on the school influence on preparing them for university:

Tasha: I think my school did a very good job at sending us out there equipped for whatever lay ahead.

Nadia: My school was really focused on good results and university; I remember in my matric year the teachers would always like tell us like work at university is worse than school. They would say it is hard work and we needed to brush up and whatever ... and now I really understand what they meant. Like it's like so much work, it's double the amount of work than matric and I think our teachers prepared us well for this expectation.

The participants' 'good' school experience had a positive influence on their finding their feet and fitting in academically and socially. The following descriptions explain the participants' experience of fitting-in:

Joyce: In my class I talk to everyone, I love to talk and I can mix easily, so I can fit into any group or conversation.

Nadia: The work is not difficult for me, it is easy and I am passing, not with good results but that is just me ... I know I can do better but I am just lazy to put in that effort so I really have no excuse. I think I need to manage my time better, maybe cut down on socialising a bit.

6.5.3.2 Parents' educational aspirations

Three of the eight participants were non-first-generation students which meant that they either had one or both parents who had obtained a university qualification. From the data it was apparent that parents of the non-first-generation participants valued education. Many of the participants had intense conversations with their parents about their academic work and progress. Their parents were involved in the decision-making process about choice of course and university.

Nadia's mother, who is a teacher, was able to provide her with professional, academic and emotional support:

Nadia: *My mom is a teacher; she studied the same course as me, even at the same campus, but it had a different name. She is always there to support me at all times; she is there to motivate and inspire me and yeah, like I can discuss my academic work with her; she even helps with my assignments.*

Tasha was able to gain advice from her parents with regard to course selection and choice of university:

Tasha: *My parents went to university, my dad's an engineer and my mom a legal secretary and they wanted me to do something at university. And uhm, well I've always loved teaching so my parents and I, we sat down and spoke about it and they thought this would be a good direction for me.*

Lisa's dedication and commitment to her studies was influenced by her parents' educational aspirations:

Lisa: *My parents have been to university; you know, even my granny wanted to do teaching but her mom forced her to be a secretary! My mom is a psychologist. Our whole family is like very focused and academic driven. My sister also got all distinctions in matric so that also helps me because it's like ... you feel like maybe I should be doing this. But definitely the hardworking side is from like what my mom, she achieved ... then you kind of like, maybe I should also do that I also need to achieve you know.*

6.5.3.3 Summary: fitting in

The two sub-themes of school experience and parents' educational aspirations illustrated the participants' level of preparedness for university. These aspects reflected their realistic expectations of university life. The value placed upon education by their parents and the participants' privileged school experience helped to ensure an easy transition to university. The participants fitted into their new environment with confidence.

6.5.4 Main theme 4: out-of-habitus experience

When habitus enters a new unfamiliar field, it can create a level of discomfort. From the qualitative data it was evident that some of the participants, in their new higher

education field, encountered an out-of-habitus experience. Their expectations of university life, shaped by their past experiences, were different from the reality. This was noticeable in the following sub-themes: religious influence, racial stereotyping, and culture and tradition.

6.5.4.1 Religious influence

Three of the participants spoke about the influence of religion in their lives. Their religious influence has shaped whom they are; how they behave and how they perceive others.

One of the participants' serious commitment to her faith resulted in her experiencing a culture shock. She immediately felt a sense of not belonging:

Alley: My religion has sheltered me; when I came here, and during orientation, they were talking about like the whole clinic and going for HIV testing and that they fall pregnant and stuff. I was a bit shocked. I was, like, do people do that? Because I think I'm just like still very young, I act younger than my age or I still have that mindset that I'm still a child and that I'm growing up a certain way and there is a certain standard and a way that you live your life ... a certain order ... so it was a bit like, oh gosh, people do that! Like people in your first year fall pregnant, oh pregnant, oh okay.

Although Alley's initial reaction was one of shock, she immediately began to reflect on these issues and on herself as an individual. She seemed to be positive and open about these new experiences with regard to other students:

I think I didn't expect the big age groups but I thought oh okay, you've got a child, okay. Oh you're just out of school so I didn't expect that. I thought they would be around my age or younger but you're all this age and this age ... and then some of them were like mummies already. I'm like oh okay, okay. I didn't know you were in the first-year group but cool. So that was a bit interesting for me that I wasn't really like a normal 20-year-old or 25-year-old. So I'm like okay. I still act like I'm 15, but it's okay.

The other two participants spoke about the positive effect that religion has on their person lives:

Thabo: I am a church goer; I go to church every Sunday. Although some of my peers may look at me strangely when I say that I am not afraid to say I go to church, even though I am a man. It has made me who I am ... respectful of others and honest.

Lisa: I am the only one in my family that goes to church and who believes in a higher power. My family ... not so much, although my mom follows the Buddhist teachings. So this is good; each one can believe in what they want, this has made me open to other people's religions but my behaviour is guided by my Christian faith.

6.5.4.2 Culture and traditions

Having participants from different cultures, traditions and backgrounds highlighted how participants engaged with these new experiences. It was apparent that some of the participants struggled with their out-of-habitus experience and were constantly assessing and re-assessing their behaviour.

As evident in Thabo's remarks:

My culture has influenced me a lot, especially in my academic stuff because in our culture it is mostly based on respect and how you should respect the elders and stuff like that so ... it's difficult because I am put in this position whereby I can respect the lecturer who says something even though it doesn't mean the lecturer is right but I need to respect that person as an elder ... so what can I do? I can't just talk back like I see other students do. It's tough!

However Joyce takes a different attitude towards her culture:

I think culture is a personal thing for me. I mean yeah, our grandparents and our parents groomed us to be the people to be able to respect other people and how we relate to other people. I think it becomes a personal thing as we grow up because we tend to see people in a different way, we are exposed to different races, different cultures, how people see themselves; you know for me personally because as I grew up as a teenager I had to learn things on my own.

Tasha doubts the culture that she was brought up with:

I was brought up with a culture that taught me to be kind to people and to keep ... you know, negative things to myself and just deal with them myself ... which I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing but yeah.

Nadia was able to use her cultural experience to her advantage:

My culture has taught me to be um, loyal to others, always be truthful and honest to people. Um, it actually also helps me like here at campus in the university life because it's how you make friends also, you get friends and you earn their trust and you will always have people around you that will be there to help you if you are struggling with your work.

6.5.4.3 Racial stereotyping

Some of the participants' stereotypical expectations of their peers were influenced by their past experiences and perceptions which influenced the way they interacted with students from different cultures and racial groups. This was highlighted by the following comments from some of the participants:

Joyce's perceptions of African students' attitude towards academic work:

When I do an assignment, I don't mix with my own people [African], ... because there is always an excuse when you have to do work, so I say no, let me move to people I know ... if you have my people doing the assignment it will be a problem because there is always a problem at home, there is this, there is that.

But Joyce also adds:

You know, for me it makes me feel sad ... I look at the education that the other students get from the township schools, it's like the standard is just not right, I know they're going to struggle at university.

Joyce's advice to African students:

I told them [African peers] when you come to university, you come for a reason. I am here to study, not worry about other people's marks, you need to put yourself with

people who know they are doing something positive; people that can help you achieve your goal. You are not here to make friends, friends are a bonus; focus on your marks, you are here for something, focus on that.

Joyce's views on white students:

I was surprised mostly to see white people because I ... I always thought that like white people would go for UCT, UWC, those type of campuses, you know what I mean, because I didn't think most of them would do education because most of them get good marks because they come from good schools, like I know someone who passed with 5 distinctions and 2 Bs. I mean she could have done anything but she chose education not because her marks are not good but because she wanted to do education. You know what I mean.

Thabo also had a similar perception of white students:

I see white students getting Funza bursary and it's like what! I always thought that white people are ... they have money. They are not like us [black people]. Seriously I always thought white children ... from the day that they are born money is there for them you know, to go to university. That's the thing because you know you always say why am I always working, whereas the white children just get all the money and everything they want. But they are different from us, they don't have to struggle with academic life.

Lisa's perceptions of working with students from other race groups:

I know and I get along with them [black students]. It doesn't bug me at all. It's not like I'm not gonna ... you know if I have to work with them then fine, like I'm not gonna say no ways. But when we get to choose our groups I choose the girls that are from the same background as me, we always work well together. I would never be able to work with someone who is lazy or never hands in work on time, like I'm always punctual. So ... otherwise, no I'm not like that at all. It's not an issue. Not at all. I love being able to talk to everyone and all the younger ... because you learn from them you know. Like sometimes the experience that you get from them is so nice, yeah.

Tasha's perceptions of students in her class:

The students in my class, for me, they're not as, I won't say as intelligent as ... maybe, that's rude. Maybe I should say, they are not as intellectual as I thought they'd be.

6.5.4.4 Summary: out-of-habitus experience

This main theme emerged from the participants' expressing their emotions and experiences because of their struggles with trying to fit in with their new university environment. The majority of their out-of-habitus experiences related to three sub-themes: religious influence, culture and tradition, and racial stereotypes. All of the sub-themes dealt with issues of diversity. Although it did create a bit of discomfort to the participants, it led to an awareness of diversity among the student population and their new environment.

6.5.5 Main theme 5: Positioning oneself to succeed

This main theme emerged from the participants' reflecting on their social and academic integration at university. It was evident from the data that some participants made a conscious effort to position themselves in situations that contributed positively towards their academic success. The following sub-themes were identified: dialogue with lecturers; choosing peers for group work; and making friends.

6.5.5.1 Dialogue with lecturers

Three of the eight participants felt comfortable with having dialogues with their lecturers in and out of class time:

Joyce: I am very comfortable because I know why I am here ... I don't have problems with speaking to the lecturers ... if I don't know something I'll ask them and if I don't understand I am not afraid to ask the lecturers to explain, they are here to help.

Lisa: If I have a problem or don't understand anything, I go straight to my lecturers. I am not afraid to approach them, definitely not because I feel they are the easiest people to go to, to ask for help and guidance.

Nadia was not as comfortable as Joyce and Lisa with interacting with her lecturers, but did engage with them when it was necessary:

Like if I have a query or whatever, like if I have a problem I would go and ask the lecturer or I wouldn't just like sit or wait for ... I would go and ... But if they would ask me a question I would give an answer but I will only speak when I'm spoken to, like that.

The importance of being noticed by the lecturers was acknowledged by Joyce and Lisa:

Joyce: All my lecturers know me, I am very talkative and that's a good thing – then they can see I am serious about my work. I am not here to fool around. I know why I am here and they can see it, especially when they mark my work.

Lisa: I know all my lecturers, yeah. I think when you talk a lot in class and when you contribute to a discussion then I think you can get to know them well and they get to know you well. They know your standard of work and they know what to expect from you. Because I think if you're very quiet and don't attend lectures a lot then I don't think it's any good for you but being noticed, it is important.

The other five participants did acknowledge the importance of engaging with the lecturers, but were also cautious of being considered as 'being stupid' or 'disturbing the class'. Some second-language students didn't feel comfortable with speaking in English, phrasing their questions or engaging in class discussions. They were concerned that their lecturers might perceive them as not understanding their work, or alternatively, they would just not be noticed by their lecturers.

Letti explains her concerns:

You don't want to bother your lecturers with asking too many questions and looking stupid. And like yeah I try to ask my peers now to help me. I don't want to raise my hand the whole time in class. Yeah, so I just keep quiet and when I really don't understand and then afterwards I would go to my friend or whoever, just explain this, help me.

Thabo voices his concern with class interactions:

I would love to be more involved with my lecturers but I am not comfortable asking the questions in class so I would just ask my friends.

Tasha expressed her feelings with regard to not being engaged in class discussions or with her lecturers:

I don't need to engage with them, there is no need to disturb the class but if I have a problem I will approach them out of class. They are all great you know. They are all very open and if I have any problems they are more than happy to assist which is nice.

Katlyn doesn't see the need to be engaged with her lecturers although she is aware of their actions and engagement with certain students in the class:

I don't like asking questions ... and I don't think that my lecturers really know me. I think they've kind of picked their pets and the top achievers and that's it. So you can go through the lesson being unnoticed... like there is a group that do like super well and I like them, they are really nice people, honestly they are but I sat at their table that one time in maths and I got 69 and they all got in the 90s and they like joked with the lecturer asking for a re-write! Like really!

Alley remarked on her interaction with her lecturers and her perception of their engagement with students:

I don't talk in class or engage with my lecturers ... Uhm ... not really but if I need my notes and stuff, if I'm not there then I will go to the lecturer to get it. Uh ... I know some of them know us. It depends on how we interact in class but I think most of them would know the students that talk a lot. I think they know more of the problematic girls than the ones that are actually quiet or the ones they feel have an attitude.

6.5.5.2 Choosing peers for group work

Participants were strategic when choosing peers for group activities. It was evident that they preferred peers who were similar to them with regard to work ethics, attitude towards academic work and similar prior schooling experience.

This behaviour was apparent in the following participants' voices:

Katlyn: I am very careful when I choose peers to work with and therefore the friends that I have made have really contributed a lot to my academic work, because in high school my friends weren't very um, ambitious, they just wanted 40% or 45% and now all the people I have surrounded myself with are very ambitious ... they aim high and I mean I didn't get anything below 65%.

Lisa: Yeah. We [peers for group work] just kind of ... like similar; I knew some of these students and then I asked them if we could stay together because we all work hard, all four of us, we all have the same standard. We're like, this is what we want, so when it comes to group projects, we always work together and then we know we are fine.

Thabo: I would like to be in my comfort zone as I've said before. So they [black peers] want to be with people who understand them, who understand them better and not only about school work and all of that, that's what I noticed, so usually I get pulled into this group although I would also like to experience being in other groups with different races, but also working with my race group is comfortable.

Alley: I used to have a group of friends but then I just felt like they weren't very good for me. I like being with people that can make a difference to my life, I can learn from them and be friends with them as well because that's just how I can get better and improve.

Joyce: When I do an assignment, I don't mix with my own people [African], ... because there is always an excuse when you have to do work, ... so I say no, let me move to people I know that are like me and we have the same attitude towards our work.

6.5.5.3 Making friends

It was evident that participants' choice of friends at university was based on the same premise of choosing peers for group work. Most of the participants' intentions for building friendships were based on achieving their academic goals.

Participants wanted to be around friends who could motivate and support them at university as indicated in the following remarks:

Katlyn: I was bullied when I was younger and it's horrible not to have any friends. It's the most humiliating feeling in the world. But now at university I have amazing friends. I think these are friends to keep for life. Because we have so much in common. They helped me a lot and are very ambitious with their marks and that's helped me a lot because I spent a lot of my time with them.

Letti: I love my friends. They're always there when I need them. They are 'like don't worry you are going to be fine'. I'm a stress ball, I stress a lot. So it's like 'no you stress for nothing'. I'm like 'yeah I know'. They're know you're gonna be fine so they're very helpful, very motivating you know. They're there for you when you need them.

6.5.5.4 Summary: positioning oneself to succeed

It was apparent from the evidence that all participants were motivated to succeed in their studies. They had positioned themselves differently according to their prior school experience or background circumstances, to take full advantage of their own potential and the potential of others who could assist them to reach their academic goals. The three related sub-themes, dialogue with lecturers, choosing peers for group work, and making friends, describe how participants were able to position themselves to advance their own academic interests.

6.5.6 Main theme 6: Challenges

The findings under this section illuminate the many challenges that participants encountered on a daily basis in their first year at university. The data revealed how participants reflected and reacted to challenges internal and external to the university which had an influence on their academic studies. The sub-themes that informed the main theme were: balancing work, study, and family commitments; and dealing with diversity.

6.5.6.1 Balancing work, study and family commitments

All participants interviewed had highlighted challenges with regard to either balancing work and study or study and family commitments, or all three aspects: work, study and family commitments.

Joyce regards herself as lucky: she received a bursary and did not have to worry about work. Her only focus was her studies and her son. She seems to have worked out a convenient way to balance all her commitments:

Most weekends I work at home, during the week after campus; my focus is on my son. I have to make sure he does his homework. I have to do his laundry in-between and also cook in-between. I know if I cook in the week then weekends I can focus on my studies.

However, she still considers her situation a challenge and is constantly aware of the difficulties:

I mean I also have things that I have to do at home. I have a son and he keeps me busy all the time but I have to make time for my studies as well because that is just as important – you know what I mean.

Thabo is not as fortunate as Joyce when it comes to financial issues. He has to balance work, study and family commitments. He has a young daughter, a sister and an extended family to take care of. He finds balancing all three activities a challenge, but acknowledges that balancing all these obligations is important to achieve his goal of being financially stable and thereby obtaining a good life for himself and his family:

So ja I'm working, studying and supporting my family again, it's been quite a ride, not an easy one, it's quite daunting at times when you sleep on the weekends, you pass out. Ja because it's been like yoh! the week, is nearly to the end.

Thabo's part-time job is demanding:

Yes I'm still working, I'm working night shift. Joh its quite difficult, it's not easy, because this workload at university it's quite tough, eh sometimes you lack that [sic] levels of concentration, you didn't sleep, you were working nights and at times, not

most of the times, there's this thing where the lesson is boring and you begin to doze off.

It is affecting his academic work:

This week we were submitting a handwriting file on the day when I don't sleep, so it was rush rush to meet the due date and then I got a low mark for that. Had I done it a week before and had time to type it and do well with it and check spellings and everything, I would have done better, much better. Ja so this working is also playing a part. I wouldn't say, I don't want to call it an excuse, because I came in here knowing that it's gonna be like that.

Thabo had to live up to his family's expectations of sending money back home:

Uhm because I grew up there, I think there is that expectation, even though they are not saying that to me, I think there are those expectations of getting money from me. And I try my best to move away from those thoughts, because they're gonna disturb me, in terms of my studies, but I need to send money home.

Katlyn is experiencing problems trying to balance her part-time work and study commitments:

One day I literally got home, I went straight from university, I went ... it was a Friday so I came home, we had a test. I worked from 5:00 till 6:15 and from 6:30 till 12:00 and then the next day from about 9:00 till the whole day and I was exhausted. I was like I can't breathe, but I still need to complete my university work.

Katlyn finds it challenging to share the study at home with the family:

Yeah because I will get home on weekday nights about 6:30 and then I will like have about half an hour to use the study and I try and cram everything into that study session and then as soon as she [mom] gets home I'm like okay, I already know she's gonna come in and say I need to go like on the computer now.

Letti's financial circumstances resulted in her experiencing a challenge in balancing work and study:

.....I just have to... I just have to do my work during the week because on weekends I work on a wine farm.

6.5.6.2 Dealing with diversity

The sub-theme, dealing with diversity, articulates the participants' feelings, beliefs and perceptions that were informed by their background environment and prior schooling experiences. From the data it was apparent that the participants felt challenged when dealing with diversity with regard to race, culture, religion, age, educational background, and socio-economic status. An awareness of such diversity posed some serious challenges for the participants in understanding and responding to their peers, lecturers and new university environment.

Thabo talked about his dilemma about interacting with his lecturers; although he is mindful of his culture and the respect due to elders, he understands the importance of having a dialogue with his lecturers:

I'm younger than them [lecturers] so I give them that respect, because our culture is more about respect. Eh I wouldn't say it's the best one, I don't know about that one, but I know when it comes to comparing it and putting culture into it and where it comes from ... eh a lecturer is a lecturer who is older than you; if you don't get a chance to ask this in a class and stuff like that, you'll get the chance maybe next time but for now I don't know if I am comfortable with it.

Thabo adds how this has an influence on his academic work:

My culture is influencing me a lot according to my academic stuff also that has put me in a position whereby I can respect the lecturer who says something even though it doesn't mean the lecturer is right, but I need to respect that person as an elder.

Participants' awareness of diversity was evident in the way they interacted with and perceived their peers.

Joyce's perceptions of diversity and interacting with students from other race groups were more positive and embracing due to her prior school experience:

I just mix with everyone, I talk to everyone. I don't have a problem with that ...

Thabo's attempt at interacting with students from other race groups can be regarded as challenging:

Sometimes you try to fit in, we try to fit in with white people or maybe coloured people 'cause we are African; we try to do that and sometimes it's hard, because eh you get to be in a conversation. Then they [white students] chat and then the chat is about their stuff, while we were chatting on something maybe serious and then they change it and turn to each other and chat and then you feel like an outsider, honestly we feel like an outsider, that's my honest opinion.

This was a challenge for Lisa. She was willing to work with diverse students with regard to academic work; yet she was aware of their diverse educational backgrounds and was sympathetic to their circumstances:

If I have to work with them [African students] it doesn't bug me at all. It's not like I'm not gonna ... you know if I have to work with them then fine, like I'm not gonna say, no ways.

Lisa adds:

I think some of them [African students] struggle. I really do think so ... Shame I feel sorry for them.

Katlyn feels sympathetic to students who are not English first-language speakers and is concerned about how they are able to cope with the situation:

I sometimes feel sorry for some of the Xhosa students because, in say, Professional Studies, we get a thick pile of notes with heavy in-depth English and I don't know how they cope ... I sometimes don't even know what it is and I've been speaking English my whole life so I feel very sorry for them.

Letti's prior experience with diverse populations makes her feel comfortable with the diverse student population as she explains she has been exposed to a diverse population during her upbringing:

I'm Sotho but I grew up in Stellenbosch which exposed me to a lot of people from different races. So I'm even comfortable speaking Afrikaans and isiXhosa. I wasn't raised like in rural areas so ... I was surrounded by all kinds of people, yeah so I don't know where I belong because I'm happy with everybody.

Thabo's lack of interaction with other race groups prior to entering university created a different experience:

Comparing my school experience with the other students [white students], there's quite a major difference, as I've said before, because we come from different backgrounds and schools; we have different personalities and different ways of seeing things and we go about solving issues differently, so ja, those expectations of diversity were just my personal expectations, the ones I made for myself when I thought of a university as being a diverse one; but true diversity is not experienced here, I think that is what I would say politically that is what is lacking.

Some of the participants acknowledged that their intentions of mixing with students from other race groups and cultures were borne out of curiosity to learn more from the diverse student population as remarked by Lisa and Thabo:

Lisa: I love being able to talk to everyone and all the younger [black students] ... because you learn from them you know. Like sometimes the experience that you get from them is so nice, yeah.

Thabo: Eh I want to be amongst other race groups, for instance we were doing a presentation about Islam religion, I found that I wanted to be in another group, a mixed one because I wanted to be more exposed to other people's like culture and the way they think and get challenged in terms of my English and all of that but then my friends wanted me to go with them.

Evident from the data collected was how participants' who interacted with students from other race groups were perceived by their friends and peers.

Joyce adds that students of her own race group have an issue with her interacting with students from other race groups:

My people, the black people, sometimes I feel they have this attitude towards me because I interact with other races most of the time.

Thabo had a similar experience with peers from his race group:

Sometimes my friends see me talking to the white students and will call me this word 'coconut' being white inside and black outside. Yes they would call me that [laughing], and the others will pass by and say 'coconut'.

However, Thabo is willing to embrace these new experiences and take full advantage of getting to know the diverse range of students:

It's nice when I see Xhosa people mixing up with white. There was one mixed group working together in class and I like that, I love that so much. So sometimes it's not right to eh separate yourself to exclude ourselves from that because at the end of the day we are all students, we can learn from one another.

6.5.6.3 Summary: challenges

The main theme in this section highlighted the range of challenges experienced by participants and how they were influenced by their background circumstances and experiences. The other main themes highlighted varying experiences or challenges faced by participants. This section specifically illuminates their challenges in terms of two sub-themes: balancing work, study and family commitments; and dealing with diversity. The findings emphasised that participants' life experiences were a positive force in enabling them to deal with challenging situations inside and outside the university environment.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the qualitative data which emanated from one-on-one interviews, the sort-card activity and focus-group interview. A total of eight participants were involved in the one-on-one interviews and six of the eight participants formed part of the focus-group interview. The findings from the sort-card activity revealed that the factors that were most beneficial in supporting a positive first-year experience were external to the university: family support, school experience, self-confidence, and need to succeed. The sort card findings revealed

that the main factor hindering a positive first-year experience by participants was their financial plight.

The following main themes, which were data driven, emerged from the one-on-one and focus-group interviews: *determination; self-reliance; fitting in; out-of-habitus experience; positioning oneself to succeed; and challenges*. Sub-themes were identified and provided a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of pre-entry factors influencing students' first-year experience. Direct quotations were used in this chapter, as they foregrounded the students' voices. Their experiences formed the heart of this study. The students' voices provided a rich description of their first-year experience and factors influencing these experiences. Overall, participants expressed how their life experiences, which can be viewed as their habitus, had influenced their commitment to improve their socio-economic status, obtain job security and a better life either for their families and/or themselves. This commitment made them more focused and diligent towards their academic performance. Although all these participants had the same intentions, they were underscored by different life circumstances and thus influenced the way they reacted to situations.

The next chapter is the discussion chapter. The key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data will be discussed by employing the conceptual framework developed to guide this study. The key findings are framed around Bourdieu's key concepts of habitus, capital, and field; and Tinto's concepts of social and academic integration. The conclusions of this study discuss the contributions of this study to students' first-year experience in higher education and the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing these experiences

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing students' first-year experience and academic performance. These factors emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data. The participants' voices are central to the overall research process; hence I have foregrounded the qualitative data as the primary source of information for this discussion chapter. The quantitative data provided an overview and a backdrop to this study and is included in the discussion where appropriate. The conceptual framework, together with relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 3, guided the interpretation and integration of the key findings discussed in this chapter. The conceptual framework developed and explained in Chapter 2 is grounded in key concepts from Bourdieu's conceptual tools (habitus, capital, and field), together with two key concepts from Tinto's integration model (social and academic integration). These concepts have been utilised as analytical tools in this study to comprehend how students' past experiences influence their present and future actions. The conceptual framework provided a foundation from which to view and understand the totality of how students' habitus and capital resources influence their first-year university experience. The framework offered a context to understand how certain key pre-entry factors challenge or assist students' social and academic university integration.

The six key themes and 15 sub-themes that emanated from the data in Chapters 5 and 6 are discussed in this chapter. However, owing to the wide range of sub-themes, and to offer clarity in this discussion chapter, Table 7.1 on the next page provides a structure for the discussion of the findings. I outline how the themes and sub-themes are further categorised, grouped and reduced to two data sets for discussion in Table 7:1 (page 227).

Table 7:1 Structure for discussion of findings

Six key themes	Sub-themes of the findings	Categories for discussion	Data set
Determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family influence Broken families Taking charge of one's own destiny 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family support Life circumstances 	Pre-entry academic & non-academic factors influencing FYE and academic performance
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic hardships Social ills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic status Prior school experience 	
Fitting in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School influence Parents' educational aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity in student population 	
Out-of-habitus experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious influence Racial stereotyping Culture and tradition 		
Positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue with lecturers Choosing peers for group work Making friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic integration Social integration 	Adjusting to FYE and academic performance
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing work, study and family commitments Dealing with diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sense of belonging 	

The 15 sub-themes (see second column of Table 7.1), are grouped into eight categories (as indicated in the third column of Table 7.1) and listed below:

- Diversity in student population
- Prior school experience
- Economic status
- Family support
- Life circumstance

- Academic integration
- Social integration
- Sense of belonging

These eight categories were further grouped into two larger sets of data (column 4 of Table 7:1 on page 227) and are listed below:

- Pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing first-year experience and academic performance.
- Adjusting to the first-year experience and academic performance.

It is important to note that although the findings are discussed under these two broad data sets, the themes and sub-themes under the eight categories are not isolated concepts, but are interconnected and integrated in the discussion. The two data sets frame the focus of this research study and address the following main research question:

How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?

7.2 Pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing first-year experience and academic performance

In order to capture the participants' first-year university experience and academic performance fully, it was essential to investigate their past experiences. Participants' backgrounds provided a deeper understanding and context to view their multi-layered first-year university experience. The findings in this study identified the following pre-entry factors as influential in participants' first-year experience and academic performance: student diversity, prior academic experience, economic status, family support, and life circumstances. In identifying these significant pre-entry factors, the following key themes emerged: *determination*, *resilience*, and *challenges*, which are discussed in the following sections in Section 7.2.

7.2.1 Diversity in student population

The diverse nature of students with regard to age, gender, race and socio-economic status, could either have a positive or negative influence on students' university

experience, which could contribute to their either staying or dropping out of university (Fraser & Killen, 2003). The quantitative data provides evidence that the profile of a 'typical' student has shifted. The findings revealed that there was a wide range of ages of participants entering university as first-year students: 19 to 45 years. Consistent with many other studies on changing profiles of first-year students (Tinto, 1993; James, 2002b; Terezini & Reason, 2005; Krause, 2006), the findings from this study reveal that first-year student profiles have become more diverse and inclusive. Close to half of the first-year student population are mature students: 40% within the 20–29-year age group; 6.2% in the 30–39 age group and 0.5% over 40 years of age. The study's sample reveals that the ratio of male to female students entering university has also changed, indicating a ratio of 1:3 for male: female participants. It was found that there are more students entering higher education from fulltime employment than directly from school. Students entering first-year university can be classified into three groups of students: school-leavers, gap students and mature students. The study indicates that 26.2% of the participants were school-leavers entering university directly from school, while 31.8% were gap students and 42% were mature students, either returning directly from fulltime employment or a long period of absence from studying or working. Also evident was a shift in the racial composition of students entering higher education, towards better representation of the racial composition of the country. The first-year intake constituted 82.6% black students and 17.4% white. According to Swail (2004), race can be a factor related to retention at institutions where the diversity of the student body is not met with the same diversity in faculty and institutional leadership. McInnis and James (1995) warn that many universities and academics are not adequately aware of the increasing diversity of the student population or how this may impact on their institution and/or staff. This study intends to address this gap by providing nuances of diverse students' first-year experience and academic performance and uncovering the factors influencing their integration into their new university environment.

The findings on student pathways to university reveal that a large percentage of participants (34.4%) were employed in fulltime jobs and 39% were unemployed prior to entering university. An additional finding on student diversity indicates that for the majority of mature students entering tertiary education, their decision to further their studies was not an impulsive or taken-for-granted one. For many of them, this

decision emanated from their disadvantaged social and economic circumstances. Participants in this study provided the following reasons for their intentions to go to university: secure job, good salary, better life for themselves and their families/extended families, and improved social status 'to be someone'. The research of Tones et al. (2009) obtained similar findings and they elaborate that many of the students entering university from fulltime employment are mature students, predominantly from low socio-economic backgrounds. They add that these students have more family and home obligations that could impede their studies.

An interesting finding is that the majority of the participants entering university are first-generation students: 83.6% and 87.7% of the participants' male and female parents respectively do not possess a tertiary qualification. Studies reviewed reveal that a lack of parental tertiary education deprives first-generation students of the crucial cultural capital associated with education, resulting in certain students being academically advantaged and others disadvantaged at university (Bourdieu, 1984; Pascarella et al., 2004; Reay, 2004). Bourdieu (1984) describes the cultural capital, transmitted tacitly from parental education, to be knowledge, language, values, experiences and ways of doing things that belong to the dominant social group. As a result of parental educational influences, first-generation students, as Noyes (2007-2008:56) states: 'did not enter the university on equal terms' and may struggle with first-year university transition. The findings on this topic are elaborated on further in this chapter under the family support section.

7.2.1.1 *Dealing with diversity*

The qualitative data reveals that diversity with regard to prior academic experience, culture, and socio-economic background, created a level of discomfort with fitting into the new university environment for some of the participants, mainly, first-generation and mature students. According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus shapes individuals' present and future practices which are structured by past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing, culture and educational experiences. Habitus gives individuals the confidence and feeling of comfort to operate in a particular field. Many of the first-generation participants and those from disadvantaged schools and backgrounds felt an out-of-habitus experience at university. Their expectations of university life, shaped by their past experiences,

were different from their actual first-year experience. Many of the first-generation participants struggled in their new environment and were constantly assessing and re-assessing their behaviour to try to fit in:

Sometimes you try to fit in, we [black students] try to fit in with white people or maybe coloured people cause we black we try to do that and sometimes it's hard, because eh you get to be in a conversation, then they [white students] chat and then the chat is about their stuff, while we were chatting on something maybe serious and then they change it and turn to each other and chat and then you feel like an outsider, honestly we feel like an outsider, that's my honest opinion.

Bourdieu (1993:88) describes this behaviour as the 'power of adaptation'.

The findings reveal that in confronting issues with diversity, participants expressed feelings, beliefs and perceptions that were informed by their background and prior schooling experiences. For example, one participant expressed his perceptions of white students:

I see white students getting Funza bursary and it's like what! I always thought that white people are ... they have money! They are not like us [black people]. Seriously, I always thought white children, from the day that they are born, money is there for them you know, to go to university.

Many of the participants felt 'out of their comfort zone' when dealing with issues related to diversity in race, culture, religion, age, educational background, and socio-economic status. In addition, an awareness of student diversity created difficult challenges for some of the participants, particularly those from homogeneous schools and communities that limited the participants' exposure to diversity in race, culture and religion. This finding is evident in the following quotation by one of the participants:

I've been doing everything in my first language [isiXhosa] at school. It was a bit of a problem to now do everything in English, because I didn't do that. I just came from a black school.

The participants found it difficult to adjust to their new diverse environment and struggled to integrate and interact with their peers, lecturers and the university culture. The findings also reveal that some participants' stereotypical expectations and cultural beliefs, influenced by their habitus, prejudiced the way they interacted with academic staff and students from different cultures and racial groups. One of the participants found it difficult to interact with lecturers because of his cultural upbringing:

it's difficult because I am put in this position whereby I can respect the lecturer who says something even though it doesn't mean the lecturer is right but I need to respect that person as an elder so what can I do? I can't just talk back like I see other students do, it's tough!

An interesting finding that emerged was that although the diverse experience among some of the participants had brought them a degree of discomfort, it did lead to an awareness of diversity among the student population and a curiosity and preparedness to embrace their new environment which was motivated by their need to succeed in their first year of study. This finding was consistent with that of Tieu and Pancer's (2009) study of first-year undergraduates' involvement with and adjustment to university.

7.2.2 Prior school experience

From the total sample, 79% of the participants attended urban schools while 21% attended rural schools. A significant number of participants (51.7%) attended fee-paying schools and 40.4% no-fee schools. Many of the participants who attended fee-paying schools studied at ex-Model C schools. Participants that attended these well-resourced schools exhibited an effortless and natural transition into university life. These participants felt comfortable and fitted easily into their new academic environment with peers, academic staff and the university culture. The following quotation provides evidence of the advantages of being in a good school and the level of preparedness for university:

I went to a very good school and I was exposed to white teachers; I even had a white lady teaching me isiXhosa. I was mainly with other races and this helped me as I don't have a problem with mixing at university.

Bourdieu argues that schools in which students traditionally made the transition to university transmit cultural capital to their learners as a necessary pre-requisite for transition to university (Scanlon et al., 2007). This study's data corroborates Bourdieu's statement and affirms that the transition to university was an easy progression for participants who came from well-resourced schools. The findings indicate that these participants' advantaged school experience had prepared them for university, thus creating an alignment between their expectations of university life and their actual university experience. Participants from both working-class and middle-class families who attended ex-Model C schools felt grateful to their parents for sending them to such schools and felt obliged to succeed in their academic studies:

they [her parents] made sacrifices and yeah they put me in a school which was very good, it was a Model C school and it was expensive and yeah they wanted me to get the best education.

These participants were able to see the benefits of their privileged school education and experiences in their first-year university transition. Some of the salient points that these participants from well-resourced schools identified as supportive of an easy transition into university were being exposed to student diversity, teacher support, stringent school discipline, being made aware of university expectations, acquiring academic writing skills, and exposure to English as a medium of instruction.

Evidence from the data indicates that participants who entered university from disadvantaged educational backgrounds lacked the dominant cultural capital needed and were relatively disadvantaged with regard to university expectations and academic performance. For many of these participants, it was their first experience of being in a heterogeneous academic environment with students from diverse racial, cultural and language backgrounds. This created a challenge for these participants as they struggled to fit in. Although many of these students initially struggled to adjust to their new environment, their determination to succeed academically was driven by the need to change their life circumstances. They showed a high level of determination, motivation and self-resilience that influenced their commitment to their

studies and their academic performance. This finding is evident in the following quotation by one of the participants:

I wouldn't say like completely I'm enjoying myself at university, we [black students] came here to work, we want this degree, that's what we want, that is what I want. I want it so bad so I will do whatever it takes to make sure that I get the work done.

Research on personal factors such as motivation, personal interest, confidence, determination and self-esteem indicates that such variables can positively influence academic performance (Kim et al., 2010). My findings are supported by the study of Guiffrida et al. (2013), which uses the concept of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to reveal that students who attend university to fulfil an intrinsic motivation (personal goal) are positively influenced with regard to their level of academic success and intention to persist. Studies completed on student satisfaction reveal that students' decisions to withdraw from campus are often linked to their lack of motivation and adjustment to the campus environment (Nes et al., 2009).

7.2.3 Economic status

Both the quantitative and qualitative data confirm the lack of financial assistance as a major factor impacting on students' first-year experience and academic performance. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that the most powerful form of capital is economic capital as all forms of capital are inherently linked to economic capital. He adds that students at higher education institutions who are endowed with economic capital resources are at an advantage – they are likely to be more competitive and to succeed. Economic, cultural and social capital is bestowed to children by their parents, thus access to such resources could advantage some students while disadvantaging others. The findings in this study indicate that access to economic capital, determined by the participants' parental qualifications which were aligned with the types of employment they were engaged in, influenced the amount of financial support that parents were able to offer their children. A total of 24.45% of the participants' male parents and 22.2% of female parents were employed in professional occupations. Many parents' lack of tertiary education and their subsequent type of employment had a negative impact on the participants' financial

support. A total of 40.8% of the participants received financial support from their parents, while 53.1% sourced external funding (10.1% received student loans and 43% obtained student bursaries) and 6.1% paid for their own university studies. A similar finding was reported in Noyes' (2007-2008) study which indicates that the financial barriers that accompany the lack of parental tertiary education makes first-generation students' lives more challenging, which may impact on their academic success and university persistence.

Access to economic resources primarily by working-class participants created a barrier to their university studies which resulted in many of them seeking alternative means to fund their studies. Six of the eight participants acknowledged that their financial circumstances were created by their families' economic hardships which made focusing on academic studies a challenge in their first year at university. The findings reveal that many of the participants were compelled to take on part-time employment to fund their tertiary education. Some participants were actively trying to source loans or bursaries, either to supplement their first-year tuition fees or secure funding for the following academic year. These circumstances of trying to balance part-time work and studies, and seek funding for university studies, resulted in many of the participants not being able to give their full attention to their academic studies:

I'm working night shift. Joh! It's quite difficult, it's not easy, because this workload at university, it's quite tough, eh sometimes you lack that [sic] levels of concentration, you didn't sleep, you were working nights and at times, not most of the times, there's this thing where the lesson is boring and you begin to doze off.

The data affirms that these participants were unable to enjoy the full benefits of being a university student. Taniguchi and Kaufman's (2005) study indicates that these challenging circumstances of trying to balance study, work and home commitments could create a barrier to students successfully completing their studies. Swail's (2004) study adds that fulltime students working while attending university, paying tuition through loans or grants, and being financially dependent on family, are all factors that could influence academic success and undergraduate retention.

Evidence of economic hardship was strongly identified in this study, mainly among the working-class participants. Findings reveal that participants from disadvantaged communities faced difficult challenges in their upbringing. In most cases, working-class participants viewed difficult challenges as ‘making the best of a bad situation’. However, Cabrera et al. (1992) found that providing financial assistance to disadvantaged students early in the academic year created an equal playing field among the students that were financially advantaged and those that were not.

7.2.4 Family support

From the data it was evident that all the African participants regarded their extended family, aunts, uncles and grandparents, as part of their immediate family. Two of the three African participants were raised by their aunts and grandmothers who played a pivotal role in their upbringing. The discussion in this section includes extended families as part of family support. Findings from the sort-card activity reveal that the highest ranking was accorded to the family support card, with 75% of the participants ranking it in the top three positions, indicating that their families had positively influenced their first-year experience. The cultural capital within family networks influences the kinds of support that are offered. The findings show a distinct difference in the kinds of family support received by first-generation and non-first-generation participants. However it was evident that the value of the support received from all the participants’ family networks was significant to their first-year university experience.

The nature of family support offered to the non-first-generation participants was both tangible and intangible. Non-first-generation participants noted the following kinds of tangible support: financial, informational, advisory, academic support, and physical assistance. The intangible support included encouragement, motivation and personal support. The findings affirm that parents of non-first-generation participants valued education. Many of the non-first-generation participants had intense conversations with their parents about their academic work and progress:

My twin sister is studying Bachelor of Social Science at the University of Cape Town and my mum just completed her Master’s in Psychology – cum laude. So we have academic discussions all the time.

The parents of the non-first-generation participants were also involved in the decision-making process about choice of course and university. Non-first-generation participants' parental influence enabled these participants to gain first-hand knowledge of the value of success and preparedness for hard work. These participants displayed a positive attitude towards university and were determined to succeed. Longden's (2004) study supports these findings and highlights that non-first-generation students were able to fit in and thrive in their new environment, without any challenges, due to the tacit knowledge and cultural capital received from their parents.

In stark contrast, first-generation participants from working-class families did not imbibe first-hand experience or knowledge from their families with regard to university studies. They mainly received intangible support from their families, namely, spiritual, emotional, motivational and personal encouragement:

My extended family is very supportive, my aunt's sisters and my aunt's children play a part in saying that this is good for you, keep doing what you are doing.

Dennis et al. (2005) state that despite the lack of first-hand university experience, families can provide encouragement and emotional support which could influence first-generation students' decision to remain and succeed at university. The first-generation participants in this study displayed a positive attitude and were determined to succeed at university. Their purpose for wanting to succeed was based on their family struggles and social ills. They wanted a better life for themselves and their families:

I want to make a success of everything; whatever it takes I want to be successful and be able to help my mom, my dad, my family and support myself if I'm done.

Six of the eight participants had varying degrees of broken family experiences, including, single-parent upbringing from a young age; death of parent/s at a young age; and living with extended families and step-families. These participants had personal experiences of growing up in a broken family environment. The socio-

economic struggles of these participants made them more determined to improve their own circumstances and make their families proud of their achievements:

I have to think of what's going to earn me money because my mom she really struggled, we never had a lot growing up so I didn't want to struggle like that. I want to be financially independent and being successful in my studies will help me achieve this goal.

This finding is also supported in Cabrera's (2014) study on factors influencing first-generation minority students' preparedness to attend higher education. In Cabrera's study, attending university was a stepping stone for first-generation minority students and their families. They considered themselves role models for other first-generation minority students. As expressed by one of the participants:

I want to prove to myself that I can do this, even with all of the challenges that I have, but it's just that the need to succeed goes into supporting my family and putting them onto the map as well.

A significant finding from the data is that irrespective of parental educational attainment, both tangible and intangible family support influenced all participants' first-year experience, educational goals and goal commitments (Stage & Rushin, 1993; Martin et al., 1999). Bourdieu (1977:495) emphasised that first-generation students' commitment to succeed and reach their educational goals placed them in an advantageous position equal to the students from the upper sectors of society that understand the need for their children to increase their cultural capital.

7.2.5 Life circumstances

Results from the one-on-one interviews affirm that adversities from participants' past experiences contributed to their wanting to succeed in achieving their educational goals. Two key themes that emerged from the data addressing family struggles and socio-economic circumstances were participants' determination to improve their personal circumstances and their strong resilience against economic hardships and social issues. Findings from this study indicate that the majority of participants articulated determination as a strong factor influencing their need to succeed at university, which was primarily driven by the need to change their life circumstances.

Many of the participants regarded university as a way of improving their lives and taking charge of their destiny:

I decided I want to study, I'm gonna quit work because it's not the life I want for me and I just said to myself, 'No! you need to change your life, you need to go back to study.' I wanted to do something better for me and my son to have a better life!

Both middle-class and working-class participants were faced with social issues beyond their control: drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and the tragic deaths of family members. These social ills contributed to some participants being motivated and determined to succeed at university. In addition, the findings indicate that economic hardships emerged as a strong factor that was influential in working-class participants reinforcing their commitment to their educational goals. The findings of this study suggest that these incidents made the participants more determined and gave them the courage to take control and deal with tough situations in their own personal lives. This finding was evident in the following two quotations:

... these challenges I'm facing at the campus here I feel that I am overcoming them bit by bit; because of my difficult life, it helps.

and

I told myself I'm just gonna pass every year to show them [her parents] I'm not gonna waste their money on me.

Evidence of working-class participants' resilience was acknowledged in their reflection on family hardships. These participants displayed characteristics of confidence, having high expectations, self-esteem and coping techniques to balance work, study and family commitments. The findings from this study affirm previous findings by researchers such as Yorke and Longden (2004), Cleyle and Philpott (2012), and Toni and Olivier (2004) who realised that factors such as family circumstances, past experiences and economic forces were decisive for students to be committed to their educational goals and university studies.

The findings concede that participants were committed to make a positive change by using their challenging socio-economic circumstances as a catalyst. Toni and Olivier's (2004) study supports this conclusion, when they acknowledge that students' past experiences form the root of their beliefs, sense of security, confidence, self-esteem and identity, all of which contribute to their educational goal achievement and academic success.

7.3 Adjusting to first-year experience and academic performance

It was evident in this study that participants' habitus influenced their perceptions, actions and interactions in their new higher education environment. Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1984), refers to one's values, expectations and life-styles gained through everyday experiences and individual disposition. For many of the participants in this study, the key themes of *motivation*, *determination* and *self-resilience* which resulted from their habitus, influenced their social and academic integration and their sense of belonging. According to Tinto (1975, 1993), adjustment to first-year university and academic performance occurs when a student successfully integrates into the institution academically and socially. Tinto maintains that integration is influenced by pre-entry characteristics and goal commitment, interactions with peers and faculty, and out-of-classroom factors (Jensen, 2011). For Bourdieu (1984) integration and a sense of belonging are informed by one's habitus and past experiences. Bourdieu explains that habitus operates in two key ways: it is *structured* by one's circumstances and it is *structuring structure*, as it shapes one's present and future practices (Bourdieu, 1984:170). Paulsen and St John (2002) advise that when studying diverse student groups, it is imperative that the students' situated circumstances be taken into account. These authors elaborate situated circumstances to encompass the students' prior educational and background experiences that are shaped by their values, limited resources and capital. The participants' situated contexts helped to explain *how* the participants' habitus shaped their first-year experience and academic performance. The themes of *determination*, *motivation* and *self-resilience* helped to understand *why* the participants choose to behave in a particular manner while trying to navigate through their first year at university. The key themes that emerged while participants integrated into the new higher education field were *fitting-in*, *out-of-habitus experience*, *positioning oneself to*

succeed, and *challenges*. These themes are discussed under the following three main headings: academic integration, social integration and a sense of belonging.

7.3.1 Academic integration

Participants that were non-first-generation students and also those that came from well-resourced schools were able to fit easily into the academic environment of the university. Their level of academic integration was a natural progression. The findings demonstrate that these participants understood the importance of being connected to their lecturers, support staff and learning environment. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that children who have inherited appropriate cultural capital speak the same language as their lecturers and therefore are seen to be academically better than their peers who did not have these privileges. The findings also illustrate how participants deliberately positioned themselves in situations that made them visible to their lecturers. They were aware that this could positively contribute to their academic success. For example, one of the participants stated:

All my lecturers know me, I am very talkative and that's a good thing, then they can see I am serious about my work. I am not here to fool around. I know why I am here and they can see it, especially when they mark my work.

Three of the eight participants that were non-first-generation students felt comfortable having dialogues with their lecturers in and out of class time. They were quite vocal in class discussions and did not hesitate to meet with their lecturers outside of formal class time to discuss academic issues. The findings suggest that these participants' cultural knowledge, which is valued in higher education, was acquired from their home and school environments.

Martin and Spenner's (2009) study revealed similar results to those of Ball et al. (2002), indicating that the different forms of capital, especially cultural capital which more privileged students simply inherit from their parents and prior school experience, play an important role in university educational attainment. Schmid's (2001) study argues that children whose parents are better educated make more money, have higher status jobs and tend to attain higher levels of education than children whose parents lack higher education qualifications. Terenzini et al. (1994) indicate that for non-first-generation students, university is a logical next step after

the completion of high school. They add it is an 'expected and desired stage in the passage toward personal and occupational achievement' (Terenzini et al., 1994:62). For many of the non-first-generation participants and those that attended well-resourced schools, their expectations of university were aligned to their experiences at university. They felt comfortable; the cultural capital that they inherited had placed them in an advantageous position. As stated by Lane and Taber (2012), if a student's cultural capital aligns with that which is prized in educational institutions and that of their lecturers, then that student is more likely to be academically successful.

In contrast, the findings from the first-generation participants that either attended rural or under-resourced schools indicate that they struggled to fit in to their new university environment. Bourdieu (1990) notes that these participants lack the cultural capital needed to make the transition to higher education as they are not aware of the 'rules of the game' and are therefore constantly trying to 'catch up' to their peers that have the relevant cultural capital needed for university life. The two themes that emerged from the data with regard to the first-generation participants were *out-of-habitus* experience and *challenges* experienced at university. The mismatch between the first-generation participants' past experiences and expectation of university created an out-of-habitus and challenging first-year experience. The first-generation participants' university expectations were influenced by the following factors: religion, cultural practices, language barriers, lack of parental education, and racial stereotyping. The findings reveal that although these participants were aware of the importance of engaging with their lecturers to enhance their academic success, their values, attitudes and dispositions produced by their cultural capital created a barrier to their academic integration. The findings affirm that many of the first-generation participants did not want to engage in class discussions for fear of being labelled as 'being stupid' or 'disturbing the class'. Some of the English second-language participants did not feel comfortable with communicating in English in class: they were afraid of 'phrasing their questions' incorrectly. According to Bourdieu (1993), language is an embodied cultural capital that originates in the family. Therefore English second- and third-language participants who do not possess the correct linguistic capital dominating the institution have a distinct disadvantage compared with their peers that are English

first-language speakers. Bourdieu explains that linguistic capital is central to educational success as it is closely linked to other forms of capital. However, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) advise that the notion of habitus helps explain English second-language students' acceptance of the status quo and internalising their inferiority by subscribing to the importance of English competency in higher education. As one of the participants expressed:

I would love to be more involved with my lecturers but I am not comfortable asking the questions in class so I would just ask my friends.

The first-generation participants were concerned that their lecturers might perceive them as not understanding their work or alternatively as not being bright. These participants were also cognisant that not being vocal in class could result in their being unnoticed by their lecturers which could impact on their academic success. Some of the first-generation participants' culture created a barrier to their engagement with their lecturers, for example, they regarded their lecturers as 'elders' who needed to be respected and not questioned. As a result of this situation, these participants found it difficult to engage with their lecturers in and out of formal class time.

The findings from this study concur with the findings from Orsuwan and Cole's (2007) study on Hawaiian students, which reveals that low-income and low parental educational background of students may cause students to experience difficulties as they navigate through the university system which, in turn, could cause them to be less satisfied with their educational experience. A significant finding in this study that is not consistent with many studies of first-generation student persistence is that many of the participants used their challenging circumstances to commit to their academic success and goal achievement. In spite of their low cultural, social and economic capital, inherited from their habitus, they were determined and motivated to persist in their studies. This finding is supported by other studies: Nes et al. (2009), Toni and Olivier (2004), and Nora and Cabrera (1996).

Nes et al. (2009) found that dispositional and academic optimism were associated with better motivation and adjustment to university which reduced dropout rates. They concluded that with increased self-efficacy and a belief in a positive outcome,

students can succeed in the academic world. Toni and Olivier's (2004) study adds that students' life goals, which are ignited by specific characteristics and emotions from their past experiences, influence their motivation and commitment to their studies which contribute to academic success. In Nora and Cabrera's (1996) study on minority students, they reveal that even though these students experience negative and challenging experiences at university, it is the support and encouragement from their families that give them the motivation to persist in their studies.

Other studies that highlight challenges faced by first-generation students' persistence include those of Engle (2007), Noyes (2007-2008) and Pascarella et al. (2004). These studies indicate that first-generation students are more likely to experience problems with higher education adjustment and academic and social integration than traditional students and therefore may be more likely to drop out of university.

7.3.2 Social integration

All participants' levels of social integration were influenced by two factors: their commitment to their educational goals and their economic constraints. The findings acknowledge that all participants had positioned themselves strategically to take full advantage of their own potential and the potential of others who could assist them to reach their academic goals. The findings concede that participants used the same criteria for choosing peers for group work and making friends on campus. Participants preferred peers and friends who were similar to them with regard to work ethics, attitude towards academic work and prior schooling experience:

We [peers for group work] just kind of ... like similar, I knew some of these students and then I asked them if we could stay together because we all work hard, all four of us, we all have the same standard. We're like, this is what we want, so when it comes to group projects, we always work together and then we know we are fine.

Participants wanted to be around friends who could motivate and support them at university. The findings admit that covertly students preferred being with peers from their own culture, race and age group. Kuh and Love (2000) found that students who

made cultural connections through social groups that reflected their culture of origin were more likely to persist in higher education. This finding was evident in this study; although it advantaged some of the participants from well-resourced backgrounds, it created a challenge for others. Some participants were faced with a dilemma as they also wanted the benefit of being with peers from other cultural and racial groups:

I would like to be in my comfort zone as I've said before. So they [black peers] want to be with people who understand them, who understand them better and not only about school work and all of that, that's what I noticed, so usually I get pulled into this group although I would also like to experience being in other groups with different races, but also working with my race group is comfortable.

Economic capital was another important factor that influenced participants' level of social integration. Their financial constraints resulted in a lack of funding to support their university studies and accommodation, which compelled them to take on part-time employment. The findings consequently reveal that the majority of the participants' low level of social integration was influenced by their commitment to their part-time jobs, families and financial constraints. Rubin's (2012) meta-analysis of 35 studies found that socio-economic status is related to social integration among students in higher education; he adds that working-class students are less integrated at university than middle-class students. An additional factor influencing low levels of social integration of participants was the large percentage of participants' being mature students. The mature students' commitment to their family obligations took priority over social integration at university.

A significant finding of this study is that participants' levels of academic integration were higher than their levels of social integration. As academic success and completion were the ultimate goals for participants, they placed greater emphasis on academic integration than social integration. The findings reveal that participants' decisions to socially integrate with peers and friends at university were purely to advance their own academic goals. This result was more evident among first-generation and mature students. However, in research done by Kuh et al. (2007), they claim that, with regard to increasing student persistence, social integration is essential for non-traditional older students. Other studies undertaken on student

success and retention examine social and academic integration as a cohesive whole. These studies indicate that students' being socially and academically integrated into the university domain can lead to increased academic success, persistence and student satisfaction (Tinto, 1995; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Astin, 1993). For Terenzini and Pascarella (1978), students' academic and social integration at university is a more significant predictor of university performance and attrition than academic performance. It was evident that participants that possessed the relevant cultural and social capital needed for higher education were better able to make connections with the relevant social networks that benefited them with regard to their academic success than participants that did not have this privilege.

Tinto (1995) suggests that a high level of academic integration can compensate for a lower level of social integration; this was evident in this study's findings, since participants sacrificed their level of social integration for academic integration. Tinto adds that the greater the level of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the university. By the same token, the greater the level of academic integration, the greater the commitment to the goal of university graduation. This study's findings on social and academic integration support Tinto's statement. It was evident from the data that all participants were more committed to their educational goals and thus were more academically integrated into their first-year studies than socially integrated. In this regard, the finding suggests that participants were more committed to their educational goals than to their university commitment. The next section discusses this in more detail as it alludes to participants' lack of a sense of belonging to the university.

7.3.3 A sense of belonging

According to Thomas (2012:12), feeling a sense of belonging can be defined as 'students' subjective feelings of relatedness or connectedness'. Literature on the first-year student transition, reviewed in Chapter 3, reveals that for students to successfully make the transition to university life, they need to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness with their new peer groups and the wider academic community. The findings from this study indicate that some participants lacked a sense of belonging or connectedness with the university. The participants' lack of connectedness to the wider academic community was mainly due to their financial

constraints and family obligations. The data generated revealed that many of the participants were engaged in part-time employment which resulted in their spending less time at university; they therefore missed opportunities to socialise with peers.

Another important finding indicates that many participants did not make close friendships at university and expressed a greater level of commitment to their academic studies than socialising at university. These findings are supported by a study completed by McInnis, James and Hartley (2000) on students' level of engagement. Results from their study of a five-year trend on students' level of engagement with university life, show a decrease in student engagement due to part-time work. Their study also indicates that such students spend less time on campus; they do not have close friends, and generally keep to themselves.

Mature participants spent less time on campus because of family obligations. These participants expressed a level of commitment to their studies, family and work. They were faced with many challenges and tough decisions about commitment and sacrifice while trying to balance work and study, work and family obligations, or all three. This created a sense of alienation with and disconnectedness to the university community. Other studies on mature students that concur with this study's finding discovered that mature students often experienced a lack of belonging and fit with traditional university culture (Johnson & Watson, 2004; Kahu, 2014). Wyatt's (2011) study found that mature students may have less desire and time for non-academic activities at university.

First-generation students, mature students and students from working-class families were unable to position themselves to take full advantage of the opportunities available at university or gain the full experience of being a university student, mainly owing to part-time work commitments and family obligations. Increasingly, researchers have argued that higher education institutions have a responsibility to develop a sense of belonging among students which could be acquired through sustained programmes of small-scale initiatives that meet wide-ranging transition needs, such as supportive peer-to-peer relations, encouraging positive interactions between staff and students, and integrating curricular and co-curricular activities (Kift et al., 2010; Thomas, 2012). Pym et al. (2011) suggest that when providing support to first-year students, especially in the South African higher education context,

universities need to take into account students' range of diverse histories, experiences and contexts to develop a supportive community that can promote a sense of belonging at university. Researchers have consistently affirmed that for universities to increase students' commitment to higher education institutions, they need to take a broader view of the student experience and include interactions outside the confines of the university.

7.4 Concluding remarks

The discussion of the findings in this chapter was grouped into the following eight categories that emerged from the themes and sub-themes presented in Chapters 5 and 6: student diversity, prior school experience, economic status, family support, life circumstances, academic integration, social integration, and a sense of belonging. These categories were further grouped into two data sets: pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing the first-year experience and academic performance; and adjusting to the first-year experience and academic performance. I now provide a succinct overview of the main threads of the findings drawn from the discussion.

7.4.1 Pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing first-year experience and academic performance

Participants' cultural, economic, and social capital, together with their habitus, influenced the way they navigated through their first year at university. It was noted that the pre-entry factors influencing students' habitus and capital which impacted on their academic and social integration and academic performance were: student diversity, prior school experience, economic status, family support, and life circumstances. The data confirms that the first-year student population is extremely diverse and complex, with varying levels of capital resources and habitus. This study identified the following groupings of students: first-generation, non-first-generation, working class, middle class, school-leavers, gap students, and mature students. The data reveals that with the diversity in student population, a typical first-year experience was difficult to identify. However, this study confirms that students' university experience was informed by their past experiences, life circumstances and socio-economic backgrounds.

Life circumstances were a major contributory factor to students attending university. The findings reveal that for non-first-generation participants and middle-class participants, attending university was the next logical step and they had no problems fitting into the university environment. On the other hand, first-generation participants, working-class participants and mature students struggled to adjust to university life. However, their high levels of motivation and determination to change their present circumstances were the incentives driving them to succeed and achieve their academic goals. This in turn influenced their social and academic integration at university.

Economic constraints and family hardships were the primary intention for first-generation, mature students and working-class participants to enrol at university. Going to university was not a natural progression for these participants, but an action bred out of necessity. In fact for these particular participants, going to university was breaking family tradition. The motivating force for them to succeed academically was influenced by their parents' struggles and economic adversities. These participants appreciate how privileged they are to have the educational opportunities that their parents lacked. In addition, these participants' educational goals were also driven by their need to change their economic status. The impetus to succeed at university, for these participants, was a means to make money and obtain a stable job with a steady income.

Another important finding was the influence of family support. Participants received varying levels of tangible and intangible support from parents, siblings and extended families. A distinct pattern emerged with the kinds of support offered by families to non-first-generation and first-generation participants. Non-first-generation students regarded their parents and siblings as family. Because of these parents having first-hand knowledge of university life and being financially stable, they were able to offer tangible and intangible support. Not only did these parents assist with the choice of institution and offer advisory, emotional, informational and moral support, but they were also able to financially support their children with university fees and expenses. The data affirms a contrasting pattern with first-generation participants. For many of these participants, family included their aunts, cousins, and grandparents. Many of the first-generation students received intangible support from their extended families:

emotional, religious, motivational and reinforcement. These participants felt proud as they were not only representing their families at university, but their communities. This type of support negated any negative experiences and challenges they had at university as they felt motivated and determined to change their family circumstances.

7.4.2 *Adjusting to the first-year experience and academic performance*

The participants' level of academic and social integration was guided by their habitus. These predispositions interacted with the university environment to either assist or challenge the participants' first-year experience and academic performance. Their habitus created a sense of belonging to the university. Non-first-generation participants found it much easier to integrate academically into their new university environment than first-generation participants. Overall there was a low level of social integration reported among all participants. However, first-generation participants experienced a lower level of social integration than non-first-generation participants. The findings affirm that participants did not form strong on-campus friendships with their peer groups. Most interaction with regard to social support at university, initiated by participants, was predominantly driven by academic matters. The participants shared educational goals and created on-campus friendships that were helpful to them academically. Participants were strategic in the formation of their friendships, as they tended to gravitate towards peers that shared their own educational goals; came from similar prior schooling experience; or were motivated and had the same work ethics as they had. The results indicate that this behaviour benefited the non-first-generation participants in their academic work. With regard to first-generation participants, these friendships provided moral and emotional support that spearheaded their motivation and determination to succeed academically.

The data confirms that some participants lacked a sense of belonging to the university. This finding was affirmed by the participants' low level of social integration, which according to Tinto, brings about a lower level of commitment to the institution. Most participants spent little time at university, outside of formal classes. Participants' financial constraints formed the main factor contributing to their lack of connectedness to the university. The findings concur that participants' limited financial resources and lack of financial assistance compelled them to take up part-

time employment to cover the cost of tuition fees, living expenses and family obligations. This influenced participants' opportunities to socially integrate at university. The findings bring to light that most of the participants saw the university as a 'vehicle' to get to their 'destination'. Achieving their academic goal was their main focus. Toman's (2010) study also reveals that the habitus of mature students and working-class students is associated with the university mainly as a place of learning in which the social aspects are secondary.

It was clear from the findings that although all the participants had similar university experiences and educational goals, their socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences influenced the way they responded to these experiences. Some students felt like 'a fish in water' at university: a privilege gained from their advantaged socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences. However, students from disadvantaged backgrounds felt like 'a fish out of water' as they struggled to fit in. However, the challenges that the latter participants faced at university made them more determined to work hard and succeed.

The next chapter concludes this study. It provides an overview of the study, summarises and concludes the thesis, and provides recommendations based on the findings.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

8.1 Introduction

This study is being concluded at an important juncture in South Africa's development trajectory. The importance of the higher education system in providing a foundation for sustainable development is documented in many of our country's policies. In the most recent State of the Nation address, the President of the country re-affirmed the latter. In the forthcoming period, government will substantively commit to the overhaul of the higher education system. This is evident in terms of the substantive investment of over R600 million a year, earmarked by the Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), to bring about improvements in targeted areas of need in the higher education institutions (Nzimande, 2014a:6). Among the identified areas of need, the 'first-year experience' is currently one of the initiatives aimed at assisting students with the transition from school to higher education (Nzimande, 2014b:7). Programmes such as the first-year experience underscore that the low throughput and high dropout rates continue to be one of the most pressing challenges facing higher education institutions.

Given the foregoing, the initial problem statement which underpinned this study is still relevant, and probably even more so, in the five years since the commencement of this study. The need to ensure a more efficient throughput of first-year students to graduation and into the world of practice is paramount. At the heart of this objective is the question which framed this research study: *How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence teacher education students' first-year experience and academic performance?*

My rationale for undertaking such a study was to highlight the importance of students' past histories and socio-economic and academic backgrounds for higher education institutions and planners of first-year initiatives. If higher education institutions intend to address the challenge of student retention and success, specifically in the first year of study, they need to have a holistic and realistic view of who their students are and where they come from.

8.2 A synopsis of the research journey

In Chapter 1, I outlined the crux of the problem. The shift from an elite to a mass education system to redress past inequalities has brought about a host of new challenges to higher education institutions: high attrition, low throughput, and low graduation rates. This has created an imperative for these institutions to appreciate and adjust to such diversity, particularly among first-year students. Research has recognised the first-year experience as a crucial period with regard to student persistence, academic performance, retention, and success.

This study has been undertaken in response to the need for universities to understand and adapt to the more entrenched diversity of the student body which is one of the characteristics of a post-democratic era. Recent studies have indicated the need to better understand student backgrounds and their influence on the first-year experience and academic performance. Nelson et al. (2011) emphasises the importance of examining the impact of student diversity on the first-year experience and persistence. Further, McInnis (2003) notes that more studies are needed on how student diversity adds value to the first-year experience. Reay (2012) adds that much of the research and literature on higher education student experience and retention has overlooked the influence of students' backgrounds and characteristics. This study addressed this gap in the literature by contributing empirical research to the first-year experience field by means of examining what, how and why certain pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence students' first-year experience and academic performance.

Through the journey of this investigation, my focus was not exclusively to provide an in-depth exploration of pre-entry factors influencing students' first-year experience and academic performance, but more importantly to bring about an awareness of students' habitus and social, economic and cultural capital to higher education institutions and first-year curriculum planners so that effective first-year programmes and initiatives could be planned to create an inclusive first-year experience. The main research question and sub-questions in this study provided answers with regard to the nature of the first-year students entering university. The research further addressed the complex and dynamic interplay of first-year students' habitus and capital that influenced their social and academic integration at university.

In order to unpack the problem and obtain a deeper and holistic understanding of the investigation, I developed a conceptual framework to frame the research questions and to analyse and interpret the findings of the study. The framework took into consideration the significance of diversity in understanding the first-year experience. It thus employed concepts from two sociological models: Tinto's integration model (social and academic integration) and Bourdieu's theoretical tools of capital, habitus, and field, to understand how students' past experiences influenced their commitment to their university studies which allowed them to socially and academically integrate into their new environment. The model, as shown in Chapter 2 page 50, served as a conceptual map where the various themes, sub-themes and categories were expanded on.

A review of the literature in Chapter 3 produced a robust set of evidence that supported the need for this study. It was evident from the literature review that much of the research completed on student success and persistence focused mainly on educational experiences within the university environment. Lane and Taber (2012), recommend observing the roles played by social class, capital and habitus in students' educational experiences and academic success, which is addressed in the findings and discussion chapters of this study. The literature review introduced many theories that highlight students' first-year experience from different perspectives. Although many of these theories take into account students' pre-entry characteristics, they do so as control variables rather than key factors 'investigated as variables whose effects are important to understand' (Walpole, 2007:8).

This study's research design and methodology outlined in Chapter 4 provided the grounds and justification for the study's being designed within the qualitative research paradigm. It employed a case study strategy to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions of this study. Included in this chapter were the strategies undertaken to ensure the study's credibility, transferability and dependability.

The quantitative findings chapter of this study provided a detailed overview of who the first-year students are who enter teacher education programmes at this university. This chapter specifically explored student diversity under the following headings: student demographics, socio-economic background, prior schooling, and

student expectations of university experience. The qualitative findings were presented in Chapter 5. The first section provided a biographical description of each of the eight participants. The second section highlighted the outcomes from the sort-card activity and the final section presented the qualitative findings from the one-on-one and focus-group interviews, under themes and sub-themes that emerged. The six themes and 15 sub-themes presented in Table 6.5 included the following: *determination, self-reliance, fitting-in, out-of-habitus experience, positioning oneself to succeed, and challenges*. The sub-themes identified provided a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of pre-entry factors influencing students' first-year experience.

8.3 Research outcomes

8.3.1 Theoretical contribution

The conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2 guided the interpretation and integration of the key findings of this study. It provided a lens for a critical analysis of the extant literature on the first-year experience and academic performance.

The use of Bourdieu's three concepts (habitus, capital, and field) revealed the realities of students' situations. The utilisation of the concepts provided a more detailed and coherent account of how the environments in which students were raised, as well as their habitus and capital resources, shaped their attitudes and interpretation of their first-year experience. A key contribution of using Bourdieu's concepts revealed that participants who were economically and socially disadvantaged possessed highly valued forms of cultural capital which assisted them to be committed to their educational goals and persist in their challenging first-year experience. In addition, the findings indicated that for many of the mature students, attending university was not their initial aim. They decided to attend university because of their job expectations, economic hardships and life circumstances. In addition, many of the working-class and first-generation students displayed a high level of determination, commitment and resilience to achieve their academic goals. For these participants, achieving academic success was seen as a solution to eradicate their economic hardships and improve their family status. In addition, the findings reveal that students from privileged backgrounds and non-first-generation

students were equipped to thrive and succeed in their first year at university. They were able to use the economic, social and cultural resources gained from their privileged backgrounds to position themselves more favourably and benefit academically and socially from their new environment.

The use of Tinto's concepts of social and academic integration highlighted a significant contribution. The findings indicated that, while Tinto's model of student integration demonstrates that academic and social integration operates concurrently at varying levels of students' first-year experience, in contrast, the participants of this study viewed the academic and social domains at the university as successive. Students' academic and social integration was influenced by their limited economic capital which resulted in their prioritising their concerns. For example, many of the first-generation and working-class participants regarded their financial concerns as a priority. Once they were able to deal with these concerns, only then did they shift their focus to their academic concerns. Socialising on campus was only considered by participants once they felt confident and secure that the other two concerns had been achieved. For many of the participants, their educational goal was viewed as their primary focus. This level of prioritising between social and academic integration was also evident among many of the mature students. Owing to their lack of capital resources, they focused exclusively on their academic success to the exclusion of campus social life. For these participants, their personal and family commitments took priority over socialising on campus. Another important finding with regard to social and academic integration was the manner in which participants created strategic relationships with peers. This was visible in the way they had formed bonds with peers for class group activities and out-of-class support. The main intention of their actions was to advance their educational goals rather than their social needs, as stated by one of the participants: 'Primarily we are here to study, not make friends.'

This research study has provided an example of how an integrated conceptual framework of Bourdieu's concepts and Tinto's integration model can be applied in today's university settings to bring about a nuanced perspective to investigate and understand the first-year experience. The development of a conceptual framework modelling the forms of and the relations between students' pre-entry factors and

university social and academic integration into a microcosm of the higher education field represents a contribution to the body of knowledge informing the understanding of students' first-year experience.

8.3.2 Contribution to practice

This study's findings could be extended to other universities that are committed to provide an inclusive first-year experience, as its application could influence students' first-year persistence and academic success. Analysis of the collected data and findings of this study could benefit first-year curriculum planners, student support services, first-year experience initiatives and orientation programmes. Readers should be cautioned, however, not to over-generalise the findings as they pertain to a specific university setting.

Much of the literature on first-generation students acknowledges that these students are less prepared for higher education and are more likely to drop out in their first year of study. This research study has identified that, in spite of these expected outcomes, participants from disadvantaged backgrounds, with diverse educational experience, enter university with high levels of resilience, determination and motivation to succeed. My recommendation is that higher education institutions need to recognise these traits in first-generation students and incorporate them in planning initiatives for first-year student success and retention. In addition, this study has highlighted that students predominantly make use of their own inner strengths and limited capital resources to navigate their first year at university. The results further indicate that participants' level of engagement with regard to accessing academic support is limited. In this respect, higher education institutions need to be proactive in the kinds of support offered to students. The support offered needs to be inclusive and acknowledge the diversity of students' past experiences. This type of support also needs to be embedded in the mainstream first-year programme delivery.

Another important contribution to practice identified by this study was that the first-year experience for many of the participants was adversely influenced by their financial constraints. This resulted in many of the students being engaged in part-time employment which had an impact on their level of social integration into and subsequent level of commitment to the institution. Studies by Hillman (2005) and

Tinto (1995) acknowledge that for students to be successful at university, they need to be socially and academically integrated into the university domain. The findings from this study identified that students' social and academic integration was dependent on their financial security. A recommendation is that if higher education institutions want their students to enjoy the full benefits of integration into the social and academic domain of university life, these institutions need to play an active role in ensuring that financial provision is made in first-year programme implementation and policies that facilitate this. For example, universities could assist students with financial aid prior to their entering university. Student loans and bursaries could be confirmed prior to first-year registration, which would mitigate the burden and stress of trying to secure financial aid while also trying to cope with first-year studies and other commitments such as finding a part-time job and personal issues like accommodation. The findings of this study indicate that a large number of students are involved in part-time employment and have out-of-campus obligations. In this regard first-year programme planners need to consider this important factor and be flexible when planning the first-year timetable.

This study's research findings identified that students' level of academic integration was higher for non-first generation students than first-generation students. Academic staff teaching on first-year programmes need to be aware of this factor and find creative, meaningful ways of making contact with these students and increasing their level of academic integration in a non-threatening and approachable manner. These students need to feel comfortable with addressing their lecturers and being involved in class discussions. Universities need to find proactive ways to develop student – lecturer interactions to improve student success and retention.

My research highlighted that all participants' levels of social integration were notably lower than their academic integration; this was supported by the fact that all these students felt more committed to their own educational goals than to the goals of the institution. Many studies have implied that social integration is related to better academic performance, greater persistence, and retention (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In this regard, it is recommended that higher education institutions assume the responsibility to ensure that students socially integrate into the university environment. Universities need to provide space and opportunities for students to

socialise on campus. They need to offer support to enhance students' social networking skills – something that is not only needed for students at university, but also in the professional environment. In addition, encouraging social networking at universities would allow students with limited social and cultural capital the opportunity to engage with students who have the capital needed for success in higher education. Research has shown that students are spending less time on campus and few or no close friendships are formed at university.

Finally, this research does not only have implications for broad educational practice, but more specifically for the policies and educational standards within specific departments and programmes concerned with first-year experience initiatives. Valuing diversity or acknowledging and addressing the challenges to facilitate an inclusive first-year experience is pivotal to academic success and retention.

8.4 Critique of the research and future research opportunities

As the journey through this investigation neared conclusion, I was able to reflect on the research process and identify some limitations in my study, which otherwise could have enhanced the research findings of this study. As with similar studies of this nature, I experienced the normal limitations of a postgraduate student engaged in part-time studies, such as time constraints and access to resources. More importantly, and in retrospect, the findings could have been enriched by multiple research sites. The study was confined to a single first-year programme in a single institution. A richer texture to the data could have been obtained if the sample had included more than one programme as well as more than one institution.

Secondly, from a methodological perspective, the use of reflective diaries to collect evidence may have yielded deeper insight into students' attitudes, thoughts and actions. The reflective diaries would have captured accounts of the participants' first-year experiences that they perceived as somewhat significant and meaningful to them. It would have provided a more holistic understanding of students' experiences impossible to capture in a single one-on-one interview. Data from the reflective diaries would have provided greater depth and clarity, and further enriched the findings of this study. Analysing the data from participants' diaries would have provided me with a sound understanding of students' fears, concerns and the role

players influencing their learning environment and academic performance. In addition it would have also strengthened the validity of the study by providing another element for triangulation.

8.4.1 Future research

I suggest the following key areas for future research to advance the knowledge and understanding of the first-year experience of university students:

- An investigation into the extent to which the conceptual framework developed in this research is applicable to other higher education settings and programmes.
- Longitudinal research into the first-year experience to provide a broader perspective of the pre-entry factors influencing students' university experience and academic success.
- An examination of how specific first-year student cohorts, for example first-generation or mature students' social, economic and cultural capital could be utilised to enhance social integration.
- An investigation into the manner in which students' habitus and capital resources enable them to successfully navigate the first year of study.

8.5 A personal reflection of what this journey meant to me as the researcher

I was a first-generation undergraduate university student. I grew up in an extended family environment, living with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings all under one roof. Growing up during the apartheid era in South Africa afforded me a school experience that had limited resources, but dedicated teachers and a homogeneous group of students based on race. My habitus was quite similar to many of the non-white, first-generation participants of this study.

I was fortunate to have had the economic resources to attend university. My parents' lack of senior high school and tertiary education made them determined to provide better opportunities for their children. I was the first of my siblings to attend university. My limited social and cultural resources created a real challenge in transitioning from school to university.

My own first-year university experience served as an invaluable resource in conducting this study. It made it easier for me to relate to, and understand, issues raised by the participants from the diverse and also disadvantaged backgrounds. Sharing my own experiences with the participants made them feel comfortable to share their experiences. In addition, my context of being a first-generation student, and my present position as an academic, provided a common ground for me to probe deeply and gain clarity on issues pertaining to this study.

In my reflection of my entrée into the higher education field, concomitant with my disadvantaged context and not possessing the dominant culture of the university, I felt marginalised within the higher education field. At times I found it quite daunting and difficult to adjust to the dominant culture of the institution. But, my experiences in the field resulted in my habitus 'structuring the structured', which directed me to the focus of my doctoral study. In retrospect, I think my research reflects my desire to enable and legitimise marginal field positions which are brought about by certain habitus and capital resources not recognised by the dominant culture within higher education institutions.

8.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate who the first-year students are who enter teacher education programmes and what pre-entry factors influence their first-year experience and academic performance. The purpose was to address the research problem: challenges of high student dropout, low throughput, and poor graduation rates experienced by higher education institutions. The use of a conceptual framework developed to analyse and discuss the actions and interactions of participants' past experiences on their social and academic integration into their new university environment assisted in answering the research question. The results revealed that students' first-year university experience was dynamic and in continuous flux, structured and restructured by their past experiences and present habitus. As stated by Harvey et al. (2006), the first-year experience is a shifting target that evolves and changes with time and culture. Therefore studies on students' first-year experience require research and practice to continuously re-evaluate relevance and points of possible enhancement.

Finally, the findings of this study provide insight into how unequal social, economic and educational backgrounds, created by an unjust apartheid system in South Africa (pre-1994), have created challenging circumstances for students entering higher education institutions. It is imperative that these institutions move away from viewing today's first-year students from a deficit model. They should, instead, capitalise on the qualities of determination, optimism, enthusiasm and openness to learning to create an inclusive first-year experience.

Most importantly, this investigation has provided evidence that the improvement of success, especially at the first-year level, requires recognition and acknowledgement of the after effects of the apartheid era upon the majority of disadvantaged students in South Africa, and by doing so will reduce dropout rates, improve throughput and graduation rates, and inevitably have a positive net effect on the South African human capital skills base.

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APPENDIX A: Pre-entry questionnaire



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

MOWBRAY CAMPUS

P O Box 652, CAPE TOWN, 8000

Pre-University Student Characteristics and Expectation Questionnaire

Dear BEd Students

Congratulations and welcome to the Faculty of Education at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Mowbray Campus. This questionnaire forms part of a DEd project.

You are requested to please complete the attached questionnaire (N.B. the completion of the questionnaire is optional). Once completed you can return the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed envelope provided in your acceptance pack. Your acceptance letter could also be returned in the same envelope.

This survey contributes towards a doctoral research project that aims to assist the Faculty to understand who their first-year students are and thus to improve the first- year experience of students entering the BEd programme at CPUT.

Please take note that your responses are confidential and will only be used to produce summarised results that will be used in my doctoral study. The questions below are divided into three areas:

- A. Student background information
- B. Pre-university academic background
- C. Expectations of first year at university

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to my research project titled: An investigation of teacher education students' pre-entry factors influencing first-year experience and academic performance.

We look forward to welcoming you to CPUT.

Yours faithfully

Sue Pather

Academic Development Lecturer

pathersu@cput.ac.za

Pre-University Student Characteristics and Expectation Questionnaire

Instructions:

- Please respond to all questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge.
- The responses require your opinion or perception regarding various issues. Therefore there are **no right or wrong** responses.
- Write your responses in the space provided.
- In cases where options are provided, indicate the appropriate response with a cross **(X)**.
- Please answer **all** questions.

A. Background Information

1. Name & Surname: _____

2. Age: _____

3. Gender: Male Female

4. Race:

African Coloured Indian White

5. What is your home language? _____

6. Did your parents complete a degree?

6.1 Father

Yes No

6.2 Mother

Yes No

7. What is/was your parents' occupation?

7.1 Father _____

7.2 Mother _____

8. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend university?

Yes No

9. How will you fund your university studies?

Parents Yourself Loan Bursary

Other: State

10. In which residential area will you be staying while studying?

11. How will you travel to campus?

Bus Taxi Train Walk Private Vehicle

Other: State

B. Pre-University Academic Background

12. What is your present occupation?

Student Working Unemployed

If you are currently working, describe your occupation:

13. Which BEd Programme will you be registering for?

Further Education & Training (FET): Grade 10–12	
General Education & Training (GET): Foundation Phase, Grade R to 3	
General Education & Training (GET): Intermediate & Senior Phase	

14. In what year did you complete or will complete Grade 12? _____

15. Name of school/institution where you completed your Grade 12 or are presently studying:

15.1 Where is the school/institution located?

Province: _____

Residential Area: _____

16. Subjects completed at Grade 12 level and symbols (if presently in school indicate your June 2011 examination subjects and results).

Subjects	Symbols

17. Do you have any other qualifications?

Yes No

If yes, state them:

18. Do you feel that you are prepared for university life?

Yes No

Write down at least two reasons for your answer above.

19. Have you used a computer?

Yes No

If your answer is **No** to question 19, explain why you have not?

If your answer is **Yes** to question 19, answer the following questions:

19.1 How often do you use the computer?

Every day	
3 – 4 times a week	
Once a week	
Once a month	
A few times a year	

19.2 Where do you use the computer?

Home	
Family or friend's home	
School	
Municipal library	
Cybercafe	
Work	
Other: State	

19.3 What do you use the computer for? You may mark an “X” next to more than one option.

Facebook		Browsing the internet	
Playing games		Career choices/jobs	
Email		Download music/movies	
Blog		Using Office applications e.g. Word, Spreadsheets	
Other: State			

19.4 List your **top 3** uses of the computer from the options in 19.3 above.

C. Career Choice

20. Was the BEd degree your first choice of study?

Yes	No
-----	----

20.1 If no, to the above question, what was your first choice of study?

21. Did your family support your choice of study?

Yes	No
-----	----

21.1 How did or didn't they support you? Explain.

22. Did your friends support your choice of study?

Yes	No
-----	----

22.1 How did or didn't they support you? Explain.

23. Did you seek career advice before choosing this course?

Yes	No
-----	----

23.1 If yes, from whom? Explain.

24. Did you consider choosing a different university before settling for this institution?

Yes	No
-----	----

24.1 If yes, what was your choice of institution?

25. How did you hear about the teaching degree?

26. Do you have family in the teaching profession?

Yes	No
-----	----

Explain relationship:

27. Are you aware that all your subjects will be taught in English at the Mowbray campus?

Yes	No
-----	----

D. Expectation of first-year university experience

The following statements describe a number of possible expectations which you may have of your first-year experience in the BEd course.

Indicate your response with a cross (x). You may choose only **one** option per statement.

Think about 2012, and your first year of study in the BEd programme at CPUT.

With regard to your expectations of your first-year experience:

INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
28. I expect to join organisations/clubs on campus, e.g. sports club, student union, etc.				
29. I will make many new friends.				
30. The course of study will not be difficult.				
31. Librarians will be important people to help me with finding information for my assignments and projects.				
32. I will make friends from different racial groups.				
33. My lecturer will expect me to write well-structured academic essays.				
34. I will attend many social functions, e.g. sports day, student braai, fund-raising events, etc. in my first year.				
35. I will be in contact with campus friends and peers using one or more of the following social networks: Facebook, Email, SMS, Mxit.				
36. Going out to schools for teaching practice will be easy and I do not expect to encounter any difficulties.				
37. I will not be involved in academic discussions with my peers outside of formal lectures.				
38. Joining social clubs/organisations at university will distract me from academic work.				

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
39. I expect that group work will be an important feature of lectures.				
40. My lecturers will expect me to know how to correctly reference my assignments and projects.				
41. I expect to be in contact with my lecturers using any of the following social networks : Facebook, Email, SMS, Mxit.				
42. The library is not a place where I expect to spend a lot of time.				
43. My first-year university work load will be easier than school.				
44. I expect to spend a lot of time preparing for lectures.				
45. My lecturers will not expect me to attend every single lecture.				
46. It will be more difficult to make friends at university than it was at school or work.				
47. My lecturer will expect me to take part in class discussions and debates.				
48. During my first year of studies there will only be a few assignments and projects.				
49. Lecturers will not know me and other students by their first name.				
50. It will be a challenge for me to participate in group work during class lessons.				
51. Lecturers will make themselves available outside of the formal lecture time to assist and advise me.				
52. I am looking forward to contributing to lively classroom discussions and debates.				
53. I will seek academic support from my friends whenever I need help with my academic work.				
54. Making friends from different racial groups will be difficult for me.				
55. I am aware of academic support services, e.g. writing centre, peer tutors and tutorials that are available on campus to support students that need help.				

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
56. I will seek academic help from senior students assigned as peer tutors in the various subjects if I have difficulties with my courses.				
57. I am shy and will not personally introduce myself to my lecturers outside of class.				
58. I expect the lecturers to prepare/equip me before I go to schools for my first teaching practice session.				
59. I am shy and will not contribute to class discussions and debates.				
60. Having conversations with my class peers outside the classroom is easy for me.				
61. I expect my first-year courses to be difficult.				
62. During my first year of studies there will only be a few assignments and projects.				
63. Having a conversation with my lecturer outside of formal class will be easy for me.				
64. I expect that my lecturers will provide regular feedback to me on class work, assignments and tests.				
65. My friends can easily persuade me to bunk lectures.				
66. My lecturers will expect me to be able to use the computer for assignments and projects.				
67. I expect to write fewer formal tests in my first year of study compared with school.				

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Sue Pather & Rajendra Chetty

Place this survey together with your acceptance letter in the self-addressed envelope and return to the university.

If there are any other expectations that you have about your first-year experience at CPUT Mowbray campus that are not covered in this questionnaire, please state them:

If you would like to be a participant in this research project, please indicate your details below and I will be in contact with you once you enter the BEd programme next year.

Name: _____

Cell number: _____

Email address: _____

Thanks

Sue Pather

pathersu@cput.ac.za

APPENDIX B: Interview Schedule

First-Year Experience: Student Interview Schedule

Research Question: How do pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influence TE students' first-year educational experience and academic performance?

1. FYE: Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are you enjoying about your first-year experience? • What is the worst thing about being a first-year student? 	
2. Academic Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your reasons for studying this course (goal)? • Are you enjoying your studies (intrinsic goal)? • Do you think it is worth studying (extrinsic goal)? • What difficulties are you experiencing with the course (method)? • How does the language of teaching and learning (English) impact on your learning (method)? • How do you think you are performing in your courses? Do you get regular feedback? • Have you encountered any academic challenges? How did you cope with these? 	
3. Social Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel comfortable being a student at this campus? • Do you think it is important to know your lecturer and peers (goal)? • Have you made contact with your lecturers outside of class time/how often? • Do you have a lot of friends on campus (intrinsic goal)? • Do you think being in contact with lecturers and peers is important (extrinsic goal)? • How do you feel about collaborative/group work? • Have you encountered any challenges with students? How did you cope with these? 	
4. First-Year Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the campus life what you expected it to be? • Are the students on campus what you expected them to be like? What was that expectation? • Is the course you are studying what you expected to encounter? How did you cope? 	
5. Academic Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you enjoy your high school experience? • What was your academic performance like? 	
6. Family Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me something about your family and home life? • Are you the first in your family to go to university? • What are your parents' occupations? • What kind of support do you receive from your family? 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do your family think about your studying? • What challenges have you and your family encountered with your studying? 	
7. Support Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think the following people have supported you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate family • Extended family • Friends off campus • Collaboration/group work with peers • New campus friends • Academic Development: tutorials/workshops – student services • Lecturers • Administration staff: library, admin office, bursary 	
8. Sort-Card Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students were given a pack of 10 cards with titles and pictures. The cards were in no particular order. Students had to study the cards and then arrange them according to preference of the most influential factor contributing towards their academic studies to the least influential. • Students were given a chance to arrange the cards and talk about their experiences. 	

APPENDIX C: Consent form

Consent Form for DEd Research

Participant Consent Form

DEd Research Project – Pre-entry academic and non-academic factors influencing teacher education students’ first-year academic experience and academic performance.

I, _____ have read an explanation of the purpose of the research project and have volunteered to be a participant in the above research project. I am aware that the researcher (Mrs Sue Pather) will be conducting two interviews with me. I am also aware of and agree to the interview’s being recorded. Finally, I have been assured that my interview and reflective journal in which I will be recording all my first-year academic experiences will be used for research purposes only. My confidentiality will be respected also. I hereby give my permission for any information I provide during my interviews and in my journal to be used in the DEd research study.

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

APPENDIX D: Ethical clearance

Department Name: General Education & Training

Research Ethical Clearance

Compliance Form

All postgraduate students and researchers are required to complete this form before commencing with research or submitting applications to the **University Research Fund (URF)**. All URF applicants are requested to please submit this form together with all the relevant URF application forms to their Faculty Research Committee (FRC) for approval.

(Where applicable mark relevant boxes with an **X**)

Project Title: DEd Research

Factors influencing BEd students' first-year experience and academic performance.

Applicant/Researcher		Supervisor (if applicable):
Surname	Pather	Chetty
First Name	Subethra	Rajendra
Title	Mrs	Prof
Office Telephone	021 680 1586	021 680 1532
Cell	084 6898584	
Email	pathersu@cput.ac.za	chettyr@cput.ac.za
Undergraduate		
Postgraduate		
Staff	X	

Research Checklist:		Yes	No
1.	Does the study involve participants who are unable to give informed consent? Examples include children, people with learning disabilities, or your own students. Animals?		X
2.	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? Examples include students at school, members of self-help groups, residents of nursing homes — anyone who is under the legal care of another.		X
3.	Will it be necessary for participants to participate in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time — for example, covert observation of people in non-public places?		X
4.	Will the study with the research subject involve discussion of sensitive topics? Examples would include questions on sexual activity or drug use.		X
5.	Will the study involve invasive, intrusive, or potentially harmful procedures of any kind (e.g. drugs, placebos or other substances to be administered to the study participants)?		X
6.	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing on sentient subjects?		X
7.	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X
8.	Does your research involve environmental studies which could be contentious or use materials or processes that could damage the environment? Particularly the outcome of your research?		X

If you have answered ‘No’ to all questions, submit the completed and signed form to your FRC together with the completed URF application forms.

If you have answered ‘Yes’...

If you have answered ‘Yes’ to one or more questions, kindly attach a report describing more fully how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research. It does not mean that you cannot do the research, only that your proposal will need to be approved by the Research Ethics Committee. You will need to submit your plans for addressing the ethical issues raised by your proposal to your faculty’s Research Ethics Committee.

Declaration

As Researcher/Applicant I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to follow Ethical Standards and good research practice.

I declare that I am not aware of any potential conflicts of interest, other than those declared on THIS form, which may influence the ethical conduct of this study.

Signatures:

Researcher/Applicant

Date

Supervisor/Senior (if applicable)

Date

Faculty Research Ethics Committee comments:

Approved

Referred back

Chairperson

Date

APPENDIX E: Sort Cards

Financial Support



Academic Student Support



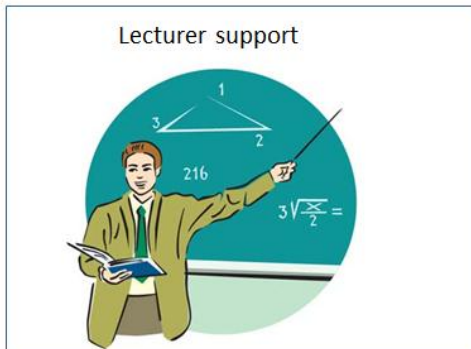
Community Support



Self Confidence



Lecturer support



Need to Succeed



School Experience



Family Support



New Campus Friends



Any Other Factor/s



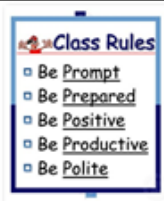
APPENDIX F: Focus-group interview

Over view of programme



- Class Rules
- Introduction Activity: Introducing yourself to the group. (time: 45 minutes)
- Activity 2: Creating your River of Life/ timeline. (20 minutes to draw time line, presentation to class & discussion – 50 minutes)
- Activity 3: Creating a group mind map. (20 minutes and report back 20 minutes)
- Activity 4: Social and academic integration

Slide 1



Rules



- Do not talk whilst another person is talking.
- Do not dominate the conversation.
- Allow everyone an equal opportunity – remember the time allocated.
- Respect each others' opinions
- Feel free to ask questions to something you need clarity on.
- Finally thank you for participating in the group discussion and please be assured that discussions in this room is confidential.

Slide 2

Introduction Activity



Introduce yourself to the class.

- What is your name?
- Where do you come from?
- Do you have a part-time job?
- What is your hobby (you do in your spare time)?
- What do you consider to be your strengths with regard to being a university students?

Slide 3

Activity 2: Starting your time line



Important points to consider:

Timelines show the steps or

events of a process over a certain period of time

- Identify main events in your life
- Write both the positive and negative impact/influence on your life
- List about 3-4 happenings under event
- Remember it should not be written in detail

Slide 4

Activity 3: Mind map



In your group discuss what qualities you have brought with you to university/higher education.

- Once you have all had a chance to reflect and discuss, you need to draw a mind map with the groups qualities.
- Your mind map should have in the middle: Qualities I bring with me to HE.
- Arrows moving outwards should have the following topics: experience, education, skills, & personal characteristics/personality.

Slide 5



Activity 4: Social Integration



Social expectation: comment

- What was your expectation of the social life on campus? Did your experience match your expectations?

Making friends on campus: comment

- How do you feeling about this topic?

Peers in your class: comment

- What is your opinions on this topic?

Slide 6

Academic Integration



Academic help from peers: comment

- Are you comfortable with requesting help from peers? How would you go about doing this?

Academic help from lecturers: comment

- Are you comfortable with requesting help from your lecturers? How would you go about doing this?

Academic Support services: comment

- Would you seek help from Academic support? What kind of help would you request?

Slide 7

**Do you have any closing remarks,
comments or suggestions before we
conclude**

Thank you for participating in this focus group
interview
Danki, Siyabonga



Slide 8

APPENDIX G: Job category grouping

The eight major job groups are:

1. Managers
2. Professionals
3. Technicians and Associate Professionals
4. Clerical Support Workers
5. Service and Sales Workers
6. Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, Fishery, Craft and Related Trades Workers
7. Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers
8. Elementary Occupations

Figure 1 below provides an indicative comparison between the skill level of occupational groups with the National Qualifications Framework as well as with the entry, intermediate and advanced levels referred to in the National Skills Development Strategy.

A mapping between ISCO skill levels and levels of education in ISCED 97 is provided in Table 1 below.

ISCO – 08 Skill Level	ISCED-97 groups
4	6 – Second stage of tertiary education (leading to an advanced research qualification) 5a – First stage of tertiary education. 1 st degree (medium duration)
3	5b – First stage of tertiary education (short or medium duration)
2	4 – Post-secondary, non-tertiary education 3 – Upper secondary level of education 2 – Lower secondary level of education
1	1 – Primary level of education

NSDA		NQF Levels KILL Level	OFO Major Groups			
HIGH	10 ↑ 7	4	2 Professionals		1 Managers	
			3 Technicians and Associate Professionals			
INTERMEDIATE	6	3	3 Technicians and Associate Professionals			
	5	2	4 Clerical Support Workers	5 Service and Sales Workers	6 Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, Fishery, Craft & Related Trades Workers	7 Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers
	4					
ENTRY	3	1	8 Elementary Occupation			
	2					
	1					

