

## Students' Experiences Regarding Diversity and Their Academic Self-concept in a South African Institution

Dumisile M. Mndawe, Choja Akovire Oduaran and Victor Chidi Onyencho\*

*Community Psychosocial Research Entity, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Mafikeng, South Africa*

*\*E-mail: victorchid01@yahoo.com*

**KEYWORDS** Colleges. Cross-culturalism. Learner's Exploit. Peer Influence. Self-awareness

**ABSTRACT** Being exposed to different cultural diversity during the transition from high schools to higher institutions has been found to impact students' performance. Despite this, diversity and academic self-concept have received little consideration. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' experiences regarding diversity and their academic self-concept in a South African institution. This qualitative study adopts an interpretive research design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 9 registered honours students of North-West University since they represent different provinces in South Africa. They were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide, and data analysis was done using a thematic technique. Themes and sub-themes that emerged show that culture, family background, religiosity/faith in God, family socio-economic status, language diversity, peer interaction, previous high school, and students' social interaction were responsible for academic self-concept. It is recommended that policies and programs to support students' academic progression should be incorporated into the academic curriculum.

### INTRODUCTION

Education professionals are required to teach students new cultures, languages and backgrounds due to the increasing cultural diversity in educational institutions. Involvement of individuals from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds, as well as different genders, and sexual orientations, is known as diversity (Oxford University Press 2021). University students, according to Omer (2023), are the most diverse group of people in terms of age, gender, social situation, ethnic makeup, family history, native languages, and level of academic preparation. Given this, failing to adapt to university life could harm a student's perception of their academic abilities. It is documented that diverse experiences assist a variety of college students (Chang et al. 2001, 2003; Omer 2023). Students' personal development such as self-concept is aided by diversity since some of the students are continually exposed to different ideas, especially from other students (Schreiber and Yu 2016).

Self-concept is the term used to describe how people perceive themselves and the value they place on themselves (Meyer et al. 2008). Likewise, academic self-concept is the view of one's general capability in school (Shavelson et al. 1976). Self-concept serves as a subjective and motivating fac-

tor, and it has an enormous impact on the variation in academic accomplishment. As a result, students gained self-assurance and were motivated to succeed in manners that complemented their self-concept. In this context, a student's optimistic self-concept is linked to greater academic success. One of the major determinants of a student's performance is having a positive self-concept (Yilmaz 2014).

As recorded during the 2000 admissions into higher institutions in South Africa, only 38 percent of matriculated students graduated within five years. Most of the problems confronting the students are academic delay, school dropout, poor teaching, and funding difficulties (Pym and Kapp 2013). Adjustment during transition can be problematic for higher institution students due to the unfamiliarity of the environment, and this often requires them to adapt to new coping strategies (Mtshweni 2019). Failure to adjust due to diversity and culture may lead to poor academic self-concept, and psychological distress (Busonera et al. 2023; Omer 2023).

Several studies laid credence to the association between self-concept and diversity (Laird 2005; Núñez 2009). On diversity and academic self-concept, Conway-Turner et al. (2023) assessed the ethnic diversity and academic outcomes of 38,857 third-graders from 278 schools. It was discovered that academic success is adversely correlated with student diversity.

In Michigan, Laird (2005) investigated college students' experiences with diversity and their effects on academic self-confidence, social agency, and disposition toward critical thinking among 289 students. The Classroom-Based Survey of Thinking and Interacting (CBSTI) and the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) were used as measurement tools in the study. It was revealed that students with diverse experiences are more likely to be high on academic self-confidence, social agency, and critical thinking disposition measures.

In a study conducted in Nigeria, Samson (2016) investigated the relationship between diversity, emotional adjustment with academic achievement among 351 undergraduate students. According to the study, there was a strong link between diversity, emotional adjustment, and academic accomplishment. It was further concluded that age and academic motivation are predictors of academic achievement.

Student and teacher relationship has been implicated by previous studies (Gebresilase and Zhao 2023; Gehlbach et al. 2023). Gebresilase and Zhao (2023) investigated the mediational role of self-esteem in the relationship between student-teacher interaction and academic achievements among Ethiopian students. Data were collected from 313 students of Wolaita Sodo University, and analysed with structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis. The study showed that student-teacher interaction positively correlated with self-esteem and academic achievement. This study thus concluded that student-teacher relationship is a predictor of academic self-concept among students. Gebresilase and Zhao study was conducted in East Africa. Therefore, a similar study might be necessary among the student population in South Africa.

On self-concept and academic achievement, Adriano et al. (2023) explored self-concept and academic achievement among 176 first and second-year students. According to the survey, students believe they have a typical self-concept. Students also reported having highly positive social self-concepts. Academic achievement and self-concept are predicted by previous high school attendance, according to Adriano et al. Academic achievement and students' overall self-concept, however, were not correlated.

Ababu et al. (2018) revealed that students who had stronger social support perceived themselves more capable of coping and dealing with academic demands. In another study, Cousins et al. (2017) investigated academic self-concept, social, emotional and institutional attachment among students. The findings showed that peer support was positively associated with academic success, social development, and institutional attachment. This invariably has a positive influence on academic self-concept of the students. This comparative study was conducted among bereaved and non-bereaved students.

In Pakistan, Ashraf et al. (2023) investigated the extent to which religious self-regulation and self-determination mediate the relationship between self-resilience and conflict management strategies among 330 Muslim students. It was found that religious self-regulation fully mediated the path between resilience and conflict management strategies. It was concluded that religious self-regulation plays a significant role in learning and executing effective conflict management strategies. However, this study only considered Muslim students, and this might have skewed the findings.

Dropout rates among South African students have been a matter of concern among the stakeholders in light of the aforementioned established information on students' experiences with diversity and academic self-concept. Based on a report by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) on the South African student dropout rate, only 1 out of 4 students complete their studies in record time. According to Sibanyoni and Pillay (2014), 5 percent of Black and coloured students completed their university coursework within the allotted period. Schreiber and Yu (2016) state several variables that affect students' academic progress. Peer interactions, personal experience, on-campus student culture, and the larger university environment all contributed to academic performance. Factors responsible for academic delay among this population need to be unravelled.

According to Pym and Kapp (2013), students encounter a variety of academic, linguistic, and social issues when they first enrol in college, which affects their confidence and self-esteem. Human-Vogel and Rabe (2015) discovered that most students abandoned their studies in South institutions due to inadequate pre-university education, low proficiency in the common language of in-

struction, inadequate financial support, and inadequate student support services.

According to Schreiber and Yu (2016), students who lack self-knowledge frequently rely on outside guidance from others in their immediate settings and are unable to form a sense of self. Therefore, students who struggle to stand out and develop a distinct awareness of who they are may have trouble developing self-concepts (including academic self-concept). Changes in behaviour are presumed to originate from the changes in self-concept. According to Rogers' (1961) theory of the self, which dates back to 1960, a person's behaviour is significantly influenced by their perception of themselves.

### Objective of the Study

The research therefore aimed to study students' experiences regarding diversity and their academic self-concept in a South African institution. Based on the above aims, the following research questions were stated:

1. How does a student's cultural upbringing affect or contribute to how they view themselves academically?
2. To what extent does linguistic disparities, prior education and peer interactions affect students' perceptions of their academic self-concept?

## METHODOLOGY

### Design

This qualitative study adopts an interpretive research design. The study methodology was deemed suitable for this study because the design helps to generate information relevant to the topic of interest.

### Population

Participants were chosen based on their North-West University (NWU) experiences as well as their affiliation with the Faculty of Humanities. Undergraduate students from the Department of Psychology were selected from different provinces across the South African region for the interviews.

### Sample Size and Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 9 (2 males and 7 females) registered honours

students of North-West University since they represent different provinces in South Africa. The sample size was sufficient to meet the study's aims, as evidenced by data saturation (Clarke and Braun 2013). Participants were carefully chosen because they could provide insights that were relevant to the research problem, had long-term exposure to university-related factors, understood psychosocial processes through their academic training, and could provide better answers to the research questions than other participants. In a qualitative study, the ceiling of participants is mostly determined when saturation is achieved.

### Procedure

At a different time, each participant underwent an interview in a calm, confidential setting within the faculty of health science at NWU. Open-ended questions were incorporated into the interview schedule to help elicit in-depth explanations of the participants' experiences. The sessions were audio-recorded for later transcription. English language was used for every session of the interview which lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. Individual interviews have an exclusive concentration on the individual, which offers an opportunity for in-depth investigation into the person's viewpoints on the subject of interest (De Vos et al. 2011).

### Ethical Considerations

The Human Research Ethics Council (HREC) granted its approval for the ethics. It was given the ethical approval code NWU-HS-2017-0179. The researchers addressed issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and protecting participants from harm. To record the talk and obtain informed consent for participation, written consent forms were signed. All study-related information was kept in a computer with a password. Pseudonyms were used in the text that was transcribed to maintain anonymity and protect the participants' identities.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The information pertaining to the study question is broken down into important concepts by a theme. Thematic analysis assisted the researchers in making links between the experiences and views of stu-

dents with regard to diversity within the university context.

## RESULTS

The following themes and sub-themes were formed based on the interview conducted. Academic self-concept of students, secondary school setting and changes in academic self-concept, academic self-concept and the university environment, psychosocial variables that affect academic success and self-concept, and cultural factors that affect academic success and self-concept.

### Academic Self-concept of Students

Based on the following excerpts, it was shown that academic self-concept of students increased in correlation with their performance levels.

*"I consider myself to be dedicated. I am aware that some modules are challenging for me, but I never allow it to get to me. I always make an effort to work hard and give it my all..."* (P5)

*"Because you didn't get an A in matriculation, I came to the conclusion that you wouldn't do any better in university. I didn't obtain any distinctions for my Matric grades, but after I began university, I started getting them..."* (P1)

### Secondary School Setting and Changes in Academic Self-concept

The following extracts show how participants, who had previously considered themselves to be average performers, indicated that their academic performance had improved, enabling them to earn distinctions at the university level.

*"Looking back at my journey from high school to the present, I have had the chance to learn new things. Consequently, you develop self-awareness as you age. I am more aware of who I am now than I was in high school..."* (P3)

*"Though I don't think I was as diligent as I am today. I didn't think Honours was for me at first, but as I started working harder, it's safe to say that my academic development has improved from when I was in high school..."* (P8)

### Academic Self-concept and the University Environment

According to this study, a significant factor in students' academic achievement includes the fol-

lowing sub-themes of pressure or demands from the classroom, group participation, relationships with peers, experiences relating to diversity, and influence of academics.

### Pressure or Demands from the Classroom

It is clear that as students advance in their education, there are more academic expectations at each level they reach, with post-graduate work experiencing the most academic strain.

*"Every year, there is a heavy workload that requires you to work harder than the year before. As a result, you must be adaptable if you want to fit in because the workload grows yearly..."* (P9)

*"I am aware that when under pressure, I work harder than when I have more time..."* (P2)

### Group Participation

It is clear that participating in schoolwork frequently entails engagement with fellow students in terms of group participation. The following statements made by participants reflect how participation in groups encouraged the acquisition of new knowledge, learning from peers, and contributing knowledge to the group:

*"I think I learned a lot from the way they engage us in group activities during undergraduate studies. I have to understand that people are unique and embrace them for who they are. In light of my undergraduate experience, I genuinely believe that I was very mature by the time I reached this level of honours..."* (P2)

*"I've come to the realisation that I can't just work in a group but also be able to accept individuals for who they are, comprehend them, and understand them as they want to be understood. Working as a team is essential..."* (P1)

### Relationships with Peers

Students have the opportunity to interact with other students they meet in the university setting. According to the present research, students value peer support more and get inspiration from one another, as exemplified by the following statements:

*"I've discovered that living alone without others is impossible for a person. For instance, as I am currently pursuing my Honours degree, I must go out and ask others who are pursuing Master's*

*degrees for prior question papers. If it weren't for socialisation, I would not be able to obtain this help. I was probably going to fail...*" (P1)

*"My friends' will respond with something like, 'Just study, try your hardest, and you know you have done this before, so you know you can do it again.' This is the way they encourage me to work hard..."* (P9)

### **Experiences Relating to Diversity**

The extracts below show how participants believed that their dealings with diversity in the academic setting had always been good.

*"Varsity allowed me to interact with a wide range of people while preserving my individuality. During my first year, I only occasionally dealt with white people, instead here, I mostly interacted with Swati and Zulu speakers. While attending varsity, I had the wonderful opportunity to interact with people from many backgrounds..."* (P5)

*"I've come to understand that we are unique individuals with diverse cultures and worldviews. I made the decision to live as a person who accepts others for who they are and does not permit others to impose their beliefs on me..."* (P1)

### **Influence of Academics**

Participants acknowledged that academic success was greatly influenced by university employees, particularly lecturers. The following phrases illustrate how important academics' contributions to university curricula and teaching methods are to students' academic success.

*"I will say that lecturers also contribute to a student's academic life because they encourage you to accomplish your coursework effectively and provide information you did not know..."* (P9)

*"The teaching style at the university differs from that in high school. I thought the university one was a lot simpler than the high school one. During presentations, they employ projectors...I performed really well in my undergraduate work since it was simpler..."* (P2)

### **Psychosocial Variables That Affect Academic Success and Self-Concept**

It has been demonstrated that psychosocial factors influence students' academic success. The

following sub-themes have been identified of student social roles, prior schooling/education and enrollment in the university, and student assistance.

### **Student Social Roles**

Participants disclosed that they played a variety of responsibilities in their social and academic lives. This reinforces research showing that students' social backgrounds have an ongoing influence on them in higher education, as summarised in the assertions below.

*"Even when I have to complete academic-related tasks, I am a very responsible person when it comes to my schoolwork; I have to consider my character, my background, and how my family views me. So, that brought in responsibility that whenever we needed to submit an assignment, I had to do it..."* (P2)

*"Everything can be achieved when you have discipline, thus I didn't face any obstacles thanks to my discipline and awareness of my goals, origins, and future aspirations..."* (P6)

### **Prior Schooling/Education and Enrollment in the University**

According to the following responses, students in this survey also believed that their former teachers had influenced them and prepared them for their studies.

*"Yes, in a way. I wouldn't say it was the high school, but they really pushed us to work hard, and I had a few teachers who told us that if we got to varsity, it would be up to us to drive ourselves to class. As a result, whenever I hear what they stated, they just keep repeating themselves, and I know what I need to do..."* (P7)

*"In high school, I had these two teachers for English and Life Sciences, who inspired and supported me, which improved my sense of self and self-worth and gave me the confidence to feel that I could accomplish more..."* (P3)

### **Student Assistance**

Students' ability to remain resilient and cope with the demands and stresses of their studies appears to be significantly influenced by the assistance they receive from people outside the aca-

demographic setting, particularly from family and friends. The following statements were extracted in respect of students' assistance.

*"Their assistance does in fact affect how well I do in school. Even if I sometimes feel just exhausted, I try not to play here at school because of the sacrifices they have made for me at home and their support..."* (P5)

*"My family has been quite influential, especially when it comes to my cousins, who have helped shape the things I am doing today. I'm the only student in varsity at home right now, and all of my younger cousins are married with kids. I thus wished to serve as an example..."* (P1)

### **Cultural Factors That Affect Academic Success and Self-concept**

Cultural influences were discovered to contribute to students' academic success and self-concept. This is demonstrated by the various roles that students play, which come from their neighbourhoods, families, and academic institutions. These surroundings eventually collide and have an ongoing impact on personal development.

#### **Family History/Culture**

The study's findings demonstrate the importance of family engagement and their encouragement for students' academic success, particularly when they face challenges in both their schoolwork and personal lives. The following extracts illustrate this point.

*"I'll admit that how I interact with my lecturers and fellow students has a bearing on who I am and how well I achieve academically because you have to cherish and treat others with respect. Therefore, my culture influences how I interact with other people..."* (P4)

*"Coming from a disadvantaged family background, I believe that my family has really influenced me in achieving my academic goals. One would truly study hard when they enter varsity, therefore that is when I really pushed myself to study..."* (P2)

#### **Religion as an Influencing Factor**

The following extracts from participant responses demonstrate that participants' beliefs

served as a source of support for them through challenging moments in their studies.

*"In my opinion, I wouldn't have advanced this far academically without my beliefs. I approach my studies with a strong faith in God, and thus I believe that He will help me succeed..."* (P8)

*"I do have a relationship with God; I believe that it is the most crucial relationship to have and uphold. Aside from my family, who give me support and serve as my source of strength, I believe I need to have a relationship with God..."* (P7)

#### **Language Experience in a Multicultural Setting**

Participants also disclosed that, even though their native languages were different, they did not vote on either their preferred language or the language they used to interact with others. Since English is the language of instruction in higher education, it was discovered that participants primarily speak English to one another, as shown by the following statements.

*"Despite coming from different cultures and speaking different languages, we did not discuss which language to use when we wished to communicate. We spoke English and it kind of just flowed effortlessly..."* (P1)

*"Learning about many languages and the conflicts between our civilisations has been an intriguing part of my stay here. Because I am more interested in languages than anything else, I really like that. Additionally, it was about getting to know one another better since the closer we became, the simpler it was for us to talk to one another about schoolwork..."* (P8)

## **DISCUSSION**

In this study, culture is related to the concept of family customs, religious and linguistic issues. Students' experiences contributed to their academic self-concept and achievement. This conclusion is consistent with the mesosystem and macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1974) Ecological system theory, which takes into account the connection between students' backgrounds, lifestyles, and engagement in the institution. Academic success among students is influenced by their family background. Participants in this research believed that the culture of their family and upbringing had an

impact on their academic self-concept and personal growth. Low socioeconomic status has been shown to be an appealing factor for students to be focus and perform well in school. This claim was supported by the Beiter et al.'s (2015) study, which revealed that students highly regard education as a means of improving their own fortunes and those of their families.

Religion has also been connected to students' academic success and resiliency. Participants claimed that religion has an enormous effect on their academic success and personal development. This result supports what Smith and Baratta (2016) indicated about the relationship between religious identification and academic achievement. This finding was further supported by a study from Pakistan that found religious self-regulation to positively impacts learning and conflict management (Ashraf et al. 2023). Despite the fact that the current study was done in a Christian-dominated environment while Ashraf et al.'s study was conducted in a Muslim-dominated environment. Academic self-concept has been shown to be significantly influenced by student religiosity and orientation.

There was linguistic diversity among the students. It was discovered that exposing students to a variety of languages helped them learn and increase their knowledge. However, even outside of the university's structures, students from various backgrounds communicate in English. This finding aligned with Conway-Turner et al.'s (2023) study which emphasised that academic success correlated with student diversity. Students did not see linguistic differences as having a negative impact because the majority of them were able to adapt by speaking English most of the time. However, Bernstein and Chemaly (2017) contend that South African students who are pursuing studies in higher education may experience tremendous stress due to their inability to speak a variety of languages fluently. For this study, participants admitted to speaking more than two languages, which they have continuously learned as a result of the academic environment's diversity.

Most of the students believed that their secondary education had adequately equipped them for advanced education. The engagement of school teachers, who served as motivators and provided them with knowledge and information, led to this proficiency. This finding was supported by Gebresilase and Zhao (2023) study, where stu-

dent-teacher interaction positively correlated with self-esteem and academic achievement. Therefore, previous or current student-teacher interaction influence academic self-concept among students. However, a significant portion of the students claimed that despite their schools' limited resources and location in rural areas, some of their teachers still made sure that students were appropriately educated and guided. According to Naidoo et al.'s (2014) research, the majority of governmental schools in rural areas are not well-founded. Therefore, participants of this study came from different schools, with underfunded schools in some areas. Nevertheless, to ensure that students reached their potential and satisfied the requirements to enrol in a university program, their high school teachers assisted them in becoming ready for higher education.

This study further showed that peer interaction affects students' academic progress and self-concept. Students are introduced to a setting where they can connect with other individuals who have distinct traits from them and forge new relationships. This result is consistent with Vincent and Idahosa's (2014) findings, which suggested that having colleagues with similar roots and aspirations gives students resources in settings where they feel like minorities. Similarly, the study aligned with previous studies where peer support positively correlated with academic self-concept (Cousins et al. 2017; Ababu et al. 2018).

## CONCLUSION

It is therefore concluded that the majority of the students believed that the culture, and family background positively impacted their academic self-concept and personal growth. More importantly, socio-economic status of the student is a motivating factor in academic success and self-development. In addition, religiosity and personal belief in God were also related to students' academic success and resiliency. Linguistic diversity among the students correlated positively with academic self-concept. Exposing students to a variety of languages helps in achieving academic success. Previous educational background or high school attended has an impact on academic self-concept among university students. Lastly, students' social interaction influences academic progress and self-concept in this study. Introducing students to group activities helps them to understand diversity and self-growth.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevant stakeholders need to recognise the importance of individual differences such as family background, culture, linguistic differences, religious orientation, previous schools attended, and peer factors when assessing academic excellence or students' academic self-concept. Having done this, dropout rates among students would be viewed from different perspectives, rather than being seen as a lack of intellectual capacity or dedication. Therefore, it is recommended that policies and programs to support students' academic progression should be incorporated into the academic curriculum.

### LIMITATIONS

Given that there were 9 participants in total, of which majority came from South Africa's provinces, generalisation of the results may be of concern. Also, out of all the numerous institutions in the nation, just one was used for the study.

### REFERENCES

- Ababu BG, Yigzaw AB, Besene DY, Alemu GW 2018. Prevalence of adjustment problem and its predictors among first-year undergraduate students in Ethiopian University: A cross-sectional institution based study. *Psychiatry Journal*, 5919743. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2018/5919743>
- Adriano MN, Manalastas J, De Jesus E, Salvador O 2023. Profile, self-concept, and academic achievement: An examination of education students' self-concept. *International Journal of Education, Technology and Science*, 3(2): 187-208.
- Ashraf F, Zareen G, Yildirim M 2023. Religious self-regulation, self-determination, resilience, and conflict management strategies in a community sample of international Muslim students in Pakistan. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 42(3): 323-345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2023.2167255>
- Beiter R, Nash R, McCrady M, Rhoades D, Linscomb M, Clarahan M, Sammut S 2015. The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 173: 90-102.
- Bernstein C, Chemaly C 2017. Sex role identity, academic stress and wellbeing of first-year university students. *Gender and Behaviour*, 15(1): 8045-8069.
- Bronfenbrenner U 1994. Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the Development of Children*, 2(1): 37-43.
- Busonera A, Lampis J, Cataudella S 2023. Starting university at the time of COVID-19: psychoemotional adjustment of a group of Italian students. *Journal of Adult Development*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-023-09444-9>
- Chang MJ 2001. Is it more than about getting along? The broader educational implications of reducing students' racial biases. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(2): 93-105.
- Chang MJ, Witt D, Jones J, Hakuta K (Eds.) 2003. *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities*. United States: Stanford University Press.
- Clarke V, Braun V 2013. Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2): 120-123.
- Conway-Turner J, Williams J, Winsler A 2023. Does diversity matter? School racial composition and academic achievement of students in a diverse sample. *Urban Education*, 58(6): 1085-1117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920902257>
- Council on Higher Education 2013. *A Proposal for Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa: The Case for a Flexible Curriculum Structure*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Cousins C, Servaty-Seib HL, Lockman J 2017. College student adjustment and coping. *Omega (Westport)*, 74(4): 386-409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222815598911>
- De Vos AS, Strydom H, Fouche CB, Delpont CSL 2011. *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.
- Gebresilase BM, Zhao W 2023. The Mediating role of self-esteem on the relationship between teachers students interaction and students academic achievement of Wolaita Sodo university students. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1): 243-69. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.111019>
- Gehlbach H, Mascio B, McIntyre J 2023. Social perspective taking: A professional development induction to improve teacher-student relationships and student learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 115(2): 330.
- Human-Vogel S, Rabe P 2015. Measuring self-differentiation and academic commitment in University students: A case study of education and engineering students. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 45(1): 60-70.
- Laird TN 2005. College student's experiences with diversity and their effects on academic self-confidence, social agency, and disposition toward critical thinking. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(4). <https://doi:10.1007/s11162-005-2966-1>
- Meyer WF, Moore C, Viljoen HG 1997. *Personology: From Individual to Ecosystem*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- Mtshweni BV 2022. Adjustment and socioeconomic status: How do these factors influence the intention to dropout of university? *South African Journal of Psychology*, 52(2): 262-274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463211059141>
- Naidoo U, Flack PS, Naidoo I, Essack SY 2014. Secondary school factors relating to academic success in first year Health Science students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 28(4): 1332-1343.
- Núñez A 2009. Modeling the effects of diversity experiences and multiple capitals on Latina/O College students' academic self-confidence. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(2): 179-196. <https://doi:10.1177/1538192708326391>
- Omer S 2023. Social adjustment challenges of first-year students: peer influence, misuse of freedom, ignorance of life skills management, living in anxiety and guilt.



- In: Peter Aloka, Kananga Robert Mukuna (Eds.): *Handbook of Research on Coping Mechanisms for First-Year Students Transitioning to Higher Education*. Pennsylvania: IGI Global, pp. 160-173. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-6961-3.ch010>
- Oxford University Press 2021. *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Pym J, Kapp R 2013. Harnessing agency: Towards a learning model for undergraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(2): 272-284.
- Rogers CR 1961. *On Becoming A Person: A Psychotherapist View of Psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Samson J 2016. *Relationship Between Social, Emotional Adjustment With Academic Achievement Of Undergraduate Students*. Doctoral Dissertation, Unpublished. Kaduna State-Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.
- Schreiber B, Yu D 2016. Exploring student engagement practices at a South African university: Student engagement as reliable predictor of academic performance. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(5): 157-175.
- Shavelson RJ, Hubner JJ, Stanton GC 1976. Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research*, 46(3): 407-441. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543046003407>.
- Sibanyoni N, Pillay R 2014. 'Like playing with fire under a hut'-You will get burnt if you do not adjust: Reflections of social work students on adjusting to university life. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 2(1): 96-119.
- Smith PV, Baratta A 2016. Religion and literacies in higher education: scoping the possibilities for faith-based meaning making. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (Cristal)*, 4(2): 68-87.
- Vincent L, Idahosa GE 2014. 'Joining the academic life': South African students who succeed at university despite not meeting standard entry requirements. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 28(4): 1433-1447.
- Yilmaz E 2014. Analysis of students' success in the exam for transition to further education through some of the variables. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 6(1): 57-63.

**Paper received for publication in September, 2023  
Paper accepted for publication in March, 2024**