An exploration of emotion situations and management during the student first year experience

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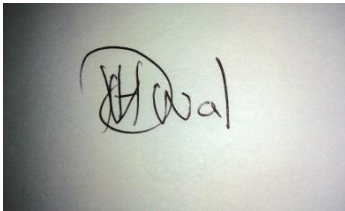
The reader is reminded of the following:

- The editorial style of this research study follows the format presented within the Publication Manual (6th edition) of the *American Psychological Association* (APA) and the guidelines presented by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (SAJIP). The layout of references, tables and figures within this mini-dissertation is presented in accordance with these principles. Furthermore, the abovementioned principles are in line with the policy of the North West University (Potchefstroom campus) Industrial Psychology programme to commit to the APA guidelines in all scientific documents as from January 1999.

- This mini-dissertation is submitted in the format of a research article (Chapter 2). The mini-dissertation consists of three chapters presenting this study's introduction (Chapter 1), research article (Chapter 2) and conclusions, limitations and recommendations (Chapter 3).

- The reader should bear in mind that the length of the research article will exceed the total pages required by most accredited journals. This is due to the richness of the findings and the extensive discussions thereof to ensure that the lived experiences are clearly articulated.

DECLARATION

Declaration of originality of research

I, Henriette van der Wal, hereby declare that "An exploration of emotion situations and management during the student first-year experience" is my own work. Furthermore, the views and opinions expressed within this study are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the reference lists throughout the paper.

I further declare that the content of this research study will not be handed in for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

HENRIETTE VAN DER WAL

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LANGUAGE EDITING STATEMENT

4 December 2016

I, **Ms Cecilia van der Walt,** hereby confirm that I took care of the **editing** of the **mini-dissertation** of **Ms Henriëtte van der Wal** titled *An exploration of emotion situations and management during the student first-year experience.*

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SUMMARY

Title: An exploration of emotion situations and management during the student first-year experience.

Keywords: Emotions, emotional intelligence, emotion management, emotion regulation, emotion situations, first-year experience, performance, student success, transition, well-being.

Tertiary qualifications have become increasingly more popular over the years as matric certificates aren't sufficient in today's globally competitive labour market. Student tertiary graduation is therefore of great importance, not only to the student but also because it promotes positive outcomes for the South African government, the labour market, society and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). However, there seems to be a problem as most of the students who apply drop out during their first year. High drop-out rates not only have a personal effect on the student but are wasting (HEI) and government resources and funds and lead to an unskilled, incompetent and uncompetitive labour market. Thus the investigation into the factors influencing first-year student's success and failure has become important. Therefore increasingly more researchers have begun to explore the significant link between emotion-related factors and student success / drop-out.

The student first-year experience is seen by most students as challenging as it holds emotion-evoking situations that elicit emotions which have to be managed effectively with high emotional intelligent and constructive emotion-regulation strategies in order to achieve student success. However, little is known about the specific emotion management strategies (EI and ER) first-year students choose to utilise during the first-year experience, making it difficult to understand the reasons behind student failure and to create effective solutions to this problem. The general objective of this study was therefore to explore the emotion situations encountered during the student first-year experience and the emotion management strategies employed by these students to manage the elicited emotions within a South African higher education institution.

This qualitative study made use of a narrative and phenomenological research approach. Purposive sampling was used to gather a representative first-year student sample of twenty-

nine (N=29) living both on- and off-campus. Data was gathered by means of two World Café conversations held on campus of which the data were recorded and analysed by means of thematic analysis. Ethical principles and conduct were ensured throughout the research process.

The findings of this study yielded six emotion situations during the first-year experience which included transition and adaptation, demands and resources, negative interpersonal experiences, academic experiences, hostel experiences and student life. Two emotion management strategies were found and were defined as emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER). The (EI)-related management strategies included self-awareness, self-acceptance and growth, social awareness, emotion expression, self-motivation, stress management, trait optimism, low impulsivity, adaptability and emotion used to facilitate thinking. The (ER)-related management strategies found can be defined as situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, response modulation, spirituality and destructive emotional outlet. Further findings included five first-year emotion experiences referred to as a sense of belonging, positive affect, negative affect, high-arousal emotions and pathological emotion experiences. The findings thus illustrate that first-year students experience a variety of emotion situations which they perceive to be both positive and/or negative and that they apply both constructive and destructive emotion management strategies in order to influence their positive and/or negative emotions leading to either student success or failure.

However, this study wasn't without limitations. The population size of twenty-nine participants might be regarded by some as being too small and not diverse enough. Furthermore, the population represented only one university and this resulted in findings that are not representing a multi-cultural and multi-contextual South African first-year student. More so, data collection was done after the initial Registration and Orientation programme and directly after the first exam opportunity in the first semester which might have influenced how the participants recalled their experiences. The participants also seemed to have limited self-knowledge and knowledge regarding emotion-related constructs.

Therefore the following recommendations could be made: Firstly, future research could gather a larger, more diverse sample and one that is representative of more than one university. Secondly, data could be gathered earlier in the year when the student experiences

are still fresh. Thirdly, future research can conduct interviews as the data collection method to gain more in-depth understanding. Fourthly, future researchers can create and apply interventions to develop emotion management strategies and then make use of a developmental (longitudinal) study and lastly, researchers can use the information of this study to build the resources needed for first-year students so as to perform optimally.

OPSOMMING

Onderwerp: 'n Ondersoek na emosie-situasies en -bestuur tydens die studente-eerstejaarservaring

Sleutelwoorde: Emosies, emosionele intelligensie, emosionele hantering, emosionele regulering, emosiesituasies, eerstejaar-ervaring, prestasie, studentesukses, transisie, welstand

Tersiêre kwalifikasies het deur die jare toenemend meer gewild geraak aangesien matrieksertifikate nie toereikend genoeg binne die hedendaagse mededingende arbeidsmark is nie. Studente tersiêre graduering is dus van die allergrootste belang – nie alleen vir die student self nie, maar ook omdat dit positiewe uitkomste vir die Suid-Afrikaanse regering, die arbeidsmark, die samelewing en die Hoër Onderwysinstellings (HOI) begunstig. Daar blyk egter 'n probleem voor te kom aangesien die meeste studente wat aansoek doen, in die loop van hul eerste jaar hul studies staak. Uitsak-syfers het nie 'n uitwerking op die student alleen nie, maar verkwis (HOI-) en regeringshulpbonne en lei tot 'n onbedrewe, onbevoegde en nie-mededingende arbeidsmark. Die ondersoek na die faktore wat eerstejaars se sukses en mislukking beïnvloed, het dus belangrik begin word. Toenemend meer navorsers het dus begin om die betekenisvolle verband tussen emosieverwante faktore en studentesukses / studente se staking van hul studies (uitsak) te ondersoek.

Die studente se eerstejaar-ervaring word deur die meeste studente as uitdagend beskou aangesien die emosie-ontlokkende situasies inhou wat emosies verwek wat doeltreffend met hoë emosioneel intelligente en konstruktiewe emosieregulerende strategieë hanteer moet word sodat hierdie studente sukses met hul studies kan behaal. Kennis rakende die spesifieke emosiehantering-strategieë (EI en ER) wat eerstejaar-studente kies om tydens die eerstejaar-ervaring aan te wend is beperk, wat dit moeilik maak om die redes vir studentmislukking te verstaan en doeltreffende oplossings vir hierdie probleem te vind bedink. Die algemene doel van hierdie studie was dus om die emosiesituasies wat tydens die studente se eerstejaar-ervaring teëgekom word en die emosiehantering-strategieë wat hierdie studente inspan om die verwekte emosies in Suid-Afrikaanse Hoër Onderwys Instellings gevolg word, te verken.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie het 'n narratiewe en fenomenologiese navorsingsbenadering gevolg. Doelgerigte steekproefneming is benut om 'n verteenwoordigende eerstejaarsteekproef van nege en twintig (N=29) studente wat sowel op- as af-kampusverblyf het, te bekom. Data is ingesamel deur middel van twee "World Café" gesprekke wat op die kampus gevoer is, waarvan die data op band opgeneem en geanaliseer is aan die hand van tematiese analise. Etiese beginsels en gedrag is deur die hele navorsingsproses heen verseker. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie het ses emosiesituasies tydens die studente se eerstejaar-ervaring opgelewer, wat transisie en aanpassing, eise en hulpbronne, negatiewe interpersoonlike ervaringe, akademiese ervaringe, koshuiservaringe en die studentelewe ingesluit het.

Twee emosiehantering-strategieë is bevind en as emosionele intelligensie (EI) en emosieregulering (ER) gedefinieer. Die (EI)-verwante hanteringstrategieë het bewustheid van die self, selfaanvaarding en groei, sosiale bewustheid, uitdrukking van emosie, selfmotivering, streshantering, eienskap-optimisme, lae impulsiwiteit, aanpasbaarheid en emosie wat aangewend word om denke te fasiliteer ingesluit. Die (ER)-verwante hanteringstrategieë wat aangetref is, kan gedefinieer word as situasie-seleksie, situasie-modifisering, aandagaanwending, kognitiewe verandering, responsmodulering, geestelikheid en destruktiewe emosionele uitlating.

Verdere bevindinge het vyf eerstejaar emosie-ervaringe (waarna verwys word as 'n sin vir behoort aan), positiewe affek, negatiewe affek, hoogs ontlokkende emosies en patologiese emosieservaringe ingesluit. Die bevindinge dui dus daarop dat eerstejaar-studente 'n verskeidenheid emosiesituasies ervaar wat hulle as beide positief en/of negatief waarneem, en dat hulle beide konstruktiewe en destruktiewe emosiehantering-strategieë toepas om hul positiewe en/of negatiewe emosies te beïnvloed, wat lei tot óf studentesukses óf studentemislukking.

Beperkinge in hierdie studie is egter nie uitgesluit nie. Die grootte van die populasie, naamlik nege en twintig deelnemers, kan deur sommige beskou word as te klein en nie divers genoeg nie. Voorts het die populasie slegs een universiteit verteenwoordig en dit het daartoe gelei dat bevindinge nie 'n multi-kulturele en multi-kontekstuele Suid-Afrikaanse eerstejaar-studentepopulasie verteenwoordig nie. Te meer nog, is data-insameling na die aanvanklike Registrasie- en Oriënteringsprogram en direk na die eerste eksamengeleentheid in die   eerste

semester ingesamel, wat die wyse waarop die deelnemers hul ervaringe opgeroep het, moontlik kon beïnvloed het. Dit het ookvoorgekom of die deelnemers oor beperkte selfkennis en kennis van emosieverwante konstrukte beskik het.

Die volgende aanbevelings kon dus gemaak word. Eerstens kan toekomstige navorsing 'n groter, meer diverse steekprof insamel en een wat meer as een universiteit verteenwoordig. Tweedens kon data vroeër in die jaar, toe die studente se ervaringe nog vars was, ingesamel gewees het. Derdens kan toekomstige navorsing intervensies ontwikkel en toepas om emosiehanteringstrategieë te ontwikkel en dan van 'n ontwikkelingstudie (longitudinale studie) gebruik te maak en laastens kan navorsers die inligting van hierdie huidige studie gebruik om die hulpbronne wat vir eerstejaarstudente nodig is om optimaal te presteer, uit te bou.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation focuses on exploring the emotion situations, experiences and the emotion management strategies used among first-year university students. The emotion management strategies explored within this study includes emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER). The following chapter (Chapter 1) discuss the problem statement, research objectives, research approach and research design. A chapter summary will is also included.

1.1   Problem statement

Student success can be seen as an important milestone in any student's life and an important topic because of the influence it has on and across industries, professional careers and the labour market. Student success rates also have a major influence on the South-African government development goals, the Department of Higher Education and Training strategic plans and the National Development Plan being the 2030 vision of ten million graduates (Human Sciences Research Counsel [HSRC], 2008; National Planning Commission [NPC], 2012; Statistics South Africa, 2013).

However, due to the nature of the world's fast growing economy, technology and infrastructure the labour market has increased employability demands and skill requirements, making it much harder for young South-Africans to get employed, especially without sufficient qualifications (Solidarity Research Institute [SRI], 2015). According to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme [NSFAS] (2011) and Carnevale and Desrochers (2003) this leaves high school students with no other option than to obtain a tertiary qualification, as a matric certificate is no longer sufficient within the labour market. The Centre for Higher Education Transformation [CHET] (2012), NSFAS (2011) and SRI (2015) therefore propose a tertiary qualification to improve chances of employment and to perform better within the labour market due to their higher levels of education and expertise.

It is evident from the investigation of statistical data obtained from the Council on Higher Education [CHE] (2015) and the Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] (2015), with regard to the most recent student success rates, more and more high school students apply at a public higher education institution every year. The Department   of

Education indicated within 2001 that South Africa's higher education success rates are amongst the lowest in the world (DHET, 2014; Letseka & Maile, 2008). In evidence of this, CHET (2015) also states that South-Africa's graduation rates for 2011 was 15% compared to the international rates of 25%. Later on, this is still a disappointing and shameful matter as DHET (2015) indicates that the graduation rate for all public higher education institutions was 18.4% within the year 2013. In further evidence of the low percentage of success rates across universities, the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) also reports that only 15-30% of students graduate within their designated time and 45% of students drop-out prematurely (Ekermans, Delport & Du preez, 2015; Mabelebele, 2012). According to Sibanyoni and Pillay (2014) South-Africa's student success rates are even lower amongst undergraduates.

When looking at the CHET (2013) and DHET (2015) outputs of 2013 it seems as if the overall success rates across public Higher Education Institutions are slowly but surely increasing. However, despite the rapid increase in enrolment rates, the slow increase in undergraduate success rates remain shamefully low. Braxton and Hirschy (2005), Badat (2010) and HSRC (2008) refer to this as a waste of student potential and government funds (approximately R4.5 billion). As a response to the aforementioned, Sibanyoni and Pillay (2014) contemplated that it is each higher education institution's responsibility to actively implement strategies in order to improve undergraduate student success rates.

Braxton and Hirschy (2005) maintain that predicting post-secondary student success rates is in fact a very complex process as first-year students experience a vast variety of factors during transition that influences their chances of succeeding. Researchers thus started investigating aspects of the first-year experience in order to address this issue. However, these research studies mainly focused on psychosocial (Sommer & Dumont, 2011), biographical, institutional (Ramrathan, 2013), social-economical, academic/cognitive and demographical (van Zyl, Gravett & de Bruin, 2012) aspects with regard to the first-year experience.

Recently, research emphasis rather is centred on the emotion-related aspects and emotionality within the student's emotion experience with regard to student emotional health and well-being (Berrett & Hoover, 2015), emotions and learning (Dymnicki, Sambolt & Kidron, 2013) and the important role played by emotions and emotion-related constructs during transition (Mcmillam, 2013). Among these emotion constructs, emotional intelligence and its

significant impact on students' academic performance, sustained student success and well-being received a large amount of research-related attention (Delport, 2014; Ekermans et al., 2015; Maraichelvi & Rajan, 2013).

Interestingly, Parker et al. (2004) and Pancer et al. (2000) stated within the last decade that the majority of first-year students drop out from university before graduating, not due to reasons related purely to cognitive competencies, academic or financial problems, but rather poor emotional and social competencies they apply in order to cope with the unique situations during the first-year experience. Further studies undertaken by Mcmillam (2013) suggest that first-year students' emotions can be regarded as a better predictor of a student's academic performance than purely academic and cognitive competencies. Pool (1997) supports this by stating that first-year students' emotions and their emotional well-being are the strongest predictors of student academic success. Mcmillam (2013) and Swanepoel (2014) contemplate that, as a result of the challenging transition, first-year students experience a large variety and rich diversity of intense emotions which might influence their chances of succeeding.

It can be summarised from multiple research studies that high school students find the transition process to university stressful as it leads to a time of great change and adaptation that might negatively influence their chance of succeeding and their well-being (Modipane, 2011; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014; Vaez & Laflamme, 2008; van Zyl, Gravett & de Bruin, 2012). Various researchers contemplate that as many as 40% of students experience this transition as stressful and unmanageable as they are faced with a variety of unfamiliar and anxiety-provoking challenges they need to overcome; if not, they will ultimately drop out (Liamputtong, 2011; Modipane, 2011; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2004; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014; van Zyl et. al., 2012).

Some of the distressing challenges first-year students are confronted with include building and modifying relationships, increased academic expectations (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994), adapting to new learning approaches and a new learning environment (Christie et al., 2008), increased workload, demands and academic expectations and managing negative emotions (Mcmillam, 2013), trying to balance complex academic responsibilities with other pursuits (Chow, 2007) and learning to manage time and finances more effectively Parker et al. (2006). Berrett and Hoover (2015) and Vaez et al. (2008) further suggest that these challenges, among others, might lead to the rising concern of psychological health   problems

among first year students, which negatively influence both student well-being and student performance.

International research studies identified a predictable pattern of stages first-year students experience during their transition from high school to university, this pattern is referred to as the "W-Curve" of the first-year experience (Zeller & Mosier, 1993), these stages can be understood as: The *honeymoon stage* (the affective experience before the transition begins, such as feeling excited and positive anticipation), the *culture shock* (facing the reality of becoming a tertiary student and being forced to adjust accordingly. Students may experience the transition as positive or negative during this stage), *initial adjustment* (students adapt a sense of personal well-being and success when they feel that they are successfully coping with transition), *mental isolation* (students might experience feelings of homesickness) and the *acceptance/integration stage* (students fully understand the reality of higher education and establish their own place within this new learning environment) (Zeller & Mosier, 1993).

The conclusion can thus be drawn that it is perfectly normal for first-year students to experience a combination of positive and negative emotions during each stage of the transition process (Delport, 2014; Mcmillam, 2013; Swanepoel, 2014). The aforementioned clearly indicates that emotions play an important role within the first-year experience and the road towards student success, performance and well-being (Ekermans et al., 2015; Maraichelvi & Rajan, 2013; Mcmillam, 2013; Parker et al., 2004).

This leads us to the question as to what emotionality is. The way in which emotions are theoretically defined by various researchers indicates that there is no fixed universally accepted definition regarding emotions. However, for purposes of this study, Plutchik's (2001) theory of emotions will be best suited for this study as it conceptualises an emotion as a sequence of reactions to a chain of stimulus events which includes cognitive evaluation, positive and/or negative feelings, physiological changes, action tendencies and behaviour outwards. Emotions are thus internal and personal experiences that can be perceived as positive and/or negative (Plutchik, 2001).

Swanepoel (2014) elaborates on this by suggesting that positive emotions experienced can be regarded as factors that contribute to academic success, whereas negative emotions will serve as a barrier to and negatively influence academic success. Empirical evidence (Delport, 2014;

Mcmillam, 2013; Trigwell et al., 2012) further supports this assumption by highlighting that positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope and pride result in higher overall academic performance and student well-being rates due to its strong correlation with components significantly predictive of academic success and well-being.

A few studies indicate that depending on the students' positive and negative affect, students will either retard (negative emotions) or enhance (positive emotions) certain abilities contributing to academic success and well-being. Some of these abilities include cognitive abilities, social abilities, personal growth, adjustability, personal resources and optimism (Baumgardner & Crother 2014; Chidi et al., 2015), academic interest, engagement, and controlling one's impulses (Delport, 2014), academic enjoyment and motivation to graduate (Finch, Peacock, Lazdowski, & Hwang, 2015).

Baumgardner and Crother (2014) introduce (Fredricson's 1998) Broaden and Build Theory of positive emotions to this study in which to establish the importance of positive emotions during the first-year experience. According to this theory frequent positive emotions will lead to the student experiencing even more positive emotions, personal well-being and academic success as he/she builds new and enhances existing personal resources. These positive emotions and resources will serve as a buffering effect against stressors within the first-year experience. Baumgardner and Crother (2014) further state that these resources create an upward spiral effect towards successful life, academic pursuits and overall well-being. In contrast, frequent negative emotions lead to a downward spiral of more negative emotions, limited resources and the inability to build new resources. This inhibits the student from effectively adapt to and cope with transition. Students with frequent negative emotions are also more likely to experience physical and psychological ill-health that directly influences academic success and performance (Ahmad & Rana, 2012; Baumgardner & Crother, 2014; Finch et al., 2015).

However, according to the Affective Events Theory Model (AET) (illustrated in figure 1) certain emotion events have to occur first in order for a positive and/or negative emotion to be elicited and experienced. The (AET) goes on to argue that these emotion situations need to be investigated along with the personal dispositions (trait emotional intelligence) utilised, in order to understand its influence on the emotions experienced (Beal & Weiss, 2005). According to Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) Beal and Weiss

(2005), the (AET) describes emotions within an organisational context. However, this theory can also be applied to and extended within other settings. In this study, however, we applied the (AET) in a higher education environment (the first-year student transition experience). The (AET) model applied in a higher education setting indicates that the first-year student experiences an emotion situation that results in a positive and/or negative emotion influenced by the student's emotional intelligence (EI) trait as a personal disposition which in turn affects the first-year student's attitude and behaviour towards and during the transition.
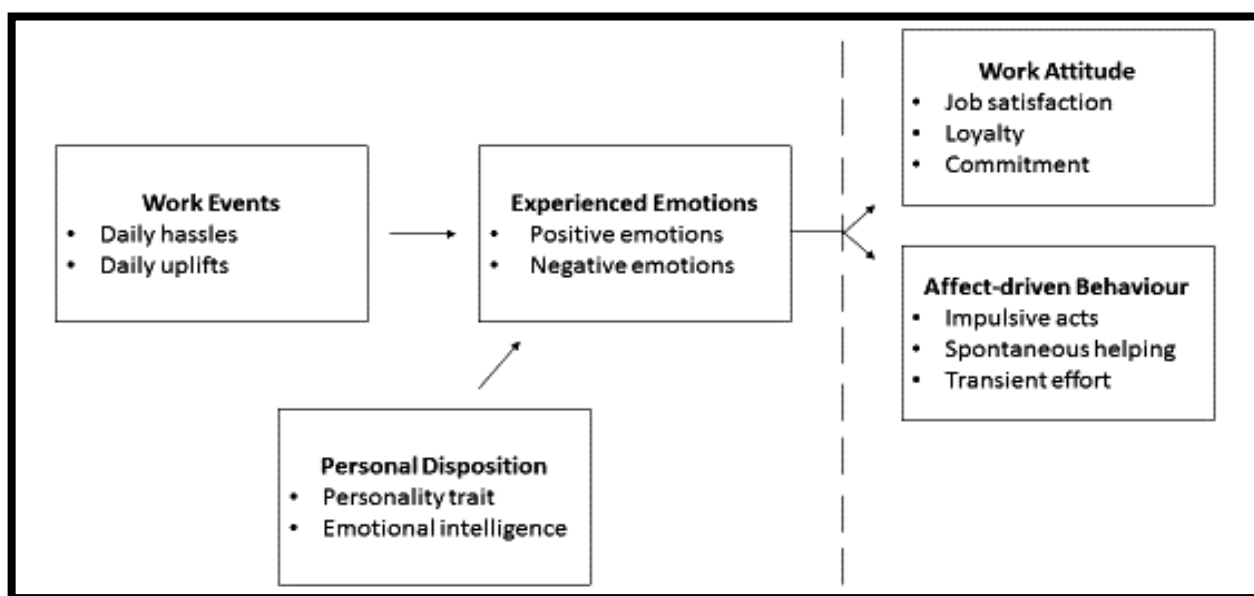
Figure 1: Adjusted Affective Events Theory (AET) model (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002).

For purposes of this study the emotion situation as illustrated in the (AET) model, will be referred to as a situation characterized by a positive and/or negative feeling that is triggered by the interaction between the first-year student and the transition experience, which begins with a triggered feeling and ends with this feeling being diminished. Needless to mention, this situation holds the potential to re-occur (Morgen, Ludlow, O'Leary & Clarke, 2010). The (AET) model thus illustrates that the trait *emotional intelligence* (EI) can be regarded as the emotion management strategy used to influence or rather manage the emotions experienced (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Peña-Sarrionandia, Mikolajczak & Gross, 2015). However, another strategy that has an influence on the first-year emotion experiences and which is

closely related to emotion management is emotion regulation (ER) (Dymnicki, Sambolt & Kidron, 2013; Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015).

The concept emotion management refers to an individual's ability to cope with, control, manipulate, manage and co-construct one's own and others' emotions and emotional reactions accordingly within a certain situation (Erdoğdu 2008; Little et al., 2012). However, Peña-Sarrionandia et al. (2015) specifically integrated and combined two traditions, namely the (EI) tradition and the (ER) tradition as core emotion management strategies and stated that the integration of these two traditions holds more benefit. Various other researchers seem to also regard (EI) and (ER) as emotion management strategies throughout their studies (CHET, 2013; Little, Gooty & Williams, 2016; Little et al., 2012; Oktan, 2011; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2013; Xu, Du & Fan, 2014; Zerbe, Ashkanasy & Härtel, 2006). Therefore, the two main components that will be discussed as emotion management strategies within this study include emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER).

According to Peña-Sarrionandia et al. (2015), Dumitriu et al. (2014) and Mikolajczak et al. (2009), (EI) can be understood within three levels for instance, as a *knowledge* (having knowledge about how to use one's emotional competencies), an *ability* (having the ability or set of skills to practically apply their emotional competence) or a *trait* (a personal emotion-related disposition or an inborn characteristic). Furthermore there seems to be three different schools of thought with regard to (EI), otherwise known as three different (EI) models. Originally Mayer and Salovey (1997) conceptualised (EI) as an *ability-related* model, a pure intellectual and cognitive ability that can be developed and strengthened (Jensen et al., 2007). Other researchers such as Bar-On, R. (1997) and Petrides and Furnham (2001) however, regard (EI) as a *trait-related* model which refers to (EI) as a disposition of an individual's behaviour tendencies and self-perceptions of one's own emotional and social competencies that forms part of underlying personality traits. (EI) as a trait resembles an individual's most likely and typical behaviour within an emotion situation (Mikolajczak et al., 2009).

It was only later that researchers started defining (EI) as a mixture of both intellectual abilities and personality traits which is known as a *mixed model* of (EI) (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso & Cherkasskiy, 2011). Petrides and Furnham (2001) build on this by establishing a new model of (EI) that conceptualises (EI) as a combination of various personality dispositions, social competencies, personal intelligence and ability, of which some include

adaptability, emotion expression, emotion regulation, self-motivation, social competence and trait optimism. However, for purposes of this study, (EI) will be understood within the framework of a mixed model (as an ability and a trait).

Recent findings established that (EI), be it an ability or a trait does in fact play an important role within the education system (Dumitriu et al. 2014) and correlates significantly with academic performance and students' well-being (Cotruş Stanciu & Bulborea, 2012; Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Zahed-Babelana & Moenikiab, 2010). Cotrus et al. (2012) further elaborate on this by stating that social and emotional competencies play an enormous part in achieving life success and reaching one's goals, specifically within the context of a social setting such as an education setting. Furthermore, it is believed by Cotruş et al (2012), Hassan et al. (2009) and Maraichelvi and Rajan (2013), that (EI) is an important predictor of first-year students' academic performance, career and life success, four times more so than (IQ) and that (IQ) alone cannot predict success without including (EI), as it only contributes to about 20% towards academic success.

Downey, Roberts and Stough (2011) further suggest that students with high (EI) are more successful in their academic careers and that they have the ability to cope and achieve better academic results. Dingman (2010) expands on this belief by stating that people with (EI) are also happier, healthier and practise better relationships not only during their time at university but also throughout their personal lives. More so, the conclusion can be drawn that (EI) is of great importance to first-year students as it correlates positively with the Broaden and Build Theory suggesting that (EI) assists students in experiencing more frequent positive emotions, resulting in more personal resources being available to effectively respond to emotion situations (Baumgardner & Crother, 2014; Ekermans et al., 2015).

However, Jensen et al. (2007) indicate that having (EI) does not mean one is immune to experiencing distress during emotion situations; it only suggests that one is able to respond to it more effectively by utilising one's personal resources and (EI) competencies. Mayer and Salovey (1995) and Scherer (2010) ad to this by explaining that emotionally intelligent students are competent enough to regulate their emotions towards effective emotional functioning that may lead to better academic performance and student well-being. According to Peña-Sarrionandia et al. (2015), (EI) should thus be conceptualised as an outcome or

result-oriented process due to the fact that (EI) is the outcome of effective use of emotion-related competencies such as (ER).

Emotion regulation, according to the response-tendency perspective, can be regarded as a process itself during which emotions arise as the result of significant emotion situations, that are manipulated, influenced and adjusted with regard to how the individual experiences these emotions (Gross, 1998). However, for purposes of this study the construct (ER) as an emotion management strategy (Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015) will refer to the first-year student's deliberate motivation to alter, manipulate, modify and manage the emotion experienced, cued by significant emotion situations that serve as a coping strategy and the ability to manage emotions more effectively (Dingman, 2010; Mathew, 2012).

Dymnicki et al. (2013), P. Singh and M. Singh (2013) and Jensen et al. (2007) established that effective (ER) correlates significantly with academic performance, student success and successful transition, whereas emotion deregulation can serve as a barrier to the abovementioned goals. Findings from research undertaken by Jensen et al. (2007) and Dymnicki et al. (2013) suggest that emotion regulation is strongly linked to a student's ability to cope with challenging life experiences. Jensen et al. (2007) goes on to elaborate that students who utilize effective (ER) strategies will most likely choose effective coping strategies in response to their emotions, not only to manage their emotions but also to manage their thoughts and actions towards an emotion-provoking situation. It can thus be concluded that effective (ER) strategies will ultimately contribute to better adjustment and the ability to cope, which in turn is associated with increased student performance and well-being.

Therefore, for purposes of this study, the 5-Point Emotion Regulation Process Model (illustrated in figure 2) can also be regarded as highly applicable as it compliments and ads to the (AET) model suggesting that emotions arise (positive and/or negative) from a significant emotion situation and that these experienced emotions are regulated at 5 points during the situation (Gross & Thompson, 2007); thus serving as an emotion management strategy. The 5-point emotion regulation is described by Moyal, Henik and Anholt (2014) as follows:

1) *Situation selection* - Identifying the situation that can be tailored/influenced externally to increase or decrease the emotional impact. This can also be described as behaviours of avoidance or approach. 2) *Situation modification* - Actively modifying and altering the

situation characteristics externally; thus to create a different situation and then changing the emotional impact thereof. 3) *Attention deployment* - To deliberately change one's attention during and after the emotion situation (internal regulation). This may include behaviour such as distractions, thought suppression and rumination. 4) *Cognitive Change* - To change one's cognitions such as the interpretations, evaluations, about the emotion situation; thus changing the meanings attached to the emotion situation. This includes cognitive reappraisal strategies. 5) *Response modulation* - To adjust and influence one's response tendencies (experiential, behavioural and psychological) provoked by the emotion situation, expressive suppression is a commonly used behaviour strategy here.

John and Gross (2004) state that the first four points of the (ER) process can be seen as antecedent-focused; thus the focus is on "prior to" the emotion situation, whereas the fifth point can be described as response-focused on "after" the emotion situation has generated an emotion. Thus the emotion management strategy utilised within this theory to manage the experienced positive and negative emotions is nothing else than emotion regulation (ER) (Gross & Thompson, 2007; John & Gross, 2004; Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015).
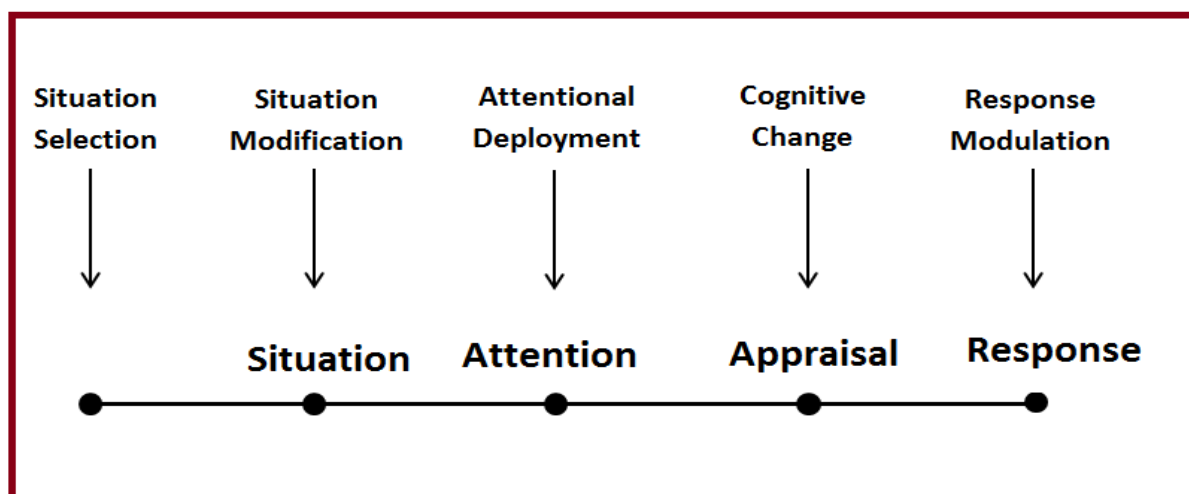
Figure 2. The 5-point Emotion Regulation Process Model (Gross & Thompson, 2007).

Thus far the researcher have touched on the first-year emotion experience process by introducing two popular, applicable and complementary models (The Affective Events Theory and the Emotion Regulation Process Model) which clearly illustrates the fact that an emotion situation results in a positive or negative emotion influenced by either emotional intelligence

(EI) and/or emotion regulation (ER), which will be referred to in this study as emotion management strategies.

To summarise, it seems clear that first-year students experience the transition to university as challenging (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014) and that their ability to effectively manage their emotions elicited from emotion situations, may have a significant impact on their academic performance and well-being (Delport, 2014). However, little is known about the specific emotion management strategies first-year students choose to utilise during the first-year experience. This literature gap makes it difficult to fully understand the reasons behind high student failure rates and therefore results in difficulty addressing this problem in South-Africa. For this reason it has become increasingly important to investigate and explore the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) utilised by students to manage these emotions during their first-year experience.

The aim of this study is thus to explore and investigate the emotion situations that drive an emotional reaction (positive or negative) and the different emotion management strategies they utilise during the first-year experience within a South African higher education institution. Therefore this study will draw upon the Affective Events Theory and the 5-Point Emotion Regulation Model to introduce the combined and conceptual emotion management strategy (EI and ER) model (illustrated in figure 3) used within this study.
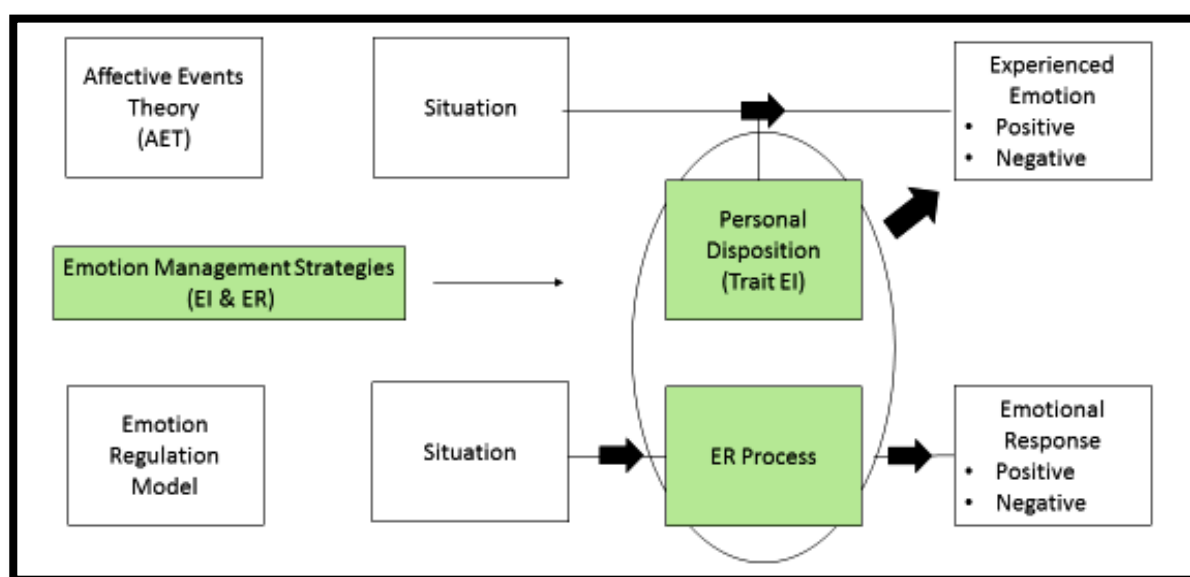
Figure 3. The Conceptual Emotion Management Strategy Model (Illustrates that an emotion situation results in an emotion experience (positive and/or negative) which is managed by an emotion management strategy).

1.2   Research questions

- How are emotion situations, emotions and emotion management strategies conceptualised within and according to literature?
- What are the emotion situations that students experience during their student first-year experience?
- Which emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) do first-year students employ during their student first-year experience?
- What are the emotions experienced by first-year students during the student first-year experience?
- What further recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

1.3   Expected contribution of the study

For the individual (The first-year student).

It helps create awareness within student populations about the expected emotion situations and effective emotion management strategies in order to successfully prepare for and undergo the transition. Developing emotion management strategies in each first-year student will not only contribute to more effectiveness within the HEI but will also be beneficial to other areas in the student's life (such as his/her personal, interpersonal and career life) towards achieving success, adapt more easily in changing situations, better performance, graduation, successful transition and becoming more employable within the labour market. It is thus advisable that further research be done on this topic in order to create and implement interventions to develop first-year students' emotion management strategies which they will then be able to utilise with ease.

For the organisation (The higher education institutions, the labour market and government).

Awareness of emotion situations, the impact thereof and effective emotion management strategies that can be used to develop and implement programs, information and interventions for the students on how to effectively manage the emotional experiences and achieve success. This will contribute towards higher graduation and retention rates across public HEIs with a lower drop-out rate, leaving the HEI with a better chance of achieving actual return on investment, rather than wasting financial investment in unsuccessful students. With regard to the labour market and the government, increased graduation rates will ensure expertise in the labour market, a high employability workforce, a qualified and internationally competitive workforce, improved global competitiveness and government development goals being reached.

For literature

The contribution to literature is that if brings answers and clarity to the aspect of emotion management strategies during transition to university, the management thereof and the effect it has on student success and effective transition. In the field of industrial psychology, career counselling and the educational psychology sub-field support programs will be further researched to assist the first-year students in effectively managing the emotions experienced during transition. To fill the gap in the literature, this research will contribute by providing suitable up to standard interventions and programs to ensure that the first-year students are adequately prepared for the transition in order to graduate.

1.4   Research objectives

The research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

1.4.1   General objective

The general objective of this research is to gain perspective on, to investigate and explore the emotion situations encountered during transition and the emotion management strategies employed by first-year students with a view to manage the emotions elicited from these situations, within a South African higher education institution.

1.4.2   Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research are:

- To conceptualise emotion situations, emotions and emotion management strategies within and in accordance with literature.
- To explore the emotion situations that students experience during their student first-year experience.
- To explore which emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) first-year students employ during their student first-year experience.
- To explore the emotions experienced by first-year students during the student first-year experience.
- To make further recommendations for future research and practice.

1.5   Research design

1.5.1   Research approach

This research study is explorative and descriptive in nature; therefore a qualitative research method is most suited. Qualitative research can be conceptualised as the collection of data in written or narrative/spoken language in order to gain insight into a specific situation or phenomenon within a natural environment, without having to predict a hypothesis in advance (Creswell, 2009). Thus a qualitative research method is appropriate for this study due to its personal and interpersonal nature. This inductive method is also highly applicable due to the desire to explore, gain insight into and fully grasp and describe the subjective human experiences of first-year students regarding their first-year experience (the emotion situations they experience and how they manage these emotions). The descriptive, exploratory and interpretive data were collected by means of storytelling (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011).

The researcher of this qualitative study encourages a social constructivism worldview that is based on a relativism ontology assumption that there are multiple perspectives on reality regarding a situation, phenomenon or experience, and a naturalistic epistemology as it is based on the assumption that knowledge is subjective and maximized by interaction (Ritchie

& Lewis, 2009). Social constructivism can be conceptualised as an individual's understanding of their reality/experience (ontology) (the first-year experience) they are confronted with and the subjective meaning (evaluation, beliefs, attitude) they attach to this reality/experience (epistemology) through social interaction with one another (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Tubey, Rotich & Bengat, 2015).

1.5.2   Research strategy

A combination of narrative and phenomenological research designs are used. A descriptive phenomenological research design is appropriate for this study as the researcher wishes to explore several first-year students' shared subjective experiences regarding a specific and lived phenomenon from their perspectives, such as their first-year experience (de Vos et al., 2011). More specifically, a descriptive phenomenological strategy approach is used in order to investigate and explore several first-year students' shared emotional experiences and emotion management strategies from their perspective. These present experiences include the students' beliefs, emotions and evaluations they have in terms of a specific phenomenon (Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015). A narrative design is also used with regard to the researcher's interest in exploring the emotional experiences and emotion management strategies of university students. The data is thus gathered by collecting the students' stories of their first-year experience (de Vos et al., 2011).

1.6   Research Method

1.6.1   Literature review

At the outset of the study a complete literature review is conducted. The literature review focuses on the following keywords: emotions, emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation), student performance and student well-being. The sources consulted include: relevant academic journals; books, published articles, theses and doctoral studies and other relevant academic sources. Relevant South African Departmental and statistical reports are also consulted. Some of the research engines in use include: Ebsco-host, Science-direct, Google scholar, Emerald, SA-ePublications and the Ferdinand Postma Online Library Search.

1.6.2   Research setting

A World Café setting is designed by the researcher in accordance with the main operating principles for an effective conversation, as indicated by several research outputs (Brown, Izaacs & the World Café Community, 2008; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

The world Café conversation takes place in a dining room on campus of the relevant Higher Education Institution in South-Africa in order to ensure easy accessibility and familiarity. The room is decorated and set up as a Café according to the theme of the conversation, which is "The first-year experience". A welcoming, informal, relaxing, enjoyable, safe and intimate atmosphere is created. The researcher ensures that the room has natural lightning and windows, the room has clear walls that are used as a "wall of thought" to put up the A2-size posters after the conversations. The room is large enough to accommodate fifteen participants as well as the research team, to ensure comfortable rotation and movement throughout the room. The room is also equipped with a large screen as well as a sound system that plays relaxing music in the background during the conversation.

Within this room there are three tables seating five participants at a time. The tables are covered with informal and colourful tablecloths relevant to the theme of the conversation. An A2-size white paper is placed in the centre of each table with the relevant research question written on it, the stationary necessary to be creative in writing and scribbling ideas and thoughts are placed on the table. The researcher ensures that there is enough colourful stationary such as highlighters, markers, stickers and post-its. Each table is decorated with a flower in the centre as well as a bowl of jelly sweets and a tape-recorder. There is a large table with refreshments and necessary dining equipment such as serviettes, spoons, cups etc. The refreshments include hot and cold drinks, pastries etc.

1.6.3   Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Access

The research proposal is sent to the Scientific Research Committee and the Ethics Committee of the specific higher education institution requesting approval of the study. Once consent has been obtained from the scientific committee and the ethics committee to proceed with the

research study, the research continues. Access to the higher education institution in South Africa is negotiated with the Student Representative Counsel of the institution. The research study report (a drafted research proposal containing the research approach, the research strategy, the purpose of the study and the setting) is presented to the Student Representative Counsel for receiving permission to conduct the study on campus. The researcher then builds relationships with certain House Committees of hostels on- and off-campus, as the researcher works through House Committees to access participants. The researcher then arranges an information session with the possible research participants, encouraging their participation and gaining necessary contact details to communicate further information with regard to the World Cafe.

Roles

The Café Host (the main researcher), takes on the general roles of being a researcher by planning the study well through a draft proposal in order to ensure successful implementation of the research method and all its phases (de Vos et al., 2011).

Thereafter, the role of the Café Host is to ensure that the correct operating principles are successfully implemented within the conversation and that the appropriate Café atmosphere is set. The researcher welcomes the participants in a warm and friendly manner to make them feel at ease, demonstrate the conversation process and manage the time of the conversation rounds. The Café Host discusses the purpose and importance of the gathering, stimulates curiosity regarding the research questions, discusses the roles of the research team and discusses consent with partial confidentiality. The researcher also sends out a captivating and creative invitation to participants. During the World Café Conversation the researcher motivates all participants to participate, reminds and encourages them to be creative and to scribble down their thoughts and deeper experiences, ensures that the data is gathered ethically and accurately and debriefs the participants afterwards (Fouche & Light, 2010; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

The Table hosts consist of three research assistants, currently Master's students with experience in psychology and in the World Café method. The table hosts are each assigned to a table and remains at that table to welcome the next group of participants. They then provide a brief summary on what was discussed during the previous round. They assist the Café Host

in recording the conversations and encouraging participation and creative sharing of thoughts (Fouche & Light, 2010; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

1.6.4   Research participants and sampling

A stratified purposeful sampling (non-probability sampling) is appropriate for this study as participants with specific characteristics are encouraged to take part in this study. Participants are selected based on a criterion that would most likely contribute appropriate and in-depth data (Oliver, 2006). The sample is gathered at a higher education institution within South Africa. A selection of participants for this study consists of twenty nine (29) first-year students and until data saturation is achieved. The strata comprise different ethnic groups (language, religion, age, race and gender) and first-year students living both on- and off-campus. The sample comprises individuals selected according to the following predetermined criteria:

- Participants are enrolled at a higher education institution in South Africa.
- Participants are experiencing the transition to university for the first time.
- Participants are willing to participate voluntarily in the research.
- Participants are efficient in both Afrikaans and English.

1.6.5   Data collection method

The researcher strives to utilise a World Café Conversation as a method for data collection. According to Richi and Brannon (2010), the World Café is an acceptable method for collecting data based on collective human emotional experiences and encourages participants to share in their sensitive experiences in the form of storytelling; therefore making this method appropriate for this study due to the fact that the researcher is collecting data based on first-year students' lived and emotional experiences and how they manage these emotions through storytelling and conversation.

After exploring several research studies (Brown, Izaacs & the World Café Community, 2008; The World Café Community Foundation [TWCCF], 2015), the World Café Conversation is conceptualised as a creative data collecting methodology that explores answers to research

"questions that matter" by fostering an intentional constructive conversation and dialogue. This is a method that encourages participants to share their stories and experiences in a Café-like environment in which participants think collaboratively and build on each other's ideas and experiences that lead to collective insight, knowledge and innovative thinking. Thus, this is more than just a conversation, since participants are challenged to identify possibilities and opportunities and to take action.

As mentioned, for purposes of this study a World Café Conversation is utilised as the method for collecting data regarding the sensitive and powerful research questions. Several studies (Brown et al., 2008; TWCCF, 2015), identify main operating principles that need to be implemented and used in combination to ensure saturated and rich data. At first the main researcher sends out an inviting, informative and creative invitation to participants, which captures their curiosity and the theme of the conversation in motivating participants to form part of this study.

The researcher strives to create an environment that is welcoming, informal, relaxing, enjoyable, intimate and decorated according to the conversation theme "The first-year experience". At the welcoming of the participants, the researcher explains the purpose of the gathering, the importance of the theme/research questions, demonstrates the process, provides guidelines, discusses the roles of the research team, discusses the consent form and allocates a table number to each participant to show at which table they are starting. There are three squared tables, each hosting five diverse participants. In the centre of each table is an A2-size white paper each with a different research question. Each Table Host encourages their participants to collaborate in a dialogue, listens carefully and shares their thoughts, ideas and deep experiences with regard to the specific research question/theme. They encourage the participants to be creative, to write, draw and scribble their ideas onto the A2-size white paper with colourful markers and post-its.

Participants are encouraged to jot down their thoughts if they feel too uncomfortable to express it verbally. This results in simultaneous conversation about the themes for approximately twenty minutes, after which participants are requested to move to the next table/theme for a further twenty minutes and then the next. The Table Hosts stay behind and summarise the main themes of the previous group, to the next group.

The researcher then collects the A2-size papers and posts it on a clear wall to share the collective discoveries. This is called "the wall of thought" where participants view their collective ideas and experiences. The researcher then discusses the prominent themes discovered from the conversations with the participants in order to stimulate innovative thoughts around possibilities and creative opportunities to take action towards addressing the themes. The researcher also allows a guest speaker (counsellor) from INGRYP Services to talk to, inform and motivate the participants towards student success for approximately fifteen minutes. The participants are given a self-help brochure at departure that serves as a self-help tool and help-line (Brown et al., 2008; TWCCF, 2015).

As a result of the large sample group (twenty -nine participants), the researcher arranges two World Café's on different dates but with the same sample group. The participants are then divided into two groups of fifteen participants each ensuring enough diverse perspectives during the conversation, yet keeping it manageable. Thus the data form the A2-size posters on the "wall of thought" are collected, transcribed and analysed along with the recordings of both the World Café Conversations.

The "questions that matter" which guide the conversations are: Table 1 – What emotion situations do you experience as a first-year student? Table 2 – What emotions do you experience as a first-year student? Table 3 – How do you manage these emotions or how do you react to these emotions?

Pilot study

A pilot study is completed to obtain advance warning about where the main research project can fail, to identify practical problems in the study and indicate whether the proposed method (World Café) is appropriate and delivers rich data (de Vos et al., 2011).

1.6.6   Recording of data

As part of the World Café Conversations, participants are presented with an A2-size white paper in the centre of each table on which they are encouraged to write, draw and scribble their responses, ideas, answers etcetera to each research question. These posters are collected after the World Cafés and serve as the main form of data collected. Photos are taken of the

A2-size posters as a method of recording the data visually. Recorders are placed on every table recording the important conversations held by the participants. The A2-size posters, photos and recordings remains with the main researcher and are not available for any external source, particularly due to the fact that it contains sensitive confidential information. The data are then coded into different sub-headings and -themes. The participants' responses are held confidential by removing their identity once the data have been obtained. The data is stored in a safe and secured location (de Vos et al., 2011) and saved electronically and under a code ensuring that the data is effectively backed-up.

1.6.7   Data analyses

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe Thematic Data Analysis as a method used to identify, analyse and report themes and patterns prominent within the data. It enables the researcher to organise the data in such a manner that it can be understood and described in detail. Braun and Clarke (2006) and Percy et al. (2015) explain that thematic analysis is widely used in the field of Psychology to address subjective experiences and can be seen as a generic approach compatible with different qualitative methods. The researcher of this study uses a Theoretical Thematic Analysis to analyse the data according to the researchers' pre-understandings and pre-determined themes grounded in theory, yet staying open to and accepting new themes emerging. The Thematic analysing phases that are followed are (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Percy et al., 2015):

- *Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data* - This includes reading and re-reading through all the data gathered in order to familiarise oneself with the data and gain a general perspective, idea and understanding thereof.
- *Phase 2: Generating initial codes* - Code, highlight and note interesting features and patterns within the data that seem to be meaningful. Review the meaningful data by comparing it with the research questions and objectives to decide whether or not the themes are relevant, then discard the irrelevant data.
- *Phase 3: Searching for themes* - The researcher sorts the codes into potential themes and uses co-coders to assist with coding and sorting the data. Simple code names are used during this phase.

- *Phase 4: Reviewing relevant themes* - This includes verifying whether the themes are in relation with the themes extracted; thus refining the themes identified during the previous phase.

- *Phase 5: Defining and naming the themes* - During this phase, the identified themes/patterns are named, defined and described properly by adding meaning and understanding to them by using proper psychological language (as seen in the attached appendices A, B and C).

- *Phase 6: Producing the report of the final analysis* - This includes reporting on the final findings in chapter 2 of the mini-dissertation. The data is illustrated by means of a table and pictures/photographs (of the A2-size papers) indicating the themes and sub-themes. Theme definitions, interpretations and discussions are reported in paragraph format and the findings are compared with and evaluated by existing relevant literature.

1.6.8   Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Other than quantitative research, qualitative research quality cannot be directly evaluated by means of terms such as validity, reliability and empirical generalisation. Therefore qualitative researchers have to pro-actively ensure that they comply with rather different criteria/techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings (Kitto, Chesters & Drbich, 2008). During this study the researcher complies with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, supported by recent studies.

Credibility (Internal validity) – is ensured through *triangulation* where multiple methods of data collection and recording are used. *Reflexivity* is ensured through a personal field journal. *Respondent validation* is utilized, getting the participants' opinions with regard to the themes and the interpretations (Yin, 2011). *Peer debriefing* takes place to validate the research methods, themes and interpretation (Anney, 2014).

Transferability (External validity) - The researcher strives towards a study that is relevant and useful to the public of which the findings can be extended to another context (Kitto et al., 2008).

Dependability (Reliability) – is achieved by co-opting an *independent co-coder* who assists the researcher in sorting the findings, ensuring objectivity and ensuring that the study and process is well-documented, structured and logical (Shenton, 2004).

Conformability (Objectivity) – is maintained throughout the study by means of *triangulation, peer reviews and co-coding,* ensuring that the findings are evident, real and not imaginative or based on desired/pre-determined findings (Anney, 2014).

Pilot study – A pilot study is conducted to ensure that the proposed method (World Café) is appropriate, comprehensive and gathers sufficient accurate, rich and deep data (de Vos et al., 2011).

1.6.9   Reporting

Howitt (2010) points out that the writing of a qualitative report allows for accurate, clear and detailed descriptions of the research findings. A descriptive, qualitative reporting style is used during this study and the findings are reported with great care and sensitivity. The researcher strives to ensure that the reporting style is logically consistent, clear and objective in nature. Throughout the report there are proper chapters, headings and sub-headings ensuring consistency, simplicity and structure. The themes and sub-themes are illustrated in table format and the findings are reported in essay style. The findings and tables can be inspected in appendices A, B and C. Photographs of the A2-size posters are included in this report (as seen in appendix E). However, the findings are descriptive in nature and therefore quite lengthy (Howitt, 2010; Yin, 2011).

1.6.10 Ethical considerations

Barnes and Figley (2005) note that qualitative research studies naturally have ethical complexities and issues that need to be taken into account when working with human subjects. Therefore it is important for researchers to investigate and identify possible research implications, consequences, risks and benefits within this study to address these issues and to protect the participants from harm. This requires of the researcher to fully understand and implement ethicality to the best of his/her abilities and to utilise ethical principles throughout the research process – from start to finish (de Vos et al., 2011). The researcher and research

assistants are *suitably qualified, competent* and experienced within this field of study (Psychology), research and ethics, and counselling, thereby ensuring ethical standards and protocol from the entire team (Department of Health, Republic South Africa [DHRSA], 2015).

The research proposal is reviewed and accepted by an *Institutional Review Board* and the Ethics Committee of the specific Higher Education Institution. Once clearance is obtained the research process continues (Yin, 2011). The researcher obtains agreement and *consent from the gatekeepers* at the Higher Education Institution, such as the Student Representative Counsel of the institution as well as from hostel parents, house committees and relevant class lecturers (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher strives to select the *voluntary* participants equitably. The researcher discusses and explains the *informed consent* and voluntary participation in depth with all participants, including information regarding the research purpose, goal, procedures, confidentiality and privacy of each participant. The researcher also discloses possible reasons for participants to withdraw due to the sensitivity of the topic. Participants are, however, informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the study. The research team are made exceptionally aware of participant confidentiality (Yin, 2011; DHRSA, 2015).

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the researcher takes precautions by arranging that a *registered psychologist* be on the scene during the World Café Conversation. The table hosts of the World Café are Master's students in Psychology with experience in human behaviour and counselling, for the simple reason of being able to easily identify distress in participants and to address the sensitive situations appropriately and with care. *Debriefing* is done by means of the "the wall of thought" where the researcher and participants collectively discuss the themes/findings. This also grants the participants the opportunity of asking research-related questions. As part of debriefing and to provide participation benefit as well as to promote the participants' subjective well-being, the researcher arranges a speaker from the Higher Education Institution's INGRYP Services to provide the participants with a brochure that will serve as a self-help tool and help-line. These strategies are the means for *protecting the participants* from mental harm (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010).

The researcher strives towards protecting the *status and welfare* of the participants during the study and the research team plans this study while taking into consideration respect for the participants' *rights and dignity* (APA, 2010; DHRSA, 2015).

During the data collection, analysis and reporting process the participants' privacy and *confidentiality* are taken seriously by removing all personal information from the data and replacing the identity with a code. The data is restored in a safe and secure setting. The research report is written without any *deception, misleading information or plagiarism* (APA, 2010).

1.7   Chapter division

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Research article.

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

1.8   Chapter summary

Chapter 1 raises awareness of the importance of understanding the first-year students' emotional experience and reports that emotion management strategies are applied in order to fully comprehend the emotion-related factors associated with student drop-out and success. In this chapter a conceptualised emotion management model was discussed and the components thereof, namely emotion situations, emotion management (EI and ER) and emotion experiences. This chapter furthermore discussed the proposed research questions, objectives, approach and method. This chapter thus gives a brief overview of the expected structure of this mini-dissertation.

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN EXPLORATION OF EMOTION SITUATIONS AND MANAGEMENT DURING THE STUDENT FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Orientation: The majority of students experience the transition from high school to a tertiary education institute as rather challenging as they experience a variety of emotion situations which elicit strong (positive and/or negative) emotions within them. These elicited emotions in turn influence the student's performance and well-being contributing to either student graduation or dropout. Therefor the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) utilised to manage these emotions become important.

Research purpose: The general objective of this research study is to gain a perspective of, to investigate and explore the emotion situations encountered during the first-year experience and the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) employed by first-year students to manage the emotions elicited from these situations, within a South African higher education institution.

Motivation for the study: There seems to be a lack of research regarding emotion management strategies influencing first-year student success making it difficult for higher education institutions to address high drop-out and to maintain student retention. This study might help tertiary institutions to address student success more effectively and achieve valuable return on investment. Motivation for this study is to explore the first-year emotion experience by investigating the emotion situations they encountered, the emotion management strategies they utilised (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) and the resulting emotions they experienced during their first-year.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative research approach is used along with a phenomenological and narrative research strategy. Two World Café Conversations were held as method of data collection with a sample of ($N = 29$) first-year students living both on and off a South African tertiary education institutions. The data was then analysed by means of thematic analysis.

Main findings: The students' first year experiences yielded six positive and negatively evaluated emotion situations (transition and adaption, demands and resources, negative interpersonal experiences, academic experiences, hostel experiences and student life). Furthermore, students appeared to have managed their emotions through two prominent emotion management strategies which included emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-

acceptance and growth, social awareness, emotion expression, self-motivation, stress management, trait optimism, low impulsivity, adaptability and emotion use to facilitate thinking) and emotion regulation (situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, response modulation, spirituality and destructive emotional outlet). Further findings illustrated five emotion experiences (a sense of belonging, positive affect, negative affect, high arousal emotions and pathological emotion experiences).

Practical/Managerial implications: If management of higher education is aware of the different emotion-provoking situations experienced by first-year students and the emotion management strategies (effective and dysfunctional) students utilise to manage their positive and negative emotions, these institutions can build awareness programmes, more student psychological resources and other practical interventions to aid students in managing their emotions more effectively. Higher education institutions' investment in better emotion management strategies (EI and ER) of first-year students will reap the benefits of greater return on investment.

Contribution/Value-adding: This study will fill the gap in the literature by providing suitable up to standard interventions and programs to make sure that the first-year students are adequately prepared for the transition in order to graduate. Furthermore, higher education institutions will have higher student retention rates and thus higher financial and resource return on investment in prospective graduates. As a result of more South African tertiary graduates, the labour market will benefit from a more employable, competent and competitive workforce. Even more so, South Africa's government development goals of higher tertiary graduate rates might also be reached if the recommendations of the study are taken further.

Keywords: Emotions, emotional intelligence, emotion management, emotion regulation, emotion situations, first year experience, performance, student success, transition, well-being.

Introduction

Enrolment rates within South African Higher Education Institutions (HEI) increase annually (Centre for Higher Education Trust [CHET], 2016; Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2015) due to society's popular demand for tertiary qualification as a matric certificate can no longer be an ultimate goal within a globally competitive labour market (Branson, 2015; Branson, Leibbrandt & Zuze, 2009). Tertiary graduation is therefore not only of great importance to the student him/herself, but a critical ingredient for generating positive outcomes within the South African government, the labour market and higher education institutions (Bloom, Canning, Chan & Luca, 2014; Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2016; Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014).

However, regardless of increased enrolment, student graduation rates remain disappointingly low (CHET, 2016). The problem is that most newly enrolled students drop out within their first year (CHE, 2016; DHET, 2014; Murray, 2014). Low graduation rates not only have a personal effect on the student as an individual but leaves higher education institutions and the South African government in a predicament as it results in wasted funds and resources (CHE, 2016; CHET, 2016). Moreover, high student drop-out has major negative consequences for the South African labour market, inhibiting a highly skilled, competent, innovative and competitive workforce (Bloom et al., 2014; CHE, 2016; Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014).

As a result, student retention has captured the attention of South African higher education institutions and has encouraged the investigation into factors influencing student success as a means to improve student graduation through the application of comprehensive student success strategies (Pillay, Phiri, Mcnair & Charidza, 2014).

In response to this, researchers started investigating the underlying factors contributing to student failure. Most researchers focussed on non-emotional factors such as financial constraints, institutional environment (Branson, Hofmeyr, Papier, & Needham, 2015), social factors, student background (Mcghie, 2012), socio-economic and political factors (Murray, 2014) and lack of social, academic and financial resources (Tinto, 2014). However, the focus of research recently shifted to the investigation of more emotion-related factors present during the student first-year experience (Du Plessis & Guse, 2016; Martinez, Arnold, Erjavec & Lopez, 2014; Sparkman, Maulding & Roberts, 2012).

Parker et al. (2004) corroborate the important role emotionality plays during the students' first-year experiences by stating that first-year students are more inclined to drop out prematurely due to the poor emotion and social competencies they utilise during the transition to university, rather than because of nonemotion-related factors. Mcmillam (2013) suggests that first-year student emotions can be regarded as a better prediction of a student's academic performance than purely academic and cognitive competencies.

Furthermore it is said that emotions, emotional well-being and other emotion-related constructs such as positive emotions, emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER) can be regarded as the strongest predictors of student academic success, student well-being and effective transition (Martinez, et al., 2014; Sparkman et al., 2012; Valiente, Swanson, Eisenberg, 2012). Swanepoel (2014) also contemplated that the rich variety of emotions students experience during transition, influence their chances of succeeding.

Swanepoel (2014) maintains that first-year students seem to experience a variety of both positive and negative emotions within their first-year experience. Trigwell et al. (2012) and Mcmillan (2013) identify common positive emotions experienced by first-year students as hope, enjoyment and pride etc. whereas, common negative emotions during the first-year experience include anxiety, anger, shame and frustration etc. (Pekrun et al., 2007).

However, the Affective events theory (AET) indicates that before students can actually experience these emotions, they first have to encounter a situation that elicits emotions (an emotion situation) (Beal & Weiss, 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano (1996). Some emotion situations that have been experienced by first-year students as indicated by previous research include having to make new social connections, participating in the initiation process, adapting to an unfamiliar academic environment and managing finances etc. (Clark &Hal, 2010). These situations generate different emotions. The manner in which these emotions are then managed can be seen as the pathway towards student success or failure (di Fabio & Plazzeschi, 2015; Jensen et al., 2007; Martinez et al. 2014; P Singh & M Singh 2013).

The (AET) suggests that individuals apply emotional intelligence (EI) as a way of managing and influencing their emotion experiences and that (EI) can be regarded as the link between the emotion situations and emotions experienced (Ashton-James, 2007). This theory serves as

a basis for understanding the first-year emotion experience process and will therefore be drawn upon in this study.

However, (EI) is not seen to be the only emotion management strategy. Dymnicki et al. (2013) and P. Singh and M. Singh (2013) claim that first-year students apply emotion regulation (ER) strategies to manage their emotion experiences. The 5-point (ER) model also suggests that emotions arise from a significant emotion situation and that the experienced emotions are regulated at five (5) points during the situation (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Therefore the 5-point (ER) model will also be used as a basis for understanding the first-year emotion experiences. To substantiate the use of these two theories collectively to describe the first-year students' emotion experiences, Peña-Sarrionandia et al. (2015) state that greater benefit lies in investigating the integration of (EI) and (ER) as emotion management strategies and that emotion management can be understood as an umbrella term for both (EI) and (ER).

It comes as no surprise that the investigation of emotion situations encountered during transition, the emotions experienced and specifically the emotion management strategies (ER and EI) utilised, have become increasingly important in order for HEI to understand student failure and to implement effective interventions to promote first-year student success.

Literature review

A literature review follows to conceptualise the student first-year experience within a South African tertiary institution. In order to fully comprehend this experience the student first-year experiences (emotion situations), emotion experiences and emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) are discussed separately and in accordance with the sequence suggested by the Affective Events Theory (AET) (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008).

Emotion situations and the student first-year experience

As mentioned, student failure rates amongst newly enrolled first-year students are significantly higher than that of previously enrolled students (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). One might ask why this is. Research indicates that first-year students (FYS) experience the

transition from high-school to university as stressful and overwhelming due a variety of unfamiliar and anxiety-provoking personal, interpersonal and environmental challenges that stare them in the face for the first time (Bernier, Larose & Whipple, 2005; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014).

Some of these new challenges FYS might experience include: Fostering new and existing relationships and adapting to new teaching stiles (Cleary, Walter, & Jackson, 2011), adjusting to new classroom seizes and academic expectations (Wangeni, Kimani & Mutweleli, 2012), managing negative emotions (Mcmillam, 2013), functioning more independently and autonomously (Parker et al., 2006), adjusting to and understanding culture diversity (Tinto, 2014), balancing academics, social life and other extra-curricular activities (Monheit, 2012), and having trouble managing finances (Lloyd & Turale, 2011) etc.

However, perceptions of transition may differ, since some students might experience it as positive, an opportunity for development and personal discovery, others – and sadly the majority of South Africans – experience it as unmanageable and negative (Leibowitz et al., 2012; Mudhovozi, 2012). Interestingly, Mcmillam (2013) states that students who perceive the transition as positive are better equipped to adjust to the transition where those who experience it as negative are more likely to drop out due to their inability to adjust effectively. Berrett and Hoover (2015) further suggest that newly faced challenges might increase psychological and physical ill health and thus negatively influence the chance of supreme academic performance.

Zeller and Mosier (1993), (FYS) add that first-year students experience a predictable pattern of stages during their transition period which is internationally referred to as the W-curve and constitutes the following stages: The *honeymoon stage* (the affective experience before the transition begins, such as feeling excited and positive anticipation), the *culture shock* (facing the reality of becoming a tertiary student and being forced to adjust accordingly, students may experience the transition as positive or negative during this stage), *initial adjustment* (students adapt a sense of personal well-being and success when they feel that they are successfully coping with transition), *mental isolation* (students might experience feelings of homesickness) and the *acceptance/integration stage* (students fully understand the reality of higher education and establish their own place within this new learning environment). To

conclude, it seems fair to say that (FYS) experience a variety of positive and negative emotions towards and during this transition process (Mcmillam, 2013).

Student emotion experiences

The abovementioned leads us to understand that emotions play an important role within the (FYE), serving as a pathway towards student success, performance and well-being (Maraichelvi & Rajan, 2013; Mcmillam, 2013). Thus, how one conceptualises emotionality becomes important. Within this study, emotions can be best conceptualised when bearing in mind Plutchik's (2001) understanding of emotions as a sequence of reactions to a chain of stimulus events which include cognitive evaluation, positive and/or negative feelings, physiological changes, action tendencies and outward behaviour. To simplify, emotions are the internal experiences an individual can perceive as positive and/or negative (Plutchik, 2001).

Valiente et al. (2012) clarify that these positive and negative emotions can be linked to student success and failure respectively. Moreover, it is argued by Mega, Ronconi and De Beni (2014) that emotions play a critical role in an academic and education setting due to its predictive power over academic performance and student success. Grehan, Flanagan and Malgady (2011) and Kingston (2008) add to this by stating that positive and/or negative emotions influence intellectual performance and thus also academic success and student well-being. Positive emotions can be seen as promoters and enablers of certain abilities and traits associated with academic competence and student success.

However, the opposite is also true; negative emotions serve as barriers to and retard abilities and traits associated with academic competence and student success (Febrilia & Warokka, 2011; Pekrun, , 2009; Swanepoel 2014; Valiente et al., 2012). Throughout research it is corroborated that positive emotions such as joy, hope, pride etc. enhance student success (Febrilia & Warokka, 2011; Mega et al., 2014) as it encourages self-efficacy, broader problem solving, better information processing (Valiente et al., 2012), adaptability, more personal resources (Fredrickson, 2013), motivation to graduate (Finch, 2015) complex cognitive functioning and enhances behaviour that fosters positive outcomes (Febrilia & Warokka, 2011).

Furthermore, Fredrickson (2013) states that positive emotions broaden and build a first-year student's personal resources necessary for enabling an upward spiralling effect towards student success. Building these personal psychological, social, physical and intellectual resources will be beneficial to first-year students as it provides for better problem solving and coping within a learning context, more flexible thinking styles, broader thought and action tendencies, improves student well-being, builds resilience and healthy interpersonal relationships needed in order to graduate (Baumgardner & Crother, 2014). However, (FYS) also fall in the trap of a downward spiral due to frequent negative emotions that foster narrow thought-action tendencies, tunnel vision, burnout and disengagement (Finch et al., 2015), poor learning approaches (Ahmad & Rana, 2012) and less social support, which inhibits effective adaptation to transition and hinders graduation (Baumgardner & Crother, 2014).

More so, Mega et al. (2014) introduce us to the fact that within an academic setting, it is perfectly normal for some students to experience both positive and negative emotions towards a meaningful event.

The Affective events theory (AET)

Beal and Weiss (2005) go on to explain that as mentioned, certain emotion events have to occur first for a positive and/or negative emotion to be elicited, experienced and managed. The (AET) illustrates that in order to fully understand (FYSs') emotional experiences, an exploration is needed of the situations that trigger these positive and /or negative emotions and the personal dispositions that directly and indirectly influence the link between the situations and emotion experiences (Beal & Weiss, 2005; Erol-korkmaz, 2010). Furthermore, as stated by Ashton-James and Ashkanasy (2008) and Beal and Weiss (2005), these emotion experiences directly influence the (FYS's) attitude, behaviour and reactions towards the transition and the first-year experience. The (AET), originally developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), can be regarded as a theoretical framework *(illustrated in figure 1)* to explain emotional experiences at work. However, for purposes of this study, the (AET) framework can and will be applied within an education setting (Ashton- James & Ashkanasy, 2008).

The (AET) asses the emotion situations experienced by (FYSs') to be the proximal causes of their emotion experiences and each student's individual disposition can influence and even predict their emotional experience (Erol-korkmaz, 2010). Other researchers argue that

individual pre-dispositions moderate the relationship between the emotion situation and the positive and/or negative emotions experienced (Ashton-James, 2007; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).
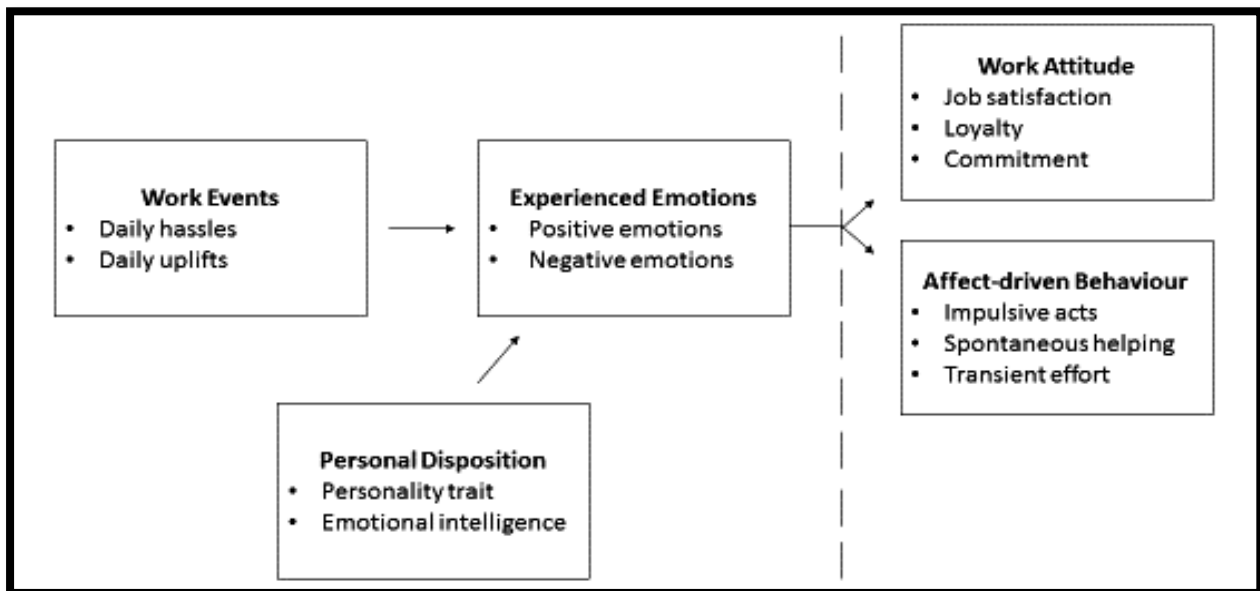
Figure 1: Adjusted Affective Events Theory (AET) model (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002).

Emotion situations as illustrated within the (AET) figure can be conceptualised as a situation characterized by a positive and/or negative feeling that is triggered by the interaction between the first-year student and the transition experience, which begins with a triggered feeling and ends with this feeling diminished. Needless to mention, this situation holds the potential of re-occurring (Morgen, Ludlow, O'Leary & Clarke, 2010). Erol-korkmaz (2010) found that these situations can be perceived as positive and/or negative. More so, personal dispositions as illustrated in the (AET) model and referred to as a method of influence can be understood as individual differences such as trait affectivity, trait emotional intelligence and personality (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008; Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). However, for purposes of this study the focus will be on trait emotional intelligence (EI) as a personal disposition that serves as an emotion management strategy influencing the emotion experiences and thus also the reacting behaviours and attitudes of first-year students (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Grewal, Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015; Shipman, et al., 2010).

Emotion management strategies

Another well-known construct that plays an influencing and managing role in (FYSs')
emotional experiences is emotion regulation (ER) which can also be conceptualised as an
emotion management strategy (Grewal et al., 2006; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015; Shipman,
et al., 2010).

Gross (2015) states that emotions come and go as they please. However, we do have some
control over how we manage these emotions to some extent. This leaves us with the question
as to what emotion management is. Emotion management can be understood as a set of
emotion-related skills, abilities and knowledge to be aware of and to identify one's own and
others' emotions, to monitor these emotions, take control of, modify, manipulate and
appropriately display these emotions within an emotion-provoking situation (Grewal et al.,
2006; Shipman, et al., 2010).

Peña-sarrionandia et al. (2015) describe emotion management simply as an individual's
ability to influence the "which", the "when" and the "how" of emotions, such as which
emotions they experience, when they experience them and how they experience and express
them. Lately, an integrated view of emotion management strategies as a combination of
emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER) has taken researchers by storm
(Grewal et al., 2006; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015; Shipman, et al., 2010). To support this,
Peña-sarrionandia et al. (2015) state that integrating the two traditions of (EI) and (ER) serves
a greater benefit than they would individually. Therefore the focus of this study will be based
on these two main components of emotion management.

Emotional intelligence

Compton (2005) points out that using emotions wisely is intelligence in itself. Kalat and
Shiota (2007) hold the perspective that "emotions are important and intelligence is good so
(EI) must be valuable too" (p. 272). EI can be understood as a multi-dimensional concept
connecting emotions and cognitions (Nasseer, Chishti, Rahman & Jumani, 2011). To fully
grasp (EI) one must first understand the multiple perspectives thereof. (EI) can be
conceptualised as either having the knowledge of how to use one's own emotion
competencies, having the ability to apply these emotion competencies practically or as an in-
born character trait (Dumitriu, et al., 2014; Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015). Thus (EI) can be
understood within three different schools of thought.

The first being the perception by Mayer and Salovey (1997) that (EI) is an ability, a multi-dimensional concept connecting emotions with cognition (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Nasseer et al., 2011). Ability-related (EI) can be seen as a pure intellectual ability which can be developed. It is a four-branched model of inter-related abilities which include: 1) Perceiving emotions − the ability to identify and detect emotions that arise in self and others and the ability to discriminate between these emotions). 2) Using emotions to facilitate thought − the ability to channel and harness emotions appropriately in such a manner that it maximises cognitive functioning such as creative thinking. 3) Understanding emotions − the ability to accurately label and understand emotions. 4) Managing emotions − the ability to appropriately regulate emotions within self and others within a certain situation and might include reducing, enhancing or modifying emotion responses (Team FME, 2014).

However, (EI) can also be understood as a trait, suggesting that (EI) is composed of emotion-related personality characteristics (non-cognitive capabilities) (Austin, Parker, Petrides, & Saklofske, 2008). Seen from a trait perspective, (EI) is seen as a disposition, an individual's typical behaviour tendencies and self-perceptions of emotion competencies (Mikolajczak, et al., 2009; Team FME, 2014). Some of these traits include (trait empathy, optimism, happiness, assertiveness etc.).

Over the years researchers Mayer and Salovey (2011) and Petrides and Furnham (2001) started to conceptualise (EI) as a mixed model concept; hence understanding (EI) as a mixture of intellectual abilities and pre-disposed traits (Perez, Petrides & Furnham, 2005; Team FME, 2014). For purposes of this study a mixed model approach will be the focus. Some of the (EI) (traits and ability) components that will be borne in mind will include adaptability, assertiveness, self-esteem, trait optimism, emotion management, self-motivation, stress management etc. (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

Back to the higher education setting: An abundance of research elaborates on the importance of (EI) within an academic setting as it promotes student academic success and well-being (Di Fabio & Plazzeschi, 2015; Grehan, Flanagan and Malgady, 2011; Joshia, Srivastavab & Raychaudhuria, 2012). This might be due to the fact that (EI) is seen as a better predictor of academic and life success than IQ (Maraichelvi & Rajan, 2013; Yelkikalan et al., 2012). According to Baumgardner and Crother (2014) and Delport (2014), (EI) plays an important role in the first-year experience as it correlates positively with the Broaden and Build Theory

suggesting that (EI) promotes an upward spiralling of positive emotions and more available personal resources in order to effectively respond to challenges within the transition.

(EI) also holds other benefits contributing to student success, well-being and easy transition. Some of these benefits include: (EI) serves as a buffer against distress (Görgens-Ekermans & Brand, 2012), it enhances the student's thinking and cognitive abilities (Multi Health systems, 2009), promotes overall hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Extremera, Ruiz-Aranda, Pineda-Galán, & Salguero, 2011), facilitates life and career satisfaction, overall professional development, an opportunity to flourish, better time management (Jensen et al., 2007), ensures more effective and healthy stress management (Ugoji, 2012), develops student potential, teamwork, creativity, innovation, flexibility and enables effective coping and adjusting to transition (Ngongo & Yazdanifard, 2014).

More so, Ugoji (2012) states that the abovementioned aspects are the very reasons for the inclusion of (EI) training for students in the education system to become so important.

Emotion regulation

However, as previously mentioned, emotion management is the integration of the concepts (EI) and (ER) (Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015). Earlier on, Gross (1998) and Scherer (2010) conceptualised (ER) as the correcting, influencing and modifying of emotional experiences, expressions and responses into more desirable and appropriate responses within a given emotion situation. (ER) is thus the motivation to manipulate and modify the emotion process in terms of the type of emotion experienced, the intensity of the emotion, the duration of the emotion and the quality of the experience thereof (Gross, 2015; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015). Peña-sarrionandia et al. (2015) also ad that (ER) as an emotion management strategy should be referred to as a process-oriented strategy. This assumption is proven by Gross's (1998) 5-point (ER) model suggesting that (ER) can occur at 5-points during the emotion experienced and generating process *(as illustrated in figure 2)*. The 5-point emotion regulation process is explained by Gross (2015) as:
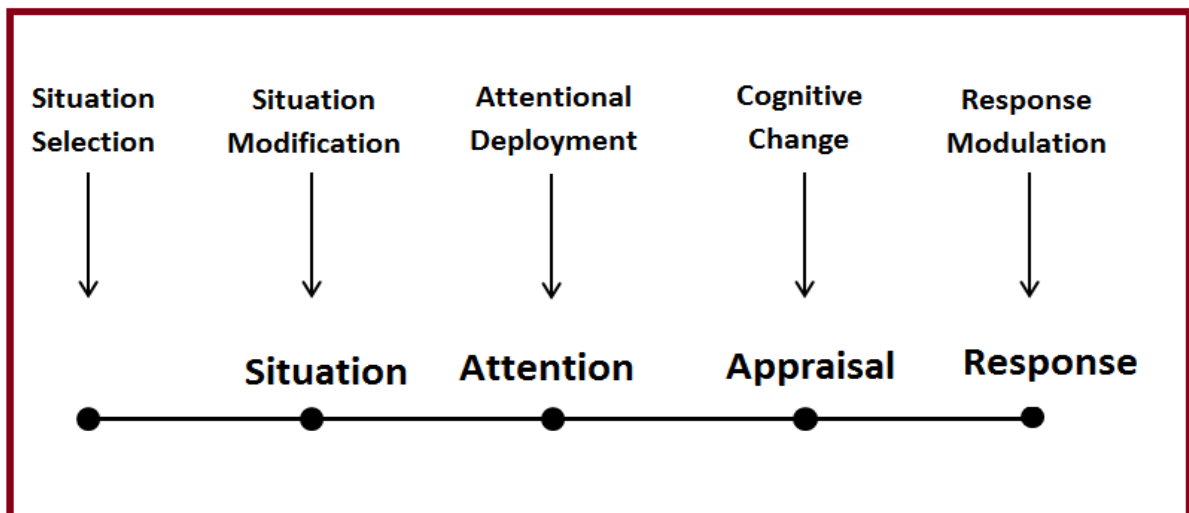
Figure 2. The 5-point Emotion Regulation Process Model (Gross, 2015).

1) *Situation selection* – Identifying the situation that can be tailored/influenced externally to increase or decrease the emotional impact. This can also be described as behaviours of avoidance or approach. Situation selection can also be described as the deliberate selecting of a situation from which one could expect to stimulate desirable or even undesirable emotions. An example would be to arrange to have coffee with a friend or to avoid a strict teacher. 2) *Situation modification* – Actively modifying and altering the situation characteristics externally (the physical environment); thus creating a different "new" situation in order to change the emotional impact thereof. This is also seen as problem-focussed coping. For example, when friends come over to watch a movie and the drama spoils the company mood, one can change the situation to watching a comedy. 3) *Attention deployment* – To deliberately change one's attention during and after the emotion situation to influence one's emotional response. It is regarded as internal situation selection and may include behaviour such as distractions, thought suppression, rumination and one's physical withdrawal / distraction / shifting of attention from the present situation. An example could be that one thinks of a memory that elicits a desired emotion. 4) *Cognitive Change* – To change ones cognitions such as the interpretations, evaluations, about the situation; thus changing the meanings attached to the situation. This includes cognitive reappraisal strategies. Cognitive change can be applied to an internal situation such as changing one's cognitions, for example "my body is shaking because I am cold not because I am nervous about the presentation" or it can be applied to an external situation such as "this exam is going to prepare me for the second opportunity". 5) *Response modulation* – To adjust and influence one's response tendencies

(experiential, behavioural and psychological) provoked by the situation. Expressive suppression is a commonly used behaviour strategy here. Examples of response modulation includes; alcohol, drugs, food, cleaning, hobbies, exercise etc. (Gross, 2015).

Ochsner and Gross (2014) and Gross (2015) elaborate on this, saying that the abovementioned 5-point (ER) process can be summarised within a three-step nested valuation circle of emotion generation and regulation. This circle includes *identifying* an opportunity to regulate an emotion, *selecting* a regulating strategy and *implementing* the selected regulation strategy. Furthermore, Chen (2016) explains that the (ER) process consists of antecedent-focused strategies where the focus is on "prior to" the emotion situation (situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment and cognitive change) and response-focused strategies where the focus is on "after" the emotion situation has generated an emotion (response modulation).

Dymnicki, Sambolt and Kidron (2013) indicated that (ER) has a strong positive correlation with a student's ability to cope and adjust to transition, which in turn is associated with better student academic performance and well-being. P Singh and M Singh (2013) and Prosen and Vitulic (2014) corroborate this statement by adding that effective (ER) correlates significantly with academic performance, student success and successful transition, whereas emotion deregulation can serve as a barrier to the abovementioned goals.

A conceptualised model of the first-year emotion experience
Throughout this literature review it has become apparent that emotionality plays an important role within a higher education setting. Further to this it has become clear that an emotion process occurs within the student first-year experience (SFYE) where students experience an emotion situation which generates a positive and/or negative emotion experience. It has also become clear that the manner in which students manage these emotions (EI and ER) paves the way towards student success or failure. The aim of the study is thus to explore and to investigate the emotion situations encountered during the first-year experience and the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) employed by first-year students to manage the emotions elicited (positive and negative) from these situations, within a South African higher education institute.

However, little is known about these emotion management strategies and this gap in literature makes it difficult to address the high student drop-out problem within South African universities.

To conclude, the emotion process within the first-year experience introduces two complimentary models (The Affective Events Theory and the Emotion Regulation Process Model) which are used within this study to understand the emotion process. Therefore this study will draw upon these existing models to introduce a combined and conceptualised emotion management strategy (EI and ER) model (as illustrated in figure 3).
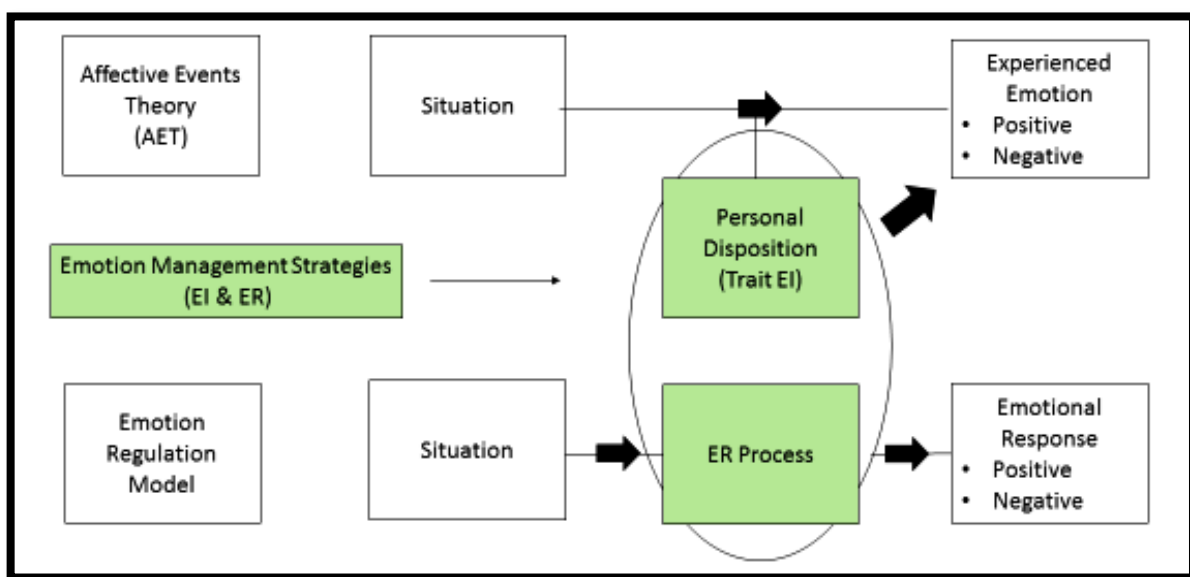
Figure 3. The Conceptual Emotion Management Strategy Model (Illustrates that an emotion situation results in an emotion experienced (positive and/or negative) which is managed by an emotion management strategy).

Research purpose and objective

The purpose and objective of this research study was to gain a fresh perspective on and explore the first-year experience within a South African public higher education institute, specifically in terms of the encountered emotion situations during transition and the emotion management strategies employed by first-year students to manage the emotions elicited from these situations.

Against this background the following research questions were posed to address the research purpose and objective:

- How are emotion situations, emotions and emotion management strategies conceptualised within and according to literature?
- What are the emotion situations that students experience during their student first-year experience?
- Which emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) do first-year students employ during their student first-year experience?
- What are the emotions experienced by first-year students during the student first-year experience?
- What further recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

Research design

The research design consists of the research approach, research strategy and research method.

Research approach

The nature of this study was explorative and descriptive in nature. The researcher thus based this study on a qualitative research approach, an inductive and interpersonal method used to collect written and spoken data. This method was highly applicable to this study as it enabled the researcher to explore, gain insight of and to fully understand and describe the subjective meanings of a specific situation/phenomenon/experience (the first-year experience, the emotion situations they experience and how they manage these emotions) from the participants' (the first-year students) points of view (Cresswell, 2014; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011).

The research paradigm on which this study was based was that of a social constructivist worldview assuming that there are multiple perspectives on and understandings of reality regarding a phenomenon or experience (relativism ontology) and the assumption that subjective meanings are attached to these realities/experiences during interaction (naturalistic epistemology) (Creswell, 2014; Tubey, Rotich & Bengat, 2015). This was an appropriate worldview within this qualitative study as the researcher's aim is to explore and interpret the first-year students' understanding of their lived reality (ontology) (their first-year experience)

and the multiple subjective meanings they co-constructed during social interaction (epistemology) (Tubey et al., 2015).

Research strategy

The research strategy for this study comprised a narrative and a descriptive phenomenology design due to the fact that the combination of these two designs complements each other and was both appropriate for this study. A descriptive phenomenology strategy was best suited for this study as it enabled the researcher to explore, describe, reflect and interpret several first-year students' shared subjective experiences regarding a specific, or rather lived, experience from their perspective (Quinlan, Babin, Carr, Griffin & Zikmund, 2015). Within this study, the first-year students' shared subjective experiences included their personal beliefs, emotions, attitudes and evaluations of the specific phenomenon – their first-year experience (Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015). As indicated, the researcher also drew on narratives, as this design was applicable to the purpose of the study, the context of the study and the data collection method utilised (the World Café). This design enabled the researcher to explore the first-year university students' emotion situations and experiences, and management thereof of by means of storytelling and a dialog/conversation during the World Café (Tracy, 2013).

Research method

The research method comprises the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, research participants and sampling, data collection methods, recording of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure trustworthiness, reporting style and ethical considerations.

Research setting

The researcher strives to set a context with a clear purpose and create a pleasant space by fostering an environment that feels safe, comfortable, informative, enjoyable and creative. The researcher also focuses on creating a physical café ambiance. The World Café was hosted in a recreation hall of one of the representative hostels on campus, which was decorated according to the theme of the study "the first-year experience" and the following guidelines set by The World Café Community Foundation (2015) to ensure an actual café-like atmosphere:

The space was filled with natural lightning, the smell of coffee and snacks in the air, theme based décor and relaxing music in the background. Four tables were arranged in a random manner, covered with colourful tablecloths and decorated accordingly. One of these tables provided refreshments to the participants as a Café would do. The refreshments included sweet and savoury snacks as well as hot and cold drinks with the necessary dining equipment. The other tables were positioned in such a manner that it ensured comfortable seating of five participants and one table host at each table. The tables were decorated with a flower, a bowl of colourful sweets, creative stationary to scribble down ideas and thoughts creatively (such as highlighters, post-its and stickers), a tape-recorder and most importantly an A2-size white paper on which different research questions were written.

The room was large enough to comfortably host fifteen participants, the research team and the décor, had a large clear wall which was considered the "wall of thought" and had large windows covered by thick curtains. The researcher also arranged a projector to display the title and theme of the study and a photo booth with theme-based props for participants to enjoy afterwards.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Access

Access to the research participants within this particular South African Higher Education Institute was gained following the following phases: Firstly, the research proposal was presented to the research Scientific Committee for approval and secondly to the Ethics Committee for approval and consent to continue with the study. During the third phase the student representative counsel was provided with a draft proposal of the study in order to gain their consent to conduct the study on campus. Fourthly, the researcher made contact with the relevant gatekeepers (on- and off-campus Hostels). A meeting was also held by the researcher and the representative house committee members of each relevant Hostel in order to gain access to participants living both on- and off-campus. During the fifth phase, the researcher made contact with the probable participants by means of an information session to inform and encourage these probable participants to actually participate, during which the voluntary participants gave their contact information to the researcher. The researcher then emailed a "World Café" invitation to each voluntary participant.

Roles

During this research project the researcher took on the role of a study planner, executer and convener which entailed writing a proposal, collecting in-depth qualitative data, transcribing, data analysis and report writing. Throughout the study the researcher also ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical and professional manner and that the data gathered were trustworthy and of high quality (Creswell, 2009; de Vos et al., 2011).

The main researcher took on the role of a Café Host. The Café Host designed the World Café accurately by ensuring that the seven principles of an effective World Café were implemented. These principles / roles comprised of; setting an appropriate context, creating a hospitable space, exploring the research questions that matter, encouraging participation, connecting diverse views and ideas, listening carefully for insight and sharing collective discoveries and ideas. However the researcher also took on other roles such as inviting the participants, welcoming them in a friendly and warm manner, explaining the research teams' roles and the importance of the study and stimulating creativity and eagerness amongst the participants. The researcher discussed informed consent, confidentiality, demonstrated the proceedings, managed the conversation time and encouraged participation (Fallon & Bean, 2014; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

The Café Host also took on the role of assigning three research assistants (Master's students in Psychology) as the Table Hosts. The roles of the Table Hosts were to each stay behind while the participants rotated, so as to welcome the new group of participants, to encourage creative participation and to briefly summarise what had been discussed. The Table Hosts also recorded the conversations with a tape-recorder (Fallon & Bean, 2014; The World Café Community Foundation, 2015).

Research participants and sampling

This was a qualitative study which aimed at exploring a certain phenomenon and experiences. Therefore, a purposive sampling method was seen to be the most appropriate technique to sample participants as it enabled the researcher to purposefully choose a specific population with characteristics that would most likely fit the study objectives and contribute to a detailed exploration (Tracy, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). More specifically, a stratified approach to

purposive sampling was utilised to gain insight into the various manifestations of the studied phenomenon (Harsh, 2011).

The aim was to gather the sample at a South African Higher Education Institute from four hostels, including male and female hostels from on- and off-campus. The sample size consisted of 29 voluntary participants and until data saturation was met. The strata comprised participants from diverse ethnic groups (age, gender, race etc.) and who resided both on- and off-campus. This sampling technique was utilised to purposefully select participants adhering to the following predetermined criteria; 1) Participants should have been enrolled at a higher education institute within South Africa, 2) they should have been experiencing the transition to university for the first time, 3) be willing to participate voluntarily in the research, and 4) be efficient in both Afrikaans and English. Characteristics of those that participated in the research study are illustrated below in table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of participants taking part in the research study (N=29)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	16	55%
	Female	13	45%
Race / Ethnicity	White	26	90%
	African	3	10%
Language	Afrikaans	24	83%
	English	1	3.4%
	German	1	3.4%
	Setswana	3	10%
Age	17-18 Years	8	27.5%
	19-20 Years	19	65.5%
	21-22 Years	2	7%
Reside	On campus	20	69%
	Off campus	9	31%

Table 1 illustrates that a sample of 29 voluntary and available first-year students participated in this study. The population was divided into terms of gender of which (55%) was male and (45%) female. The sample consisted of predominantly white South African participants

(90%) and (10%) black South African participants of which the majority reside on-campus (69%) and (31%) off-campus. The population predominantly comprised Afrikaans-speaking participants (83%), but also included a representation of English- (3.4%), German- (3.4%) and Setswana-speaking participants (10%). The first-year student sample ranged in ages from 17 to 22 of which most (67.5%) were 19 or 20 years of age, the older age group of 21 to 22 years seemed to represent only (27.5%) of the population and the youngest group of 17 to 18 years seemed to be the minority (7%).

Data collection method

World Café Conversations

A World Café method was used as a means to gain rich and full data from the participants by means of collectively exploring the sensitive and powerful research questions that matter. This method was highly appropriate as it enabled and encouraged participants to share their first-year emotional experiences, views and insights through a conversation or rather story-telling within a Café-like environment. This was, however, more than simply conversation, seeing that participants embraced the opportunity of sharing not only their experiences but also their collective wisdom, insights and thoughts concerning possible action. The researcher enabled effective collective dialogues regarding the research questions/phenomena by incorporating the World Café's core principles to ensure that rich and full data was gained from the participants' points of view and shared experiences (Fallon & Bean 2014; The World Café Community Foundation [TWCCF], 2015). Two World Cafés were held accommodating fifteen participants each in order to keep the population size diverse yet manageable.

Preparations in advance

The research team (Café host and table hosts) received training in accordance with the World Café method. The researcher arranged and briefed all relevant parties such as the counsellor who was onsite and the guest speaker, where after the Café decorations, setting and environment were planned (Fallon & Bean 2014; TWCCF, 2015). Creative and attractive invites were then sent out to voluntary participants.

<u>The morning of the World Café</u>

The researcher created a hospitable space and setting for the World Café, which included décor, refreshments and fostering an environment that felt safe, comfortable, informal, informative and enjoyable. The researcher then welcomed the participants by setting the context, explaining the purpose and importance of the study, demonstrating the procedure of events, encouraging creativity and participation, clarifying the research team's roles and discussing informed consent and partial confidentiality (Fallon & Bean 2014; TWCCF, 2015).

The Café Host (main researcher) then allocated table numbers in a random manner to the participants where after the participants created three small groups of five and seated themselves around the relevant table. Each Table Host (part of the research team) then joined their separate tables where they explained the relevant research question to the participants and encouraged full participation and creativity. The participants then collaboratively and simultaneously discussed the relevant research question on their table and scribbled, drew and wrote with creative stationary on the A2-size white paper. Participants were encouraged to link and build on each other's ideas, thoughts and experiences throughout the World Café session. After twenty minutes the participants were asked to rotate and move to the next table where each group had a new research question to discuss, where after the next twenty minutes they rotated again for yet another new research question until all the participants had been afforded the opportunity of discussing all three research questions. When the participants rotated, the Table Hosts stayed behind to summarise what had been said by their previous respective groups (Fallon & Bean 2014; TWCCF, 2015).

Throughout this process the Table Hosts recorded each table conversation. After sixty minutes of simultaneous conversation, the researcher then collected the A2-size papers from each table and placed it on a clear wall called "The wall of thought" where the researcher gave feedback, facilitated the process of identifying prominent patterns and themes and stimulated the participants' thoughts concerning possible action plans (TWCCF, 2015).

<u>After the World Café conversations</u>

After the participants could view the gallery of their thoughts on the "wall of thought", a speaker from "INGRYP-dienste" encouraged the participants to make the best of their first-year experience and advised them on how they could do so, for about fifteen minutes. Each

participant also received a brochure containing information on how to improve their academic success and well-being with relevant help-lines.

<u>The research questions that matter</u>

Table 1 – What emotion situations do you experience as a first-year student? Table 2 – What emotions do you experience as a first-year student? Table 3 – How do you manage these emotions or how do you react to these emotions?

Pilot study

Kim (2010) views running a feasibility study within a qualitative and phenomenological study is to be critical. Therefore the researcher conducted a pilot study by implementing a small-scale World Café with 5 participants with a view to identify any issues and barriers within the research process, specifically related to the recruitment of participants, the World Café as a method for data collection and to establish whether the "research questions that matter" or interview questions, were clear, understandable and would produce rich data. This enabled the researcher to make adjustments and to modify the study where applicable which in turn ensured a smooth and feasible study onwards.

Recording of data

The A2-size posters used within the World Cafés served as the main form of data recording due to the fact that participants creatively scrapbooked their ideas on and responses to the research questions, on these posters. Photos were also taken of these posters to record the original data in a visual manner. Tape recorders on each table were also used to record the World Café conversations regarding the particular research questions. These recordings and A2-size posters were then transcribed into written form and placed on a Microsoft Office Excel Sheet in order to further code the recorded data in themes and sub-themes. To ensure confidentiality, each participant's personal identity was replaced by a unique number. The data recorded (A2-size posters, photos and recordings) were stored and saved electronically as a method to back-up the data and ensure security. Throughout the research study, the data obtained were stored in a safe and secure location with restricted access to the main researcher and research team (de Vos et al., 2011).

Data analysis

The qualitative data of this study were analysed by means of a Theoretical Thematic Analysis approach. Thematic analysis was employed as a flexible method for identifying, organising and reporting on themes and patterns within the data, so as to gain a better understanding and description of the subjective data related to the research question (Craver, 2014). A Theoretical approach to thematic analysis was utilised where the researcher drew upon existing theory and understanding to identify and allocate themes and patterns within the data to appropriate pre-determined themes and categories. However, throughout this process the researcher remained open to the possibility of new themes and patterns emerging that did not necessarily fit within the pre-existing categories (Percy et al., 2015). The researcher thus employed the following seven stages of Braun and Clarke (2013):

Stage 1: Transcription

The researcher transcribed the recorded or rather spoken (audio) data and the data from the A2-size posters into written (visual) form on Microsoft Office Excel Sheets and saved it in an Excel folder in order to simplify the coding process and to familiarise herself with the data.

Stage 2: Reading and familiarising

The researcher acquainted herself with the data by transcribing the A2-size posters and the recorded data into written form and by saving it as Excel sheets. However, the data were based on three main research questions and therefore required the researcher to categorise the data related to each question as a separate worksheet within one Excel folder (for example; data gathered regarding the emotion situations experienced, the emotions experienced and the emotion management strategies applied, were documented on three separate excel sheets). The researcher then read and re-read the documented data thoroughly in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the content of the data needed to identify and interpret interesting patterns and codes related to each research question.

Stage 3: Generating initial codes

After carefully reading through the data, the researcher highlighted relevant and meaningful patterns within the data and compared it with the research questions and objectives. The relevant data were then coded and the irrelevant data discarded. This also aided in reducing the data and organising it into relevant and meaningful groups. The researcher also identified some of the pre-determined codes and categories grounded by theory.

Stage 4: Searching for themes

After finalising the codes, the researcher sorted the initial codes into appropriate and pre-determined themes with the assistance of a co-coder. The researcher was also open to the possibility of new yet relevant codes or themes that do not fit into the pre-existing themes and thus kept these themes in a separate folder for future evaluation.

Stage 5: Reviewing the themes

During this stage the researcher, assisted by a supervisor, checked, reflected on and refined the themes as illustrated (as seen in the attached appendices A, B and C) and the collated extracts to ensure meaningfulness and that the themes are an effective representation of the entire data set. This resulted in some themes being collapsed together and other being split into separate themes.

Stage 6: Defining and naming the themes

The researcher gave an informative name and a clear, detailed analysis description to each theme to provide them with meaning, understanding and content and to identify the 'essence' of what the theme is about by using proper psychological language in a couple of sentences. The researcher then went back to work with the themes that did not seem to fit into a pre-existing category in order to determine whether it could be used to contribute to the data set.

Stage 7: Producing the report

The researcher then reported the final findings in the format of a mini-dissertation under Chapter 2. The data of this chapter was illustrated by means of tables and photographs (of the A2-size papers), the final themes and sub-themes were illustrated by means of tables. Theme definitions, interpretation and discussions were reported in paragraph format and the findings were compared with and evaluated based on existing and relevant theory.

Strategies employed to ensure trustworthiness

De la Cuesta-Benjumea (2015) emphasised the importance of a flexible criterion qualitative researchers can actively comply with in order to ensure quality and trustworthy qualitative data throughout the research process. The quality and trustworthiness of this study was ensured throughout the research process by complying with the following criteria set by Framback, van der Vleulen and Durning (2013) and Tracy (2013):

- *Credibility (Internal validity)* - was maintained through *prolonged engagement* with the data, *persistent observation, peer debriefing* by means of constructive feedback and guidance from a study leader and the implementation of *triangulation* by using the A2-size posters as well as the recordings as methods for gaining rich data, as well as combining a narrative and phenomenological approach to methodology. The researcher also made use of a field journal to ensure *reflexivity* and *respondent validation* to gain feedback from the participants by utilization the "wall of thought". Apart from this the researcher also ensured that the most appropriate forms of *qualitative methodology* and *paradigm* (social constructivism) were applied within this study and participants were recruited through *purposive sampling* which contributed to credibility.

- *Transferability (External validity)* – the researcher ensured *resonance* through conducting a significant and meaningful study with findings that contribute theoretically and practically and that can be extended to other situations. However, the findings can only be *transferred* to first-year students enrolled at a public higher education institute for the first time. The researcher also aimed at including *rich descriptions* of the constructs, terms, methodology and findings within this study.

- *Dependability (Reliability)* – was achieved through *documenting* the study step by step, ensuring a logical and structured study process and using an *independent co-coder,* which helped the researcher to code the findings objectivity and accurately.

- *Conformability (Objectivity)* – was maintained by implementing on-going *peer debriefing* (receiving guidance and feedback from a professional supervisor), *reflexivity* (keeping a field journal to report on the research process and experience), by means of *triangulation* (combining recordings and the A2-size posters to gather data and to combine narrative and phenomenology approaches) and by co-opting *co-coders* in the data analysis process which aided in excluding subjective viewpoints and thus ensuring that the data were not manipulated in any way.

- *Sincerity* – The researcher aimed at portraying vulnerability, honesty and authenticity through constant *self-reflection* and *transparency* throughout the study process.

- *Pilot study* – In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study even further, the researcher conducted a *pilot study* in advance to ensure the appropriateness and comprehensibility of the study methods.

Reporting

During this research study a qualitative and descriptive reporting style was utilised. The researcher strove to ensure an optimal, clear and complete reporting style with detailed descriptions of the findings (O'Brien, Harris & Beckman, 2014). This thorough reporting style's aim was to communicate and report on the main findings of the study and to present the participants' experiences and perceptions in an integrated, interpreted and contextualised manner (O'Brien et al., 2014). The reporting style was done in a logical, consistent, sensitive and objective manner, with proper chapters and headings to ensure consistency, simplicity and structure (Neuman, 2006).

This reporting style included tables (in which the themes were illustrated in the first column, the sub-themes in the second column, associated meanings in the third column and direct quotations in the fourth column), paragraphs (the manner in which the findings and results were discussed) and photographs (of the A2-size posters) as evidence to substantiate the empirical data (O'Brien et al., 2014). The findings are reported in this chapter and the tables can be inspected in Appendices A, B and C.

Ethical considerations

According to European Commission (2007) ethics must be given the highest priority in research and especially in qualitative research due to the fact that research excellence can only be achieved if ethical principles are implemented effectively throughout as an integral part of research study. Therefore, the researcher ensured ethicality throughout the study by means of the implementing the following principles:

- *Institutional review board* – The researcher gained approval and clearance to continue with the study from the research scientific committee and the Ethics committee.
- *Researcher competency* – The research team were fully competent, experienced and qualified in the research field of study, research methodology and research ethics to ensure ethical and professional practice (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2014).
- *Consent from gatekeepers* – The researcher arranged a meeting with the Student Representative Counsel of the HEI by whom consent was given to conduct the study on the campus. The researcher then met up with the representatives of each house committee who consented to the use of their first-year students as participants in the study (BPS, 2014).

- *Fair selection of voluntary participants* – The researcher arranged an information session with probable participants at each representative hostel to encourage voluntary participation and gain the contact details of these voluntary participants. Thus the participants were selected in a fair, equitable and voluntary manner (Department of Health Republic South Africa [DHRSA], 2015).

- *Informed consent and withdrawal* – The researcher discuss the *informed consent form* in-depth with all participations. This included information regarding the research purpose, goal, procedures and confidentiality. The researcher also disclosed possible reasons for withdrawal and explained that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the study without negative consequence. Participants who were still willing to participate then signed the comprehensive consent form with a pen. They also consentede to the conversations being recorded during the world Café (DHRSA, 2015).

- *Confidentiality and partial confidentiality* – The importance of confidentiality and also partial confidentiality among the group of participants were emphasised and encouraged explicitly in order to avoid harm. Participants were asked not to address each other by name during the conversations, but rather on their number (code) assigned to them by the researcher to ensure confidentiality (DHRSA, 2015).

- *Registered psychologist and experienced table hosts* - The researcher predicted that emotional wounds could possibly be opened during the study and therefore arranged with a registered psychologist to be on scene. The researcher also assigned Master's students as table hosts as they are competent and experienced in efficiently identifying and handling uncomfortable participants with care.

- *Debriefing, do no harm and participation benefit* – Debriefing was done by means of the "wall of thought" where prominent patterns were discussed, thoughts on possibilities and opportunities were stimulated and participants were afforded the opportunity of asking questions. The researcher also arranged with a speaker form "INGRYP-dienste" to encourage participant well-being during the first-year experience, while providing them with self-help tools and brochures as a benefit to their participation (BPS, 2014).

- *Honesty, integrity, respect and participant rights* – Throughout the study, the participants were treated with utmost respect in order to protect their dignity and welfare. The researcher practised integrity throughout and ensured that no deception

or misleading took place, especially during data collection and report writing (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2015).

Findings and discussion

The general objective of this research study was to explore the emotion situations encountered during the first-year experience and the emotion management strategies employed by first-year students to manage the emotions elicited from these situations, within a South African higher education institute. This study seemed to not only address this objective but also to add additional value as illustrated within the following findings. These findings are represented as a collection of categories, themes and sub-themes, each supported by direct quotations from the participants themselves in order to substantiate the results. However, some of the direct quotations were provided in Afrikaans but was translated into English for purposes of this study and are illustrated within appendices A, B and C. Subsequently the findings are presented with a view to answer the research questions stated during the World Café conversations:

Question 1: What are the emotion situations that students experience during their student first-year experience?

From the conversations held during the World Cafe it became apparent that students experienced the following emotion situations during their student first-year experience:

Theme 1 – Transition and adaptation

As gathered from the literature, student transition can be referred to as a process that represents change from one education setting to the next (Student Services Transitions Project Group, 2009). The participants reported that they were subjected to a period of transition to which they had to adapt to enable them to cope with their new environment. This period was understood by the participants of this study as the transition from high school to university of which effective adaptation and new experiences were important. Transition and adaptation consisted of various sub-themes which included: Fre*edom, increased self-responsibility and self-reliance, the registration, orientation and initiation programme, experiences of homesickness* and *adaptability* (as seen within appendix A).

A few examples follow of how the participants responded to this World Café question:

"I am old enough now to make my own decisions and to take self-responsibility for my actions"

"Registration and orientation was an emotional roller coaster"

"Sometimes I get homesick because I am so far away from home and I miss my family dearly"

"The transition was difficult and hard to adapt to as there was much to adapt to"

As understood from the findings illustrated within this theme, transition itself held a vast variety of emotion situations first-year students had to face and adapt to. One can assume, after closer inspection of the sub-theme findings, that transition was a new experience of *freedom* within an unfamiliar environment away from the first-year students' homes, family members and friends. Findings illustrate that the majority of students enjoyed this freedom, and seemed to take it on as an opportunity to be more *self-reliant*, take more *self-responsibility* to take care of themselves and to make their own decisions. However, some participants reported that they experienced their new freedom as challenging.

When it came to *registering, being oriented and initiated* (a process to prepare students for university) most students responded with dislike. Findings also indicate that first-year students experienced *homesickness* to some extent which caused distress as they were separated from their direct support, family members and friends. Moreover, the majority of students reported that they found it difficult and challenging *adapting* and adjusting themselves to the new environment, people and experiences within transition.

The abovementioned findings were supported by literature, indicating that transition was a new and unfamiliar environment that implies a variety of situations triggering an emotional reaction (Habibah et al., 2010). Further research showed that, during transition, first-year students experience a variety of unfamiliar personal, interpersonal and environmental challenges they are confronted with for the first time (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). However, an interesting finding worth noting was that first-year students react differently to and have different evaluations of the transition experiences, where some perceive it as an exciting opportunity but others see it as unmanageable (Habibah et al., 2010; Leibowitz et al., 2012; Mudhovozi, 2012). Mcmillam (2013) went on to state that first-year students who have a

positive outlook on the transition and its inherent situations are better equipped to adjust to the transition where as those with a negative outlook struggle to adapt effectively.

More so, O'Neill (2007) supports the notion of new-found freedom by stating that some students experience personal freedom during transition, while others might perceive it to be intimidating and others as wonderful. During the World Café participants reported that they experienced the transition to be challenging and hard to adapt to. This is supported by various researchers (Parker, 2004; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014; van Zyl et. al., 2012) who stated that as many as 40% of students experience transition to university as stressful and overwhelming.

On closer examination one can argue that these inherent situations (sub-themes) form part of and can be incorporated in the bigger transition and adaptation process illustrated by Hoffenburger et al. (1999) as the W-Curve stages of transition. Hence it can be hypothesised that the honeymoon stage might typically include situations of new-found *freedom* and excitement, being more self-reliant and taking more self-responsibility. The culture shock stage will likely involve situations related to *registration, orientation and initiation* of students. The initial mental isolation stage might include situations of *homesickness* and the acceptance/integration stage might just be referred to as the *adaptation* situation.

Theme 2 – Study demands and resources

On referring to literature, it was established that the concept *demands* can be conceptualised as physical, social and environmental aspects one is required to adhere to. Resources are described as the physical, social and environmental aspects provided which enables the completion of demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). When referring to the findings, it seems that students experienced study demands as aspects within the first-year experience that caused distress and required an act. Study resources within this study referred to the aspects provided by the university or lack thereof that enable students to cope with the study demands. Findings of the World Café conversations illustrate that participants included the following demands and resources as emotion situations (sub-themes): *Time pressure, physical demands, physical resources and financial strain* (as seen within appendix A).

Examples of how the participants responded to this World Café question include:

"Time management gets difficult due to all the things that have to be done, for example to balance my academics, social life and sport"

"My physical living standards have fallen dramatically since I came to university"

"I love the free internet in the hostel and the fact that I do not have to worry about water and electricity"

"I have to do extra work here and there for money so that I can get a little extra money because the money my parents give me is not enough"

The participants in the World Café conversations reported that they experienced *time pressure* in terms of struggling to balance their personal / social life with their academics. They also mentioned that time seemed too little for all that needed to be done. First-year students indicated that the emotion situations they experienced were *physically draining and demanding* and resulted in lowered physical standards. Participants also seemed to have experienced *financial strain* due to the high expenses associated with studying. Some participants therefore tried to work extra jobs to earn more money in order to keep up with the study expenses.

One can argue that by working extra to earn more money, students possibly experienced more time pressure and physical demands. More so, some participants seemed to experience *physical resources* provided by the university as positive while others experienced it as lacking. It is evident that students experienced demands as well as resources during their first-year experience. The hypothesis can thus be formulated that an imbalance between study demands and resources (too many demands and too little resources) might possibly serve as a barrier to success, where as a balance between demands and resources (enough resources to accomplish the demands) might possibly promote students' success.

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) point out that within the work context, the balance between work demands and resources is crucial to prevent burnout and improve engagement towards fostering more productive, high-performance driven and healthy workers. However, one can argue that this theory is applicable to the student first-year context. Mokgele (2014) and Yorke and Longden (2008) found that an imbalance between demands and resources correlated positively with student ill health, poor student performance and student failure where a balance between demands and resources resulted in more successful adaptation   and

better student performance. It is thus evident that first-year students should be provided with enough study resources for them to effectively deal with their study demands and flourish academically.

Yorke and Longden (2008) also maintain that first-year students experience a large amount of demands of which financial strain and time pressure form part. According to Glogowska, Young & Lockyer (2007), student resources are seen to be 'Pull' factors, pulling towards student graduation whereas high student demands are seen as 'Push' factors that push towards student withdrawal. Glogowska et al. (2007) further mentioned that some of these 'push' factors / demands include financial strain and high physical demands, also experienced among this sample group. Mcghie (2012) and Keup (2013) state that universities can improve on and provide more sufficient resources to help first-year students perform to the best of their abilities. Reflecting on the latter, it became apparent that first-year students should have access to and knowledge of the available resources on- and off-campus in order to use it to their advantage and towards success.

Theme 3 – Interpersonal experiences

As reported by the participants in this study, interpersonal interaction was experienced as an emotion situation. According to the findings interpersonal interaction was perceived as both positive and negative depending on the participants' personal perceptions. Interpersonal experiences referred to the situations in which two or more individuals interacted with each other. The findings suggested that first-year students identified two major interpersonal experiences which influenced them to have an emotional reaction. These two experiences or rather sub-themes were *human / student rights* and *group pressure* (as seen within appendix A).

Following are a few examples of quotes representative of the sub-themes that describe student social life:

"We deserve respect, we are treated like animals"

"This human rights issue is stupid, I don't see how taking part in university and hostel traditions violates one's human rights, in fact I feel that by taking a lot of the traditions away due to the focus on human rights, it is preventing me from experiencing my first-year as I should"

"Sometimes my social group influence me to participate when I don't really want to"

On closer inspection direct quotes of participants' answers to the question concerning student social life, it became apparent that first-year students' attitudes differed with regard to the increased and firm focus on *human / student rights* within the university and especially within the on-campus hostels. Where some participants experienced human rights as positive and even demanded it, others seemed to have had a negative attitude towards the firm focus, as they perceived it to be a barrier to the thrill of initiation. One can therefore assume that students who looked forward to and were excited about the initiation and orientation process experienced increased student rights as negative as it prevented them from experiencing the true traditions of the university and/or the hostels. However, those who did not have a positive attitude towards initiation and orientation might have been thankful for their rights as it protected them from the traditions.

Group pressure as illustrated within the findings seemed to be experienced as mostly negative. However, a few participants did perceive it as a positive act. The first-year students understood peer pressure as the experience of being pressured and influenced by fellow students or authority figures to participate in activities they would otherwise not have participated in. Participants who perceived group pressure as negative referred to fellow students and hostel seniors pressurising them to participate in hostel or social activities which they did not want to do.

However, the small handful who perceived group pressure as positive seemed to have been the influencers who motivated and pressurised their fellow students to participate as a group within activities to involve them in the group. When one reflects on this, one could hypothesise that negative group pressure might decrease minimise healthy social interaction and adjustment that might have a negative influence on student success, whereas positive group pressure might improve healthy social interaction and adjustment that might promote student success.

Theory supported the abovementioned examples by highlighting the inevitable occurrence of interpersonal experiences as emotion situations within the first-year experience and the importance of positive group pressure to aid in student success (Upcraft, 2002). Upcraft (2002) further states that interpersonal experiences within the first year of   university

generally include some form of group or peer pressure. However, he supported the abovementioned findings and added that group pressure can be executed in both a positive and negative manner, with positive peer pressure having a positive (personal, social and academic) influence and negative peer pressure having a negative (personal, social and academic) influence on the first-year student. According to him, group pressure is seen as a powerful determiner of student success, development and adaption. Keng (2008) supported this by arguing that building supportive peer groups and interpersonal relationships is an important aspect within the student first-year experience.

In substantiating the findings of the participants' different attitudes towards human / student rights, Keng (2008) contemplated that there are two types of people (students) in this world, those who embrace human rights and those who do not. He went on to state that it is generally those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds who embrace their human rights. Interestingly, the participants within the World Café conversations who demanded that their human rights be taken seriously during their first-year experience were of previously disadvantaged backgrounds.

Theme 4 – Academia

Academia described within this study is conceptualised as activities and experiences which involve the education, thinking, studying and practising of new skills and knowledge within a higher education setting. Within this academic scope the following were referred to by the participants as experienced emotion situations (sub-themes): *academics in general, assessments, lecturers* and the *class setup* (as seen within appendix A).

Following, are few examples of how the participants responded to this World Café question:
> *"Academics are a lot more enjoyable because you get to study what you want and are interested in with no unnecessary subjects"*
> *"Tests and exams are harder than those of high school"*
> *"We have to get used to new and unique lecturers who we don't know"*
> *"The classes are a lot bigger that what we are used to in high school"*

The finding associated with the theme academia illustrates that the World Café participants experienced *academics in general* within higher education as more challenging and difficult,

though also more enjoyable and interesting as they were granted the opportunity of studying that which was interesting to them (Clark & Hall, 2010). They also reported on what they perceived is to be a huge gap regarding the difficulty and quality of education between matric and university.

One can argue that participants who experienced their academics as enjoyable and interesting were more prone to achieving academic success. It can also be assumed that this vastly different academic environment is an experience that requires adaptation in order to reap academic benefits. Further findings illustrate that participants perceived *academic/education assessments* such as tests, exams and practical exams as emotion situations that elicited a great deal of stress prior to, during and after assessment (Clark & Hall, 2010).

The sample experienced assessments at a tertiary level more challenging and difficult than those at a secondary level. *New lecturers* and interaction with these lecturers seemed to be prominent within the findings as first-year students reported that they had limited interaction with their lecturers, they didn't personally know their lecturers and their lecturers didn't know them. The *class setup,* indicated as an emotion situation, was perceived by the participants as having both positive and negative aspects. To explain, participants mentioned that the class sizes were a lot bigger, more interactive and a lot longer than that with which they were familiar.

When linking the participants' personal experiences back to theory, the following supportive evidence occurred with regard to the findings and the assumptions made. Mannan (2007) states that academic integration is an important predictor of whether a student will withdraw or achieve success. Mcghie (2012) supported the notion of a changed academic experience by arguing that students are faced with changes within the academic environment such as the change from a structured, interactive and student-focused approach to education to a less structured, self-study-focused approach with limited teacher interaction.

Furthermore, Yorke and Longden (2008) contemplated that it is important for first-year students to adapt effectively to this unfamiliar academic environment as difficulty in doing so might result in student drop-out. More evidence substantiated the abovementioned findings (Mcghie, 2012; Clark & Hall, 2010) highlighting that most first-year students do in fact experience the tertiary academics and assessments as more challenging, demanding and

sometimes even overwhelming, suggesting that students would have to manage and plan their time and efforts appropriately so as to adapt effectively and reap academic success.

When interpreting these findings, it seems that first-year students experienced tertiary academia (level and quality of education, interaction with teachers, assessments and class setup) as a lot different from that with which they were familiar. This demanded of first-year students to adapt effectively to the new academic experience in order for them to perform academically.

Theme 5 – Hostel experiences

The hostel experience can be described as an on-campus living and learning experience, on-campus accommodation and home to many students who have been living there for years (seniors) and those who have just enrolled (the first-year students) (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, 2015; Student Service Centre, 2014). It is also important to note that a hostel cannot function without structure such as rules and regulations and those who manage and lead the hostel residents (the house committee) (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, 2015). The sub-themes identified by the sample group during the World Café conversations included: *Hostel seniors, rules and regulations* and *house committee* (as seen within appendix A).

Examples of how the participants responded to this World Café question include:
"Some of the seniors are nice to you and they are the ones you like but others are just mean and rude"
"I hate being told what to do and what not to do"
"The house committee members can't plan or organise effectively and that makes me angry"

Findings regarding this theme suggested that participants expressed different opinions on the hostel experience and especially with regard to the *hostel seniors*. Where some seemed to experience their seniors in a positive light as supporters, mentors, family and friends, others prefer to see their seniors in a more negative light as rude, scary and mean. As identified within earlier findings, the majority of students enjoyed their new sense of freedom. In support, findings associated with this theme suggested that students wanted to do their own thing and make their own decisions, disliking anything that hindered their freedom such as hostel *rules and regulations*. Findings did suggest that participants experienced   strong

negative emotions that have a bearing on rules and regulations provided within the hostel experience. Furthermore, this sample mentioned that they disliked their *house committee* for trying to control them and for their inadequate manner of organising and planning.

Research regarding the first year hostel experience indicated that hostel living is an important experience within higher education as it not only provides first year students with accommodation but it provides students with the opportunity to learn, it enhances personal and intellectual student development and foster better social and academic integration. The positive consequences associated with the hostel experiences add to student success (Student Service Centre, 2014). Botha and Twine (2014) stated that first year students sometimes experience seniors and senior interaction as negative which generates negative emotions and in turn has a major negative impact on one's physical, psychological and emotional well-being and performance. However as the findings suggested not all senior situations were perceived as negative, some first year students experience seniors as mentors and supporters who provided academic and social aid, knowledge and support (Botha & Twine, 2014).

Moreover, participants seemed to dislike hostel rules and regulations, perceiving it as a barrier towards total freedom. The Department of Student Affairs (2013) indicated that hostel rules and regulations are set not to limit but to protect students. As illustrated, participants experienced house committees as negative due to their inability to organise and plan appropriately. According to the Department of Student Affairs (2013) house committees are in charge of organising, planning and managing numerous hostel and campus activities which first-year students are encouraged to participate in. The house committee thus serve as leaders of the hostel. When one reflects on this, it seems understandable that first-year students experienced it as a negative situation when their leaders were unorganised, since it could have had a major impact on their followers (the first-year students). Another reason for their clear dislike might probably be ascribed to personality differences; some students might have preferred a more structured, organised and well-planned environment in which to function.

On closer inspection of the World Café conversations it was found that the perceptions regarding the hostel experience differed among first-year students. Hence one can assume that positive perceptions of the hostel experience could possibly stimulate positive emotions and promote a positive first-year experience, whereas negative perceptions of hostel experiences might cue negative emotions adding to a negative first-year experience. One can

also argue that these positive or negative evaluations of the hostel experience might influence the first-year students' road to success. More so, a hypothesis can be formulated that positive senior interaction could result in better social and academic adaptation due to senior support, mentoring and social inclusion which might promote student adaptation and academic performance. It can further be assumed that positive senior interaction would stimulate positive emotions.

Theme 6 – Student life

Student life represented the life of a university student participating in domains such as academia, social, religious and campus activities, with the main purpose of achieving a degree (Cumings, Haworth, & O'Neill, 2002). Findings from the World Café conversations indicate that student life consisted of various emotion situations or rather sub-themes which included: *Social life* and participation in *campus activities* (as seen within appendix A).

Below are a few examples of quotes representative of the sub-themes that constitute student life:

"We meet a lot of new people during the registration and orientation programme with which you build a new bond"

"I love to be part of as many hostel and university activities as I can because it is what makes the student experience so great"

Findings suggest that the majority of the World Café sample group perceived their student life experience as positive and enjoyable emotion situations. This might suggest that more positive emotions were generated during these situations.

The participants conceptualised their *social life* as the interaction with others and socialising with new and unique people. Findings also suggested that participants rather enjoyed spending a large amount of time on socialising with others. One can hypothesise that constant socialising might result in difficulty to manage a balance between social life and other domains of the first-year experience such as academic demands. The findings illustrated earlier on in the analysis that the majority of students enjoyed and looked forward to their new social environment. From these findings one can argue that social life and social

integration is an important experience within a student's first year which can possibly improve or hamper social integration and academic performance.

Moreover, the majority of participants reported that they experienced *campus-related activities and traditions* as positive situations which they enjoyed. The sample group understood these campus activities to be situations that enriched their first-year experience and that facilitated personal growth. One can assume that the reason for evaluating this situation as positive could be that it increases social interaction, engagement in enjoyable activities and might even promote a sense of belonging. However, participants in the World Café conversations identified a small handful of campus activities which they experienced as negative. After closer inspection it was found that these campus activities were associated more with campus chores the first-year students were obliged to do.

Clark and Hall (2010) argued that student life should be regarded as a positive experience. Furthermore, findings indicate that students particularly enjoyed interacting and socialising with others as part of their social life. Cumings et al. (2002) stated that first-year students strive towards building and maintaining a meaningful social life and most students seem to seek out opportunities to socialise. Moreover, Clark and Hall (2010) contemplated that first-year students enjoy meeting new people, creating new friendships and going out to socialise. Cuseo et al. (2010) and Mannan (2007) maintain that effective social integration and positive interaction is associated with student graduation and higher levels of academic performance. Cumings et al. (2002) further mentioned that campus activities play an important role within the first-year experience as it enhances social integration and adaptation and contributes to student success.

Reflecting on the latter one could raise get the idea that positive student life experiences contribute to effective social integration and adaption within the higher education institute and even promote students' academic success. However, it may also be true that students enjoyed their student life (social life and campus activities) so much that they neglect their academic responsibilities resulting in a negative influence on student academic success.

The overall conclusion can be drawn that first-year students seem to have experienced a variety of unfamiliar, challenging, positive and negative situations during their first-year term. Moreover, participants had different perceptions regarding these emotion situations,

where one had experienced a specific emotion situation as positive, another experienced it as negative. However, there were cases in which most participants agreed on the positive and/or negative experience of a certain emotion situation. It can be hypothesised that positive emotion situations might cue positive emotions, promote a positive first-year experience and increase chances of success, whereas negative emotion situations might stimulate negative emotions, contribute to a negative first-year experience and decrease chances of success. Leibowitz et al. (2012) and Mudhovozi (2012) do not find it uncommon for first-year students to differ in their perceptions of the emotion situations associated with the first-year experience.

Question 2: *Which emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) do first-year students employ during their student first-year experience?*

During the World Café conversations, participants reported that they apply the following emotion management strategies to manage their emotions during their student first-year experience:

Theme 1 - Emotional intelligence (EI)

(EI) is referred to as a mixed model concept, being described as a mixture of cognitive abilities and personality traits (Perez, Petrides & Furnham, 2005; Team FME, 2014. These abilities and traits enable an individual to effectively recognise, understand, express, regulate and modify emotions effectively and appropriately within a given situation (Nasseer et al., 2011). Findings from the World Café conversations illustrate that participants responded using a variety of different (EI) strategies, referred to as sub-themes which included: *Self-awareness, acceptance* and *self-growth, social awareness, emotion expression, self-motivation, stress management, trait optimism, low impulsivity, adaptability* and *emotion use to facilitate thinking* (as seen within appendix B)

Examples of how the participants responded to this World Café question include:
"Just be yourself and improve yourself"
"You have to put yourself in other people's shoes"
"Sometimes I want to talk about my emotions and other times I feel it is better to just say nothing and keep quiet"

"I try again and again and again"
"I address problems directly and immediately"
"I focus on what is good within each situation"
"I take a deep breath and then count until ten; sometimes I even count a little more than ten"
"I try to embrace the moment"
"I work better and faster when I am under pressure"

From the World Café conversations it became apparent that this sample group used emotional intelligence- (EI) related competencies and traits to influence their emotion experiences. Interestingly it was found that the majority of participants utilised *self-awareness, acceptance and growth* as their dominant (EI) management strategy indicating that participants exercised their ability to get in touch with their true self, to accept themselves and they tried to improve themselves. Hot on its trail, *stress management* (the ability to manage, control and lessen stress) the participants seemed to prioritise their day-to-day activities and deal with their problems immediately when t arises. *Emotion expression* (ability to express or not to express their emotions visually) seemed to have also been popular strategies for managing emotions. Participants managed their emotion expressions by means of appropriately supressing and expressing their emotions for example to cry or not to cry during certain situations.

More so, findings illustrate that some participants preferred to be *socially aware* of others' emotion experiences by means of walking a mile in other students' shoes to give them a new perspective. Others were more likely to practise a positive mental attitude and *optimism* as a means to manage their emotion experiences such as seeing the silver lining and the humour related to a situation. Further findings from the World Café conversation lead one to believe that participants utilised their *self-motivation* to achieve their bigger goals by setting goals and trying again and again to achieve them. *Low impulsivity* was detected within this ample group as they seemed to reflect on consequences and calmed themselves down before responding. Participants tried to *adapt* effectively and appropriately to their situations. The participants seemed to *utilise their emotions* effectively to facilitate cognitive thinking by using their stress to work even harder.

According to literature the abovementioned (EI) strategies utilised by participants are in fact seen as common (EI) competencies perceived from a mixed model framework (Team FME, 2014; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The findings were further supported by Jensen et al.

(2007) who added that people with high (EI) implement more effective strategies to manage emotions and that these individuals are more likely to choose constructive regulation strategies, whereas individuals with a lower (EI) are more likely to make use of less effective motion management and coping strategies.

Results also indicate that a large number of participants demonstrated emotion expression as one of their dominant (EI) strategies. Chen (2016) argues that emotion expression is a common strategy for managing emotion experiences and is seen as an effective and valuable motion-regulating strategy. More so, participants also seemed to favour self-awareness and acceptance and stress-management initiatives as managing strategies – a concept which is supported by Garnefski, Kraaij, and Spinhoven (2001) as effective strategies in managing emotions.

When one investigates this further it becomes clear that the participants made use of both effective and poor (EI) strategies, suggesting that some participants might have had higher levels of (EI) than others. Moreover, it seems that the majority of participants practised effective (EI) strategies, implying that the majority of the sample group were emotionally intelligent. It can thus be hypothesised that those with a higher (EI) applied better emotion management strategies than those with poor and lower (EI). The assumption can also be made that participants with higher (EI) may be more equipped to adapt effectively and choose better coping strategies which might lead to a positive first-year experience and student retention.

Theme 2 - Emotion regulation (ER)

The results indicate that the participants in this study influenced and modified their emotion experiences by implementing a variety of (ER) strategies. Emotion regulation described within this study is conceptualised as the motivation to influence the emotion process by manipulating, adjusting and controlling emotion experiences (the type, intensity and duration of emotions) expressions and responses for it to be more desirable and appropriate within a specific situation (Gross, 2015; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015).

After analysing the findings from the World Café conversations, it became apparent that the participants utilised a variety of (ER) strategies to influence their emotion experiences. Most

of these strategies were categorised in accordance with the 5-Point emotion regulation model. However, two separate categories were also identified. The reported (ER) strategies representative of this theme included: *Situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment* and *cognitive change, and response modulation*. However, *spirituality* and *destructive emotional outlet* were also identified as significant sub-themes (as seen within appendix B).

Below are a few examples of quotes representative of the sub-themes that constitute (ER):

"I go to my favourite place"

"Most of my friends just drop out"

"I try to forget about it or avoid it"

"I try to laugh it off and see the humour in the situation"

"Relieve my stress physically by means of exercising"

"I fall back on my faith"

"I sometimes kick a ball or a friend when I am upset"

From the World Café conversations it became apparent that this sample group applied emotion regulation (ER) strategies to regulate their emotion experiences. Findings indicate that participants utilised *situation selection* to deliberately select a situation stimulating a certain emotion, such as going to the movies or arranging a date with friends as it would stimulate positive emotions. They also seemed to *modify situations* in order to influence its emotional impact, some participants modified their situations by means of prioritising, managing their times or withdraw form university. Further findings from the World Café conversations lead one to believe that participants practised *attentional deployment* to divert their attention by avoiding their emotions or keeping themselves busy with distractions such as listening to music or watching series. Moreover, the majority of participants seemed to prefer *modifying their responses* by means of physical exercise, by socialising and engaging in hobbies and *changing their cognitions* regarding the emotion situations by seeing the positive side of an unpleasant situation. However, findings also illustrate that where some participants drew from their *spirituality* such as praying, meditating or going to church to regulate their emotion experiences. Others engaged in *destructive emotional outlet* by physically harming (kicking, breaking and throwing) themselves, their property or others,

These findings were supported by recent studies done on first-year students (Dymnicki et al., 2013; P. Singh and M. Singh, 2013) which indicated that first-year students do in fact utilise emotion regulation strategies in accordance with the 5-point emotion regulation model during transition, as explained earlier on. Furthermore, Gross (2015) argued that (ER) strategies can be implemented in a constructive and/or destructive manner. Gross (2015) and Chen (2016) also stated that common destructive emotion regulation is emotion suppression. However, cognitive change and expression suppression are seen to be constructive (ER) strategies.

It seems that most participants regulated their emotion experiences constructively since the majority reported utilising cognitive change. Watson et al. (2012) identified that destructive or ineffective (ER) strategies may result in various psychological and physiological problems. P. Singh and M. Singh (2013) supported this by adding that emotion deregulation serves as a barrier to academic performance. The findings of Jensen et al. (2007) and Dymnicki et al. (2013) indicate that the opposite is also true; effective (ER) has a positive correlation with student academic performance, well-being, and social adjustment.

When one investigates this further it becomes obvious that participants made use of both constructive and destructive (ER) strategies, an example of constructive regulation was that participants reappraised the situation by thinking about unpleasant situations in a more positive manner. An example of destructive regulation was that of expressing anger by physically harming themselves, their property or others. More so, it seems that some participants might have had better (ER) skills than others. It can also be assumed that participants who implemented constructive (ER) strategies may be more equipped to adapt effectively and choose better coping strategies, which might lead to a positive first-year experience; hence to student retention. The opposite might, however, also be true.

Taken together, the findings suggest that participants applied (EI) and (ER) strategies for managing their emotion experiences. Both constructive (effective) and destructive (ineffective) (EI) and (ER) strategies seemed to be utilised by this sample group. When one reflects on the findings reported on above, a clearer picture comes to mind of what the (EI) and (ER) strategies are that first-year students employ during their first-year experience. It also seems that some students might employ more successful emotion management (EM) strategies than others. According to Baumgardner and Crother (2014), The (EI) and (ER) model in itself is seen as a positive psychology construct. It can thus be argued that positive

emotions might be the result of successful and constructive (EM) strategies. Literature indicated that effective (EI) and (ER) strategies are crucial within the student experience as it promotes academic performance, social adjustment and student well-being (Maraichelvi & Rajan, 2013; Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Question 3: What are the emotions experienced by first-year students during the student first-year experience?

It became apparent from the World Café conversations that students experienced the following emotions during the student first-year experience:

Theme 1 – A sense of belonging

A sense of belonging seemed to be a dominant emotion experience among this sample group. A sense of belonging is referred to as a positive feeling of inclusion, acceptance by others, feeling part of a larger group and the perception that one fits in. Koole and Parchoma (2013) conceptualised a sense of belonging as a process of interaction to establish cognitive resonance in which students integrate their personal experiences, beliefs, values and interests of the external world as their own. From the concept *sense of belonging* the following sub-theme emotions emerged: *feelings of acceptance, feeling protected, feeling lonely* and *feeling excluded* (as seen within appendix C).

A few examples follow of how the participants responded to this World Café question:
"The hostel makes me feel accepted and part of a new family, I feel like I belong"
"It seems like first-year students in an on campus hostel is protected by their hostel more than those of us who are not part of an on campus hostel"
"I felt alone at first not knowing anyone"
"I didn't feel like I fit in with the rest of the first-years in the hostel"

Findings from the World Café conversations suggest that participants experienced emotions of *acceptance* and that they could be their own self, be who they want to be and be unique within a new group of people without being judged. Participants seemed to feel part of a new social group and a more extended system. More so, it seemed that those who felt they belong also felt *more safe, supported and protected* by the larger group in which they found

themselves. Interestingly, findings indicated that most students' who reside on campus, experienced a stronger sense of belonging and protection. An explanation for this might be that a hostel is seen as a diverse society in itself which has close relationship bonds and provides a sense of family for all its residents; thus it might be easier for one to fit in and experience a sense of belonging.

However, findings illustrate that those that did not feel that they belong tended to experience *loneliness* as they felt left out, alone and far from where they believed they belong. Some participants even responded that they *felt excluded* from the larger groups, that they did not belong or fit in with these groups. Taken together, these findings might suggest that first-year students have the need to belong and feel part of a larger group. However, some students might not feel that they belong and fit in with the larger groups and as a result might exclude themselves from these groups which might trigger emotions of loneliness.

Cuseo et al. (2010) substantiated the abovementioned findings by arguing that the need to feel socially accepted and to belong plays a large part in student integration and is highly desired by first-year students. Tinto (1993) even suggested that first-year students who feel connected to their social environment and who feel that they belong within this social environment are more likely to graduate than those who feel excluded. The findings were further supported by Student Services Transitions Project Group (2009) that indicated that a students' sense of belonging is a key emotional experience during the transition year to university.

An explanation for this might be that first-year students leave their established social networks and connections when coming to university and that they have to make new social connections to be part of the group. Moreover, these new social networks might build personal resources, increase support networks and promote social inclusion, which can possibly aid in a better adjusted first-year experience.

Theme 2 – Positive affect

Positive affect is described by Cohen and Pressman (2006) as feelings that reflect high levels of pleasure, satisfaction and contentedness. Findings suggest that participants felt positive during their first-year experience as a response to the emotion situations encountered   during

their first year. During the World Café conversations the following positive effects were reported: *Happiness, hope and love* and *emotions of self-empowerment* (as seen within appendix C).

Following, are a few examples of quotes representative of the sub-themes that constitute positive affect:

"I am happy when I make new friends and I can enjoy student life"
"I feel love for my hostel and not just for the hostel itself but the people in the hostel"
"When my parents dropped me off at the hostel I was hopeful for my future"
"I feel like now I have the freedom to be myself and I can be an independent and brave woman"

Findings indicate that participants seemed to feel happy towards first-year situations; *feelings of happiness* consisted of joy, calmness and satisfaction. Moreover, the sample group mentioned that they had a *sense of hope* for their future and that they experienced *feelings of love* (receiving love, giving love and loving certain aspects connected to the first-year experience). *Emotions of self-empowerment* included pride, gratitude, bravery, courage and motivation. The assumption was made that these emotions lead to student self-empowerment and personal growth.

Findings also revealed that positive affect and its underlying emotions (happiness, hope, love, self-empowered emotions) were popular emotion experiences among first-year students. When investigating this further it emerges that emotions form part of everyday life as everyday life is defined by emotion situations. Thus experiencing positive emotions should be a frequent, natural and inevitable response to emotion situations. One can argue that all participants experienced positive affect at some point during their first-year. However, the frequency, duration and intensity of these emotions would differ. On closer investigation it can be assumed that positive emotion situations would possibly generate positive emotions and negative emotion situations would most likely generate negative emotions during the first-year experience.

In support of the findings, Febrilia and Warokka (2011), Mega et al. (2014), Mcmillam (2013), Delport (2014) and Trigwell et al.(2012) confirmed that positive emotions such as those found within this study (pride, courage, enjoyment, happiness and hope) are in fact

experienced by the majority of students during their first-year at a university. Moreover, these researchers further established that positive emotions enhance academic performance, fosters student well-being and serves as a barrier to challenges within the first-year experience (Swanepoel, 2014), which result in overall student success. The findings of Baumgardner and Crother (2014) corroborated these statements and added that positive emotions broaden and build personal resources (psychological, social, physical and intellectual resources) beneficial to first-year students as it enhances student cognitive functioning, social integration, adaptability, resilience and well-being needed in order to graduate.

Theme 3 – Negative affect

Negative affect is described by Lucas et al. (2009) and Watson et al. (1988) as feelings that reflect high levels of unpleasantness, subjective distress, dissatisfaction and discontent. Findings from the World Café conversations indicate that participants experienced a variety of negative emotions which included being *uncertain and scared*, having *regret* and feeling *irritated* and *frustrated* (as seen within appendix C).

Examples of how the participants responded to this World Café question include:
"We feel uncertain, especially during the first semester when you are not sure where you should be, at what time and what you are going to do"
"I felt scared because I didn't know what to expect and how things are going to turn out for me"
"There have been times where I regretted going out or not studying hard enough before a"
"I usually get frustrated with myself for the things I did or didn't do"
"All the rules and regulations set by the hostel committee irritates me and people that doesn't do their work"

Findings indicate that *irritation and frustration* were popular negative emotion experiences among this group of participants and that they experienced these feelings towards themselves and others, and towards situations. First-year students seemed to experience *uncertainty* and felt *scared* within the unfamiliar tertiary environment as they did not know what to expect and what would be expected from them. Other emotions clustered under uncertainty included, being confused and experiencing feelings of surprise. *Regret* was also reported by the participants during the World Café conversations as an experienced emotion which was

accompanied by other emotions such as guilt and disappointment. Findings suggest that students experienced regret as a result of something that had happened or had failed to happen within their first-year experience.

As a means to substantiate the findings, Watson et al. (1988) mentioned that the negative emotions reported by participants (uncertainty, shame and regret, frustration and irritation) are common negative affect conditions. Swanepoel (2014) emphasises that these negative affect conditions serve as a barrier to student academic success and influences it negatively. Frequent experiences of negative affect fosters a downward spiral of negative outcomes such as decreased cognitive functioning, decrease in personal resources, less social support and difficulties in adapting, which hinder graduation (Baumgardner & Crother, 2014).

It thus can be hypothesised that emotions are part of everyday life as everyday life is defined by emotion situations; thus experiencing negative emotions should be a frequent, natural and inevitable response to emotion situations within the first-year experience. From the the World Café discussions it became evident that all participants experienced positive affect at some point during their first year as a student. However, the frequency, duration and intensity of these emotions differed. One could say that the negative emotion situations encountered during the first-year experience generated these negative emotions within the participants. More so, it can be assumed that certain destructive and ineffective emotion management strategies (EI and ER) such as destructive emotional outlet, suppression etc. might promote the experience of negative emotions.

Theme 4 – High arousal emotions

Within this study high arousal emotions are regarded as intensive or overpowering emotions experienced in reaction to the first-year experience. Masuda (2015) and Comes et al. (2013) conceptualised emotion arousal levels as the intensity of emotions and level of emotion activation that ranges from low (such as calmness) to high (such as excitement). Findings from the World Café conversations illustrate that participants experienced high arousal emotions clustered in sub-themes as *positive high arousal* and *negative high arousal* emotions (as seen within appendix C).

Below are reported a few examples of quotes representative of the sub-themes that constitute high-aroused emotions:

"I felt excited the first day when my parents dropped me off at the hostel"

"I feel passionate about the hostel and hostel activities that we do"

"I get angry when the house committee is unfair or unreasonable towards me or someone else"

"I hate the hostel committee because they make me do stuff I don't want to do"

Findings indicate that *high-aroused positive emotions* included passion and excitement as overpowering positive emotions towards pleasant expected and actual first-year situations. *High-aroused negative emotions* included anger, aggression and hate as overpowering negative emotions towards others and towards unpleasant situations. Valiente et al. (2012) indicated found in their study that excitement, anger and hate are seen to be common high-aroused emotions.

According to Masuda (2015), emotion experiences can vary in terms of emotional valence (a positive or negative evaluation) and arousal (low or high level intensity). Thus, valence and arousal are interactive which substantiates the findings as it suggests emotion can be experienced as positive or negative at either a low or high intensity as found within this study. Masuda (2015) and Comes et al. (2013) elaborate on cognitive performance associated with positive and negative high-arousal emotions by indicating that positive high-arousal emotions increase students' intellectual performance whereas negative high-arousal emotions decrease students' intellectual performance.

However, Valiente et al. (2012) state that high-aroused emotions such as excitement reported within the findings might serve as detraction from academic achievement. Moreover, Valiente et al. (2012) also predicted that low to medium levels of emotion intensity might correlate better with academic achievement. Furthermore, research highlighted that emotions result in biological, physiological and sociological responses (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012) that influence attitude, action tendencies and behaviour (Ashkanasy, 2015, Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002) which could either have beneficial or damaging consequences.

When reflecting on the latter it became apparent that the participants at the World Café experienced not only a variety of positive and negative emotions but also experienced these

emotions at different levels of intensity ranging from low, medium to high intensity. After further investigation the assumption was made that if emotion situations predict the type of emotion experiences, it could be said that more intense positive emotion situations might elicit more intense positive emotions and vice versa; thus the intensity of the emotion situation might predict the intensity of the emotion experienced. It may also be possible that the level of intensity might influence the level of influence, for example if low to medium-intensity emotions result in a significant influence as suggested by Masuda (2015), high-intensity emotions would have even more incalculable consequences for first-year students.

Theme 5 – Pathological emotions

Within this study, *pathological emotions* refers to emotions associated with dysfunctional, abnormal and maladaptive behaviour that causes personal distress and which may result in psychopathology if experienced frequently, with high intensity and for extended periods of time (Burke, 2012; Whitbourne & Halgin, 2014). Findings from the World Café conversations indicate that pathological emotions divide into the following sub-themes: Feeling *emotionally overwhelmed*, experiencing *stress, panic and anxiety* and emotions associated with *depression and apathy* (as seen within appendix C).

Examples of how the participants responded to this World Café question include:
"I feel mixed emotions all at once, like I feel angry and sad at the same time"
"When I have to write a test I get so anxious because sometimes I don't have enough time to study"
"Sometimes when things get rough my emotions just go blank, like I don't feel anything anymore"
"I feel depressed when I have to go to a lecturer again and again and I still don't understand what to do"

Findings illustrate that a large number of participants felt *emotionally overwhelmed* as they experienced a large amount of intense and mixed emotions all at once. More so, the sample group that participated in the World Café conversations experienced emotions such as *stress and anxiety* and some even encountered or personally experienced *panic attacks* as a result of emotion situations during the first-year experience. Stress and anxiety appeared in the findings as predominant emotions experienced. The majority of participants experienced high

levels of stress and anxiety in response to college emotion situations. However, reporting on panic attacks were only experienced by two participants and intense feelings of fearfulness were also experienced by this sample group. Sadly emotions associated with *depression and apathy* was experienced such as intense heartache, emotional pain, emotional exhaustion and emotionlessness.

Burke (2012) supports these findings when he includes stress, anxiety, depression, apathy, panic attacks and overwhelming feelings as emotion experiences associated with psychopathology and which might lead to dysfunctional behaviour. Poll (2015) also found within their study that it is not uncommon for first-year students to experience emotions such as stress, anxiety, depression and feelings of being overwhelmed. Furthermore, it was also expected that first-year students felt emotionally overwhelmed due to the various emotional challenges they were confronted with during their first-year experience. Burke (2012) further indicated that it is normal and functional for individuals to occasionally experience these emotions occasionally. It is only when these emotions become severe, interrupt daily functioning, are frequent and experienced over prolonged periods of time, that it is seen as being dysfunctional.

By On closer inspection one can argue that these pathological emotion experiences cannot possibly result in positive outcomes for or impact positively on the first-year students' ability to adapt, their well-being and academic performance. Berrett and Hoover (2015) substantiated this assumption by clarifying that mental health problems and other psychopathological problems among first-year students is a rising concern that has a negative influence on academic performance and student well-being. His findings indicated that one out of ten first-year students experience depression. A possible explanation for the rising concern about high pathological emotion experiences during the first year might possibly be ascribed to the notion that the first-year experiences constitute a large variety of unfamiliar, stressful and anxiety-provoking emotion situations that are likely to elicit these pathological emotion experiences.

Moreover, the assumption can also be made that high-intensity negative emotion situations and high-intensity negative emotions experienced frequently and for longer periods of time might stimulate pathologically related emotions within the first-year student. A hypothesis

can also be formulated to the effect that constant ineffective and destructive emotion management strategies (EI and ER) such as emotion suppression can foster certain pathological emotion experiences.

After thorough investigation, the overall conclusion can be drawn that students experienced a variety of both positive and negative emotions during their first year at university and that some similarities and differences occurred with regard to the emotions experienced in response to certain stimulus events. It can thus be suggested that positive emotion events trigger positive emotions whereas negative emotion events might trigger negative emotions. More so, participants experienced emotions with different intensity, as some emotions reported seemed to have been experienced at a higher level of intensity than were others. What is of concern is that students reported experiencing emotions related to psychopathology during their first year, hypothesising that psychopathology-related emotions might serve as a barrier to student success.

Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

Conclusion

Regardless of the high enrolment rates each year, most first-year students will drop out before graduating (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2014). Student success has a major positive impact on not only the student but also on the higher education institution's (HEI) funds, image and return on investment, the South African labour market and the South African economy. However, the opposite is also true. The question then arises as to why students drop out during their first year. The first-year experience is an emotional experience; it is a period during which first-year students are confronted with unfamiliar emotion-provoking situations that elicit a variety of positive and/or negative emotions (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). These emotions and the manner in which these emotions are managed pave the way to student success or failure (di Fabio & Plazzeschi, 2015; Dymnicki et al., 2013).

That is why it has become increasingly important to investigate what emotion situations first-year students are experiencing and what emotion management strategies such as emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER) they utilise. Hence the general objective of this study was to explore and investigate these emotion situations and the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) employed by first-year students to manage the emotions elicited from these situations, within a South African higher education institution.

This study provided rich and informative findings which illustrate that a variety of emotion situations exist within the first-year experience which are experienced differently by different first-year students. However, there seems to be situations on which almost all participants agreed to be either negative or positive. Yes, findings indicate that first-year students experience the diverse emotion situations they are confronted with as both positive and/or negative. Some participants perceive these emotion situations as a positive experience, an opportunity to grow and develop such as the student and social life, whereas others experience it as undesirable, negative and challenging such as the situation of financial strain. According to literature, a positive outlook on emotion situations promotes student success whereas a negative outlook on these emotion situations hamper success (Mcmillam, 2013).

Results regarding the emotion management strategies utilised by first-year students indicate that first-year students utilise both emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER) as emotion-management strategies when confronted by an emotion situation. Findings regarding (EI) illustrate that first-year students seem to exhibit both high and low levels of emotional intelligence. Literature indicates that students with high emotional intelligence are more likely to achieve success than those with low emotion intelligence (Dingman, 2010; Downey et al., 2011). An example of high-level (EI) included self-awareness and acceptance. An example of low (EI) included, amongst others, impulsiveness.

Findings regarding (ER) indicate that first-year students utilise both constructive and destructive emotion-regulation strategies when confronted with and emotion situation and when linked to theoretical background it suggests that students who choose constructive regulation strategies actually increase their chances of succeeding whereas those who chose destructive regulation strategies decrease their chances of succeeding (Prosen & Vitulic, 2014). An example of constructive regulation that was reported is spirituality and an example of destructive regulation was that of destructive emotional outlet.

Findings regarding emotions experienced illustrate that the first-year experience is an emotional roller coaster ride – an experience enriched with a variety of both positive and negative emotions (Delport, 2014 & Mcmillam, 2013). An example of positive emotions included a sense of belonging and an example of negative emotions reported includes irritation and frustration. Interestingly, findings indicate that students also experience high-aroused emotions such as hate as well as pathological emotions such as depression. Bringing this back to literature, it is said that these positive emotions promote positive outcomes such as student success and that negative emotions promote negative outcomes such as student failure (Swanepoel, 2014).

To conclude, findings indicate that students experience their first year as a roller coaster ride in which they are confronted with a variety of emotion situations they perceive as an opportunity or a challenge. These emotion situations elicit a rich diversity of positive and negative emotions. However, the findings indicate that students utilise both (EI) and (ER) strategies to manage these emotions, be it constructive or destructive.

Limitations and recommendations

Although this study provided valuable insight into and findings on the phenomenon "the first-year experience", it was not without limitations. To start off with, the sample size of 29 participants might have been too small and the population representatives not diverse enough in terms of language, race and age. Therefore one cannot say that the population accurately represents a multi-cultural South Africa. More so, participants were gathered from one university only; thus only representing one university suggesting that the findings cannot be generalised to other settings or universities within South Africa. On the point of generalizability, this study was conceived as explorative in nature in an effort to deeply understand the live experiences of participants related to the phenomenon of emotion situations and how it is managed.

Collecting data after the registration and initiation programme and immediately after the first semester exams might also serve as a limitation seeing that first-year students' perceptions of their first-year experience might have become blurred or influenced. During data collection it also became clear that the first-year students did not understand some of the emotion-related concepts or rather questions posed which had to be rephrased and explained by the research team and this could have influenced the participants' understanding and responses.

Furthermore, the participants seemed to lack self-knowledge which thus made it difficult for them to accurately name the emotions they experienced. The World Café was utilised as data collection method and even though it was appropriate and served rich data it was not without its limitation. Discussing personal experiences within a group might have prevented participants from digging deep and from sharing their true experiences.

However, the following recommendations can be made for future research and for practice: First of all, the sample seize can be enhanced and the population chosen could be more diverse in terms of age, race and language to be more representative of a multi-cultural South Africa. Secondly, in order to be able to generalise the findings from research on this topic at multiple South African universities, it is recommended that future researcher sample participants from various and different universities. Thirdly, future researchers might want to consider collecting their data earlier in the year, perhaps during or directly after the registration and orientation programme before the exams take place so as to ensure that they gain the best possible and accurate responses from the participants regarding their experiences as the experiences can then be recalled more clearly.

The fourth recommendation would be to conduct interviews as the main method of data collection as participants might be more willing to share their true personal experiences without having to feel judged by others. The fifth recommendation is to use these findings in collaboration with other studies regarding the first-year experience such as using this study to build on the university resources available to first-year students or using the findings to develop interventions and training programmes for first-year students. Lastly, it is recommended that future researchers build on this study, gathering data quantitatively by means of a pre-test post-test design.

Practical implications

This research study added practical value and contributed to the field in which Industrial Organisation Psychologists (I/OP) are active as it explored the first-year emotion experience and in particular the emotion situations experienced and the emotion management strategies (EI) and (ER) applied to manage the elicited emotions experienced.

The findings, if used correctly by an I/OP, can add significant value towards South African higher education institutions as these institutions can be regarded as organisations in themselves. The findings can aid universities in understanding the first-year experience more comprehensively and therefore enable them to effectively address high student drop-out among first-year students implementing interventions or programmes with aa view to improve the students' emotion management skills and the first-year experience which will result in better return on investment of the (HEI), a better national and global image with less wasted capital and resources (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2016; Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014).

Findings will also contribute to the South African labour market practically speaking, since increased graduation rates result in an improved workforce with more competent, skilled, competitive and employable employees. This in turn results in less poverty, decreased unemployment rates and an increase in South Africa's global competitiveness and economy (Bloom, et al., 2014; Pouris et al., 2014).

Findings will also contribute to improving the first-year students ,or put otherwise, future / prospective employees' skills and knowledge regarding emotion-related concepts and effective / constructive emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence and emotion regulation) which, as gathered from literature and explained in the discussion above, promote not only high performance, well-being and student success but also career and life success (Jensen et al., 2007). Improving student emotion management strategies might prepare these students to emotionally function more optimally within other domains of their lives such as within the work environment when they become employed which might also serve as a benefit to the organisation within which they then will be employed.

Practical implications: Emotions experienced for literature are also made with regard to enriched and new findings concerning emotion management strategies, emotional intelligence and emotion regulation which might serve as groundwork for future research.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

This chapter provides conclusions regarding the findings from the research article (Chapter 2). The conclusions are aligned with the general and specific objectives of this research study. In addition, this chapter also discusses the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for the organisation / practice and for future research opportunities.

3.1 Conclusion

The purpose and objective of this research study was to gain a new perspective on and to explore the first-year experience within a South African public higher educational institute, specifically in terms of the encountered emotion situations during transition and the emotion management strategies employed by first-year students to manage the emotions elicited from these situations. To reach this objective the researcher employed two World Café Conversations as method for obtaining rich data from the participants' perspectives regarding their first-year experiences.

The findings indicated that the first-year experience can be conceptualised as an emotional roller coaster ride which comprises a variety of emotion situations perceived as either an opportunity or a challenge and a positive or negative situation experience. More so, these emotion situations generate diverse positive and negative emotions at a low, medium and high intensity which first-year students try to influence and manage by means of implementing both constructive and destructive, effective and ineffective emotional intelligence (EI) and emotion regulation (ER) strategies. Di Fabio and Plazzeschi (2015) point out that the emotions students experience and the manner in which these emotions are managed pave the way towards student success or failure.

The specific objectives of this study are illustrated in accordance with the order set by the conceptualised emotion management strategy model (illustrated as figure 3) drawing from both the Effective Events Theory model and the 5-point Emotion Regulation Process. This model suggests that emotion situations occur which result in emotions being experienced and influenced by means of emotion management strategies (EI and ER).
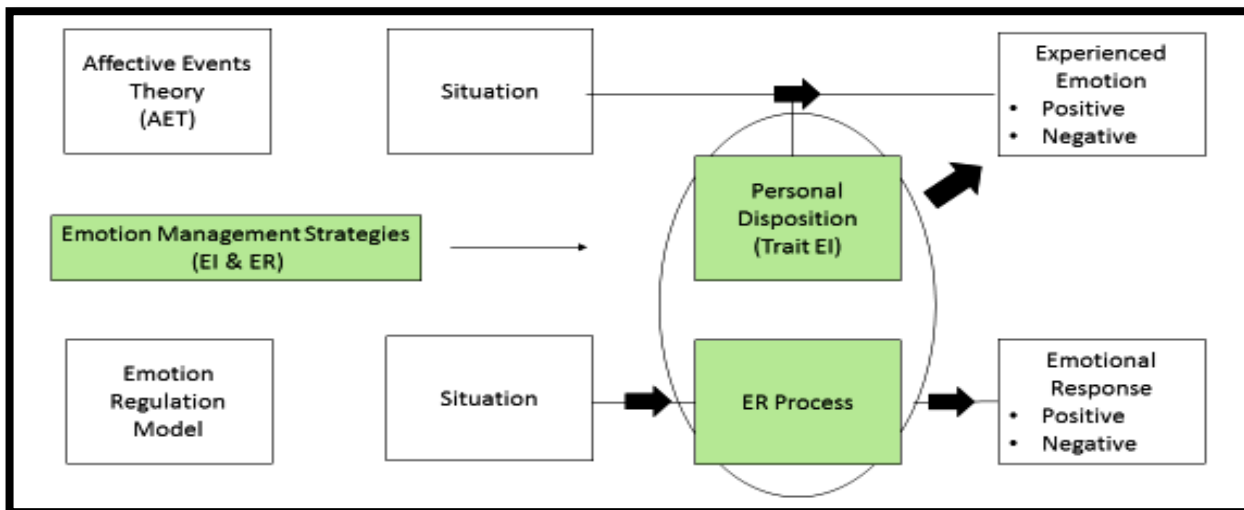
Figure 3. The Conceptual Emotion Management Strategy Model

Next, the World Café findings within chapter two will be discussed in brief, reflecting the specific objectives of the study.

Specific objective 1: To conceptualise emotion situations, emotion management strategies and emotion experiences within and according to literature:

Emotion situations

Morgen et al. (2010) conceptualise an emotion situation as being a positive and/or negative feeling elicited as a result of the interaction between an individual (the first-year student) and a significant event (the transition experience). Thus for an emotion to be experienced something significant should have happened (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, & Gross, 2007). As explained by Ashton-James and Ashkanasy (2008), de Vries, Lemmens, and Brokken (2009), Scherer (2001) and Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), emotion situations are the first components of the emotion experience process – these situations stimulate the beginning of an emotion process (emotion experience, its management and emotion response). More so, the (AET) Affective Evens Theory, applied within the educational context, explains that first-year students experience emotion situations during their transition process that cue a variety of resulting positive and negative emotions (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

More research indicates that first-year students are confronted with a variety of challenging and exciting emotion situations during their transition from secondary to tertiary educational institutions (Poll, 2015; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). Hoffenburger et al. (1999) illustrates

within their W-Curve model of transition that first-year students do in fact experience significant emotionally challenging situations. However, first-year students experience these situations differently – where some might experience it as challenging and unmanageable others experience it as exciting and as an opportunity (Mudhovozi, 2012; Mcmillam, 2013). Scherer (2001) and Erol-Korkmaz (2010) explain that individuals evaluate their emotion situations as either positive or negative; thus cuing a positive or negative emotion experience. Poll (2015) and Sibanyoni and Pillay (2014) suggest that the manner in which one perceives these emotion situations (positive or negative) encountered during the first-year experience will either positively or negatively influence student adaptation, well-being and academic performance.

Emotion management

According to the (AET) Affective Events Theory emotion events have to occur before a positive and/or negative emotion can be elicited, managed and experienced (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Beal & Weiss, 2005). The (AET) further suggests that the emotion situations experienced by (FYS) are the proximal causes of their emotion experiences and that each student's personal disposition/trait such as the emotional intelligence (EI) trait can influence and even predict their emotional experience (Erol-korkmaz, 2010). Moreover, individuals use their personal traits such as (EI) as a way to influence their emotion process by means of managing, manipulating or modifying their emotion experiences; hence (EI) can be conceptualised as the link between the emotion situations and emotions experienced (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008) that serves as an emotion management strategy (Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015). It is important to note that (EI) within this study is referred to as a mixture of personal traits and cognitive abilities (Mayer & Salovey, 2011; Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

However, the (AET) is not the only theory that refers to an emotion management strategy within an emotion process. The 5-point emotion regulation theory developed by Gross (1998) and later improved by Gross (2015) indicates that (ER) occurs at 5-points from during the emotion generation to the emotion experience process influencing, manipulating, and managing emotion experiences towards appropriate responses (Gross, 2015). It is also seen as the link between an emotion situation and an emotion experienced (Aldao, 2013; Gross, 1998) that serves as an emotion management strategy (Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015).

Emotion management can be conceptualised within this study as emotion-related skills, abilities and knowledge to identify, monitor, control, modify and appropriately display emotions within a given situation (Grewal et al., 2006; Shipman, et al., 2010). It is the act of influencing the "what", the "when" and the "how" of emotions to ensure more desirable responses (Grewal et al., 2006; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015). It is also seen as a method for modifying the emotion process in terms of the type, intensity, duration and quality of the emotion experienced (Gross, 2015; Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015). Emotion management is thus an umbrella term for (EI) and (ER) as two integrated strategies (Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015).

An abundance of research elaborates on the importance of (EI) and (ER) as emotion management strategies within an educational setting as it promotes student academic performance, well-being and adaptation which paves the way towards not only life but also student success (Delport, 2014; Di Fabio & Plazzeschi, 2015; Dymnicki et al., 2013; Joshia, Srivastavab & Raychaudhuria, 2012; Prosen & Vitulic, 2014; P. Singh & M. Singh, 2013).

Emotion experiences

For purposes of this study emotion experiences are understood as a sequence of reactions and experiences as a result of encountered stimulus events. These reactions include cognitive evaluation, positive and/or negative feelings, physiological urges, action tendencies and behaviour activation (Jazaieri, Morrison, Goldin, & Gross, 2015; Plutchik's, 2001). Emotion experiences can vary in terms of valence (positive or negative), intensity (low to high) and duration (temporary or permanent) (Masuda, 2015). Beal and Weiss (2005) and Crawford, Soto, de la Barra, Crawford, & Olguín (2014) further note that these emotions influence an individuals' behaviour, interaction and performance.

Valiente et al. (2012) and Mega et al. (2014) support this by arguing that emotion experiences are linked to student success and failure as it has predictive power over student well-being, and performance. Valiente et al. (2012) and Grehan et al. (2012) further state that emotions play a critical role within the educational setting due to the positive and promoting effect positive emotions have on success and the negative, barrier-like influence negative emotions have on success. Moreover, Comes et al. (2013) and Masuda (2015) indicate that high-intensity emotions have a stronger impact on intellectual performance than do low intensity

emotions. Thus high intensity negative emotions will have worse negative consequences and vice versa. However, very high high-aroused positive emotions may prevent optimal intellectual performance whereas medium intensity positive emotions increase cognitive functioning (Valiente et al., 2012). The Broaden and Build theory corroborates with this by indicating that positive emotions have a positive ripple effect and negative emotions a negative ripple effect on an individual's personal resources, well-being, adaptation and ultimately student success (Fredrickson, 2013).

Specific objective 2: To explore the emotion situations that students experience during the student first-year experience:

Findings indicated that first-year students are confronted with various emotion situations. From these, six (6) main situations (themes) emerged which were made up of sub-situations (sub-themes). The six main emotion situations were *transition and adaptation, study demands and resources, interpersonal experiences, academia, hostel experiences and student life.*

Transition and adaptation consisted of increased freedom associated with self-responsibility and self-reliance (making their own decisions and learning how to take care of themselves), the registration, orientation and initiation programme (to prepare students for transition and university life and to orientate them with the provided support structures), experiencing homesickness (as students had to leave behind their already established support network and then felt alone) and adapting to the new environment, new people, new expectations and a new way of living.

Study demands and resources such as time pressure (students felt like they didn't have enough time for all that needs to be done and to balance all that needs to be done), increased physical demands (participants experienced their first-year experience as physically challenging and exhausting), physical resources (some students reported that they were satisfied with the university's given resources while others experienced a lack thereof) and financial strain (many students reported that university is expensive and that they have to work extra jobs to get by in a month) were identified as emotion situations.

Interpersonal experiences which included an increased focus on human / student rights (while some students experienced student rights as positive others experienced it as a barrier to the full first-year experience) and group pressure (some participants referred to group pressure as a negative experience of influence while others experienced it as a positive influence of inclusion). *Academia* was referred to as a new academic environment of quality academics in general (participants seemed to experience tertiary education as a lot more difficult), assessments (tests, exams and practical exams were reported to be more challenging), new lecturers (students felt that they don't have personal relationships with their lecturers) and the class setup (the classes seemed to be experienced as a lot more interactive with a larger class count).

Hostel experiences which consisted of the hostel seniors (some students reported that they experience their seniors as negative while others experienced them as positive support), rules and regulations (most participants viewed rules and regulations as negative because they perceived it as a barrier to fully experiencing their student life) and the house committee (many students were upset that the house committees were unorganised and unstructured and some complained that they are too controlling). Hostel experiences were also reported by most participants as a negative experience. Lastly, *student life* was experienced as a main emotion situation representing student social life (the majority of participants enjoy meeting new people and interacting socially with others) and campus-related activities and traditions (surprisingly, participants experienced campus activities as being positive experiences which they enjoy to be part of). During the World Café conversations it became clear that the majority of first-year students experienced their student life situations as positive emotion situations.

This specific objective revolved around the different emotion situations students were confronted with during their first-year experience at a higher educational institute. This seems to be in accordance with literature indicating that an emotion situation has to occur first before emotions can be elicited within students (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008; Beal & Weiss, 2005). An emotion situation can be conceptualised as a personally significant event that can be perceived as either positive or negative and which triggers an emotional reaction; thus serving as the cause of the emotion experiences (Ochsner & Groos, 2007; Erol-korkmaz, 2010).

During the World Café conversations and as illustrated within the findings it became apparent that first-year students experienced, as suggested by literature (Poll, 2015), a variety of unfamiliar, challenging, positive and negative situations during their first-year term. More so, the abovementioned findings correlate with the emotion situations identified by Poll (2015) and Clark and Hal (2010) as common first-year experiences (independence, college expenses, building new social networks etc.). The interpretation can be made that the student's first-year experience consists of new cognitive, social, emotional / psychological and physical emotion situations to which students have to adapt. By closer inspection one could assume that students had different perceptions regarding these emotion situations, where one had experienced a specific emotion situation as positive, another experienced it as being negative. However, there were cases in which most participants agreed on the positive and/or negative experience of a certain emotion situation.

Habibah et al. (2010) highlight the fact that it is not uncommon for first-year students to differ in their perceptions of the emotion situations associated with the first-year experience. This was further supported by Mcmillam (2013) who added that students who evaluate emotion situations as positive are better able to adapt and adjust to the new emotion situations and therefore might even have increased chances of achieving student success. However, the opposite also seemed to be true. Therefore, how students evaluate these situations either promote (positive evaluation) or hinder (negative evaluation) student success. Reflecting on the latter one could hypothesise that positive evaluated emotion situations might stimulate positive emotion experiences and in turn promote student success, whereas negative perceived emotion situations might have the opposite effect of generating negative emotions which hinder student success (Kaizer & Muller, 2007).

Specific objective 3: To explore the emotion management strategies (emotional intelligence EI and emotion regulation ER) employed by first-year students during their student first-year experience:

Participants of the World Café conversations reported to have utilised a variety of different emotion management strategies to manage and influence their emotion experiences. These management strategies were clustered within two (2) main themes being *(EI)* and *(ER)*.

A variety of nine (9) different *(EI)* strategies referred to as sub-themes emerged within the findings which included self-awareness, acceptance and self-growth - participants exercised their ability to get in touch with their true self, to accept themselves and they tried to improve themselves. Social awareness - students had the ability to recognise emotions within others and tried to walk a mile in other students shoes to give them a new perspective. Emotion expression - students seemed to have the ability to appropriately supress and express their emotions visually and verbally for example to cry or not to cry during certain situations. Self-motivation - participants motivate themselves to achieve a goal by trying again and again and setting goals. Stress management - some students reported that they manage and lessen their stress by means of prioritising and dealing with their problems immediately.

Trait optimism - some students seemed to have a personal trait of optimism which they used as a means to foster a positive mental attitude regarding situations to for example see the silver lining and the humour in a situation. Low impulsivity – students practised self-control by reflecting on consequences and calming themselves down before responding to the situation. Adaptability – many students were able to adapt effectively to and embracing their new surroundings. Emotion use to facilitate thinking – participants used their elicited emotions such as stress to maximise their intellectual abilities by working even harder.

Findings regarding (EI) illustrated that the participants seemed to portray both high and low levels of emotional intelligence. The seven (7) *(ER)* representative strategies included those as illustrated within the 5-point emotion regulation process model. However, two separate sub-themes were also extracted. Findings further indicate that the participants utilised both effective and ineffective (ER) strategies suggesting that some participants might have better (ER) skills than others.

The (ER) strategies included situation selection (participants chose situations that would stimulate a specific emotion such as arranging a coffee date to talk to friends as it would stimulate positive emotions or planning to go to the movies etc.), situation modification (students seemed to modify their situations by means of prioritising, time management or simply dropping out of university), attention deployment (participants changed their attention by avoiding their emotions, forgetting about it or keeping themselves busy with other things such as watching series or playing video games), cognitive change (participants changed their perspective of situations by laughing it off, embracing the moment and accepting that it has

happened and that it is not the end of the world) response modulation (the majority of students modulated their response tendencies by means of physical exercise such as going for a run, engaging in hobbies such as baking, or socialising such as going out to party), spirituality (students seemed to fall back on their religion by praying and meditating) and destructive emotional outlet (some participants managed their emotions by kicking, breaking and throwing personal belongings and sometimes even hurting others).

According to Peña-sarrionandia et al. (2015) individuals utilise (EI) and (ER) as a method to influence, manipulate and modify their emotion experiences and emotion reactions elicited by emotion situations. Beal and Weiss (2005) and Erol-korkmaz (2010) suggest that these emotion management strategies serve as the link between stimulus emotion situations and the resulting emotions experienced. Emotion management is conceptualised within this study as a set of emotion-related skills, abilities and knowledge to influence the "which", the "when" and the "how" of emotions in response to an emotion event. This set of emotion-related abilities is a combination of (EI) and (ER) and emotion management can be regarded as an umbrella term for (EI) and (ER) strategies (Peña-sarrionandia et al., 2015).

On closer investigation it became apparent that first-year students seem to employ both (EI) and (ER) strategies to influence their emotion experience process. According to Downey et al. (2011) and Dingman (2010) students with high (EI) are more likely to achieve success than those with low (EI). Moreover, some participants appeared to utilise effective and constructive Emotion Management (EM) strategies while others engaged in more destructive and ineffective (EM) strategies. Prosen and Vitulic (2014) contemplate that constructive emotion regulation strategies increase chances of success whereas destructive regulation strategies decrease chances of success. More literature emphasise the importance of effective (EM) strategies within the first-year experience as it promotes academic performance, social adjustment and student well-being which ultimately increase student success and the possibility of eventually graduating (Dymnicki et al., 2013; Prosen & Vitulic, 2014). Furthermore the assumption was made that effective (EM) will most likely result in positive emotions, whereas ineffective (EM) will most likely result in negative emotions.

Specific objective 4: To explore the emotions experienced by first-year students during the student first-year experience:

The World Café participants experienced a variety of positive and negative emotion experiences which were categorised into five (5) main emotion experiences, each with their associated sub-emotions. The main emotion experiences were a *sense of belonging, positive affect, negative affect, high arousal emotions, pathology emotions.*

A *sense of belonging* - included feelings of acceptance and feeling safe and protected when one belongs. However, when one does not belong, feelings of loneliness and exclusion arise. *Positive affect* – included feelings of happiness, hope and love and emotions of self-empowerment such as emotional discovery, self-assurance and bravery. *Negative affect* - included feeling uncertain, being scared, having regret, feeling irritated and feeling frustrated towards self and others. *High-arousal emotions* - consisted of both high-intensity positive (excited and passionate) and high-intensity negative emotions (hate and aggression). Sadly *pathological emotions* also emerged which included feeling emotionally overwhelmed, experiencing intense stress, panic and anxiety and other emotions associated with depression and apathy.

Findings suggest that different emotions were experienced by the participants during their first year in response to the emotion situations they were confronted with, and the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) utilised to influence these emotions (Erol-korkmaz, 2010). Emotion experiences conceptualised within literature refers to a bio-psycho-social reaction process in response to meaningful emotion-provoking events. This emotion-reaction process involves cognitive evaluation, positive and/or negative feelings, physiological changes and action or behaviour tendencies in response to the stimulus event (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012).

When one reflects on the findings it is evident that this World Café sample group experienced a variety of both positive and negative emotions during their first year at university and that there were some similarities and differences with regard to the emotions experienced in response to certain stimulus events (Mega et al., 2013). Masuda (2015) agreed to this by arguing that emotions differ in valence; thus individuals experience both positive and negative emotions. The most prominent positive emotions reported were a sense of belonging

and excitement towards the first-year experience, whereas the most prominent negative emotions included anxiety, feelings of uncertainty and frustration.

From the World Café conversations it became clear that participants experienced emotions with different intensity, as some emotions reported seemed to be experienced at a higher level of intensity than others. This was supported by Nobata and Ochi (2005) who stated that individuals experience emotions at different levels of intensity (low to high). Sadly students also reported experiencing emotions associated with psychopathology which might negatively influence student success (Berrett & Hoover 2015; Burke, 2012).

The latter reflects that first-year students experience both positive and negative emotions during their first year at university (Poll, 2015) and that the valence (positive or negative), intensity (high arousal or low arousal) and duration (frequent or momentarily) of these emotions can either pave the way towards student graduation or towards student dropout (Masuda, 2015). Swanepoel (2014) argues that positive emotions promote positive student outcomes and negative emotions promote negative student outcomes. Moreover, after thorough investigation the assumption was made that the evaluation (positive or negative) of the emotion situations experienced, and the effective or ineffective nature of the (EM) strategies predicted whether the generated emotions would be positive or negative.

Specific objective 5: To make recommendations for future research and practice

This objective will be addressed in section 3.3

3.2 Limitations

Although this study provided valuable insight into and findings regarding the phenomenon "the first-year experience", it was not without its limitations.

The *first limitation* relates to the sample size of the World Café participants. A sample size of 29 was gathered and used to participate in this study, and some might say that the size is too small and that it could have been larger. More so, the sample group doesn't appear to be diverse enough in terms of language, age and race and thus result in the sample not being representative of a diverse and multi-cultural South African student population. It   is

important to ensure a balanced number of age, language and race ratio's across the participants and also a more balanced representative of participants who reside on and off campus to ensure better generalisation of the findings. This is a crucial limit due to the fact that this sample consisted of predominantly white South African participants (90%) and (10%) black South African participants of whom the majority resided on campus (69%) and spoke predominantly Afrikaans (83%).

The *second limitation* concerns the generalisation of the findings to the broader South African Higher Educational context. This study was conducted only at one South African Higher Educational Institute (HEI) making use of only this institute's first-year students as participants. Thus the findings cannot be generalised to other South African universities. It is important to note that different universities have different cultures and challenges, therefore different findings might have been found within other universities.

The *third limitation* refers to the data collection method and process utilised. This study made use of a World Café method to collect data and although this method was appropriate and served rich data, it was not without its limitation. Due to the fact that this method revolved around group conversations, it might have prevented participants to dig deep into and to share their true personal experiences with others. Furthermore, the data collection process started after the registration and orientation programme of the first-year students and straight after the first semester assessment week. Some might say that the data was collected too late in the year as the prominent period of the first-year experience is within the first few months. Collecting data at a later stage might have influenced the participants' memory of the actual severity and intensity of the situations and emotions experienced. It might also have influenced their perspective concerning their first-year experience as the prime time of adaptation was long over.

The *fourth limitation* concerns the participants' understanding and knowledge of the concepts of the study. Some participants didn't understand certain emotion-related concepts or research questions which had to be rephrased and re-explained by the research team. This might have influenced the participants' understanding and perspectives and, in turn, their responses.

The *last limitation* had to do with the participants' self-knowledge and understanding. Some participants struggled to accurately name and identify the emotions that they experienced and others had a lack of knowledge regarding the different emotions one can experience. This might have also influenced responses.

3.3 Recommendations

Recommendations are provided for the organisation / practice and future research opportunities.

3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation

The benefit of conducting this research study was that one could gain a better understanding of the first-year students' emotion experiences; thus the emotion situations they are confronted with, the emotion management strategies (EI and ER) they utilise and the emotions they experience during their first year at a Higher Educational Institute (HEI). This research provided a glimpse into what it is like for first-year students to enter university from an emotional perspective. The increased awareness and insight into the first-year emotion experience and the immense impact it has on student well-being, adaptation, academic performance and ultimately student success or failure serves as beneficial to (HEI) as organisations to prioritise a positive first-year emotion experience.

This study identified several challenging positive and negative emotion situations first-year students are confronted with, which influence their emotion experiences and thus their measure of success. With this new insight, (HEIs) can identify and increase positive situations that elicit positive emotions and promote student success and eliminate or modify negative situations that elicit negative emotions and that contribute to student failure. This study also enables (HEIs) to identify study-demands and resources or the lack thereof and combine this information with that of other studies regarding student demands and resources in order to develop a strategy to ensure enough study resources for first-year students. A suggestion would be to increase the awareness, availability, access and quality of psychological services for first-year students.

Moreover, the importance of effective emotion management strategies (EI) and (ER) were highlighted within this study due to the major influence thereof on student success or failure.

Thus it is suggested that (HEIs) use these findings to develop and implement strategies and intervention programmes to promote effective and constructive emotion management, by training first-year students in applying soft skills such as (EI) and effective (ER) strategies during their registration and orientation period. This might assist in emotionally preparing the students for their first-year experience and, in turn, increasing their chances of graduating. This is confirmed by Poll (2015) who stated that most first-year students fail due to them not being emotionally prepared for university.

During this study the importance of high graduation rates for (HEIs) as organisations, for the South African government, for the student and for the labour market has been emphasized. This study clearly illustrates the importance of positive emotion situations, positive emotions and effective emotion management (EI and ER) in ensuring higher student retention and success rates. It can therefore be recommended that (HEIs) promote a positive student first-year emotion experience by following effective and sustainable strategies.

3.3.2 Recommendations for future research

The *first recommendation* can be provided for future research in terms of increasing the sample size to be more diverse in terms of different ages, languages and races and more representative of a multi-cultural South Africa.

The *second recommendation* is made to gather participants from a variety of and different South African Higher Educational Institutes so as to be able to generalise the findings across a South African Higher Education context.

The *third recommendation* is to conduct interviews as a data collection method to dig deeper into the participants' personal experiences and to firmly grip the real essence and intensity of their emotion experiences which they might not have shared within a group. Participants might have rich emotional experiences that will only be touched on during a one-on-one and face-to-face interview. Furthermore, future researchers might want to consider collecting their data earlier in the year, perhaps during or straight after the registration and orientation programme to ensure rich, clear and accurate reflections of the participants' experiences without memory serving as an influencing factor.

The *forth recommendation* can be provided to thoroughly explain emotion-related concepts to the sample group prior to data collection to ensure that they are well knowledgeable of and able to accurately respond to the research questions.

The *Fifth recommendation* can be made to combine this study's findings with other studies regarding the first-year experience in order to build a better understanding and perception of the student first-year experience and to develop more accurate and sustainable interventions.

The *last recommendation* concerns the research approach. It is recommended that future researchers investigate the first-year experience by means of a quantitative research strategy to perhaps utilise a pre-test post-test design in order to investigate the development of certain first-year experiences. For example, it is recommended to do a developmental study on the first-year students' emotion management strategies (EI and ER) by training students in effective management and assessing their success afterwards to identify whether in fact (EI) and (ER) as emotion management strategies can be developed and to what extent it increases student graduation or success.

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APPENDIX A

Table 2

Emotion situations experienced during the first-year experience

Theme	Sub-theme	Associated meaning	Response
Transition and adaptation	Self-reliance & responsibility	With new freedom come new responsibilities. The participants experience a stronger sense of self-responsibility and self-reliance, they have to care for themselves and make their own decisions.	*"I had to teach myself how to look after myself and how to become an adult"* *"I am old enough now to make my own decisions and to take self-responsibility for my actions"*
	Registration & orientation programme	This includes the preparation of first-year students for the transition and for orientating them with the support structures. It also includes the initiation of students into the university and hostels.	*"I hate orientation, it was emotionally and physically exhausting"* *"Registration and orientation was an emotional roller coaster"*
	Homesickness	First-year students are separated from their family and friends and this causes them to experience distress as they miss their home and have preoccupied thoughts about home.	*"Sometimes I get homesick because I am so far away from home and I miss my family dearly"* *"My direct support network being my family is gone and I truly miss them a lot, I feel lonely because I am very home bound"*
	Adapting	Participants had to adjust themselves and adapt to the new and unfamiliar environment, people, experiences and expectations associated with a university.	*"Only after my first semester I started to find my feet'* *"The transition was difficult and hard to adapt to as there was much to adapt to"*
Study demands and resources	Time pressure	Participants feel they are pressured for time and work-life balance as their time is limited.	*"Time management gets difficult due to all the things that have to done for example to balance my academics, social life and sport"* *"Time is limited, sometimes I*

			don't know how I am going to get everything done in one day"
	Physical demands	The first-year environment, experiences and activities taking its toll on students physically.	*"The registration and orientation programme was physically demanding"* *"My physical living standards have fallen dramatically since I came to university"*
	Physical resources on/off campus	The first-year environment, experiences and activities which serves as physical resources and helping tools for students or lack thereof.	*"Transport and parking is a big concern, there isn't enough space for us to park and we aren't allowed to park on campus"* *"I love the free internet in the hostel and the fact that I do not have to worry about water and electricity"*
	Financial strain	Participants feel financial strain, they feel that they do not have enough money, university is expensive and they are poor.	*"The end of each month is a financial struggle"* *"I have to do extra work here and there for money so that I can get a little extra money because the money my parents give me is not enough"*
Interpersonal experiences	Human rights	Human rights or rather student rights are rights inherent to all human beings (students).	*"We deserve respect, we are treated like animals"* *"This human rights issue is stupid, I don't see how taking part in university and hostel traditions violates one's human rights, in fact I feel that by taking a lot of the traditions away due to the focus on human rights, it is preventing me from experiencing my first-year as I should"*
	Group pressure	Participants feel pressured / influenced by members of their group or by seniors to do or believe things that they wouldn't normally do / believe.	*"Sometimes my social group influence me to participate when I don't really want to"* *"There is a lot of group pressure, especially when you go out to*

			party hard"
Academia	Academics in general	The participants' experiences regarding the level of education and the quality of academics taught at the university.	*"I find the academics that we do a lot more challenging than that of high school, there is a big gap between matric and university academics"* *"Academics are a lot more enjoyable because you get to study what you want and are interested in, with no unnecessary subjects"*
	Assessments	Summative measures intended to measure learning outcomes of students. It is thus valid evidence that students have or have not adequately demonstrated the knowledge and capabilities expected of them.	*"Tests and exams are harder than those of high school"* *"We stress a lot when we have to write exams because we don't know what to expect and it is also stressful when we receive our exam results"*
	Lecturers	The participants' experiences regarding their lecturers and the interaction they have with their lecturers.	*"It is an adjustment to be just a number as the lecturers don't know me personally at all"* *"We have to get used to new and unique lecturers who we don't know"*
	Class setup	The university class setup which includes the participants' experiences of class, what is different, known, what they like and don't like of university classes.	*"The classes are a lot bigger that what we are used to in high school"* *"The classes are much more interactive so you have to be prepared for class"*
Hostel experiences	Hostel seniors	The first-year students' (new comers) experiences of the senior hostel residents (those who have been living in the hostel for quite some time and who have authority).	*"I was so scared to meet and greet the hostel seniors"* *"Some of the seniors are nice to you and they are the ones you like but others are just mean and rude"*
	Rules & regulations	The hostel has certain rules and regulations to ensure order and	*"I hate the all the rules and regulations, it takes all the fun"*

		discipline and to protect the first-year students.	*away from the experience"* *"I hate being told what to do and what not to do"*
	House Committee	The authority figures and leaders that manage and lead the hostel and all its residents.	*"The house committee tries to control us and I don't like that"* *"The house committee members can't plan or organise effectively and that makes me angry"*
Student life	Social life	Social life forms a large part of the student experience as it includes interacting and socialising with new people in different ways.	*"We meet a lot of new people during the registration and orientation programme with which you build a new bond"* *"We get to socialise whenever we want to and it is just amazing"*
	Campus-related activities	First-year students get to experience a whole new world of activities which are related to the university and hostel traditions.	*"It is sometimes difficult to balance one's academic life with all the university and hostel activities which you are required to participate in"* *"I love to be part of as many hostel and university activities as I can because it is what makes the student experience so great"*

APPENDIX B

Table 3

Emotion management strategies (EI and ER) applied during the first-year experience

Theme	Sub-theme	Associated meaning	Response
Emotional intelligence (EI)	Self-awareness, acceptance & growth	Being aware of oneself, one's emotions and the situation one is experiencing. Also having the ability to accept / be oneself fully and improving oneself.	*"Get in touch with what makes you happy"* *"Just be yourself and improve yourself"*
	Social-awareness	Being aware of others, their emotions, situations and reactions. This includes listening to others and learning about other people.	*"You have to put yourself in other people's shoes"* *"learn about other people and their background"*
	Emotion expression	The participants' ability to express or not to express their emotions visually by means of verbal and non-verbal communication.	*"Sometimes I just cry it out"* *"Sometimes I want to talk about my emotions and other times I feel it is better to just say nothing and keep quiet"*
	Self-motivation	Motivating oneself to be persistent and having perseverance in achieving a goal with enthusiasm without relying on motivation from others.	*" I set short and long-term goals for me to reach"* *"I try again and again and again"*
	Stress management	The participants' ability to manage, control and lessen stress by means of implementing different techniques.	*"I think of how I handled it and how I should have handled it"* *"I address problems directly and immediately"*
	Trait optimism	A positive mental attitude and way of thinking towards something or a situation.	*"I focus on what is good within each situation"* *"Sometimes I just laugh about it"*
	Low impulsivity	Involves the tendency to not act impulsively, but to rather reflect and think of the consequences before doing.	*"I take a deep breath and then count until ten, sometimes I even count a little more than ten"* *"I think about what would be the best way to react before I do something stupid"*
	Adaptability	Participants being able to change with the environment and to adapt to new situations.	*"I try to embrace the moment"* *"I made a new life for myself here so I don't want to go back home"*
	Emotion use to facilitate thinking	Maximising cognitive thinking by means of harnessing the appropriate emotions.	*"Stress makes me work harder"* *"I work better and faster when I am under pressure"*

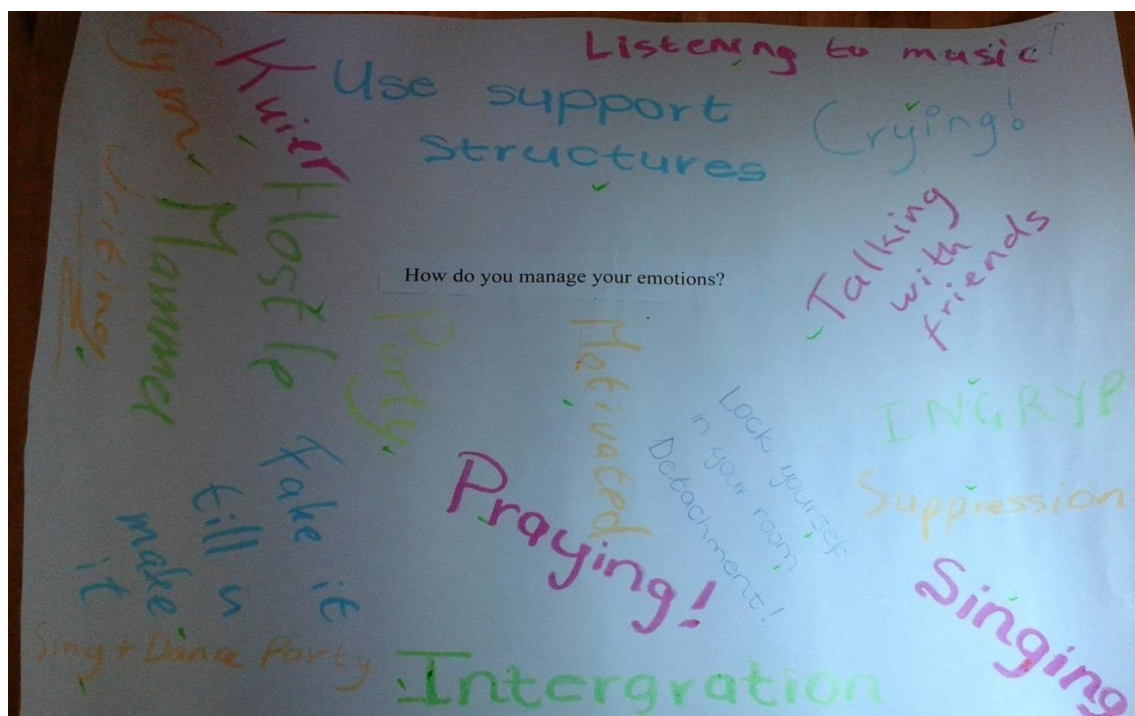| **Emotion regulation (ER)**	Situation selection	Deliberate selection of a situation that fosters certain emotions.	*"I arrange a coffee date with my friends"* *"I go to my favourite place"*
	Situation modification	Modifying and altering the physical situation in order to change the emotional impact.	*"I start to prioritise my things and do time management"* *"Most of my friends just drop out"*
	Attentional deployment	To deliberately change ones attention during and after the emotion situation.	*"I try to forget about it or avoid it"* *"I keep myself busy with other stuff"*
	Cognitive change	To change ones cognitions regarding a certain situation.	*"I try to laugh it off and see the humour in the situation"* *"I make peace with the fact that it happened"*
	Response modulation	To adjust and influence ones response tendencies towards a situation.	*"Relieve my stress physically by means of exercising"* *"I go out to party and get drunk"*
	Spirituality	Participants falling back on their religion or focussing on religious matters. Connection to something bigger than themselves.	*"When I experience strong emotions I talk to God"* *"I fall back on my faith"*
	Destructive emotional outlet	Participants' way of acting out their emotions or reacting to their emotions in a destructive manner.	*"I sometimes kick a ball or a friend when I am upset"* *"I through stuff like my cell-phone when I am upset"*

APPENDIX C

**Table 4**

Emotions experienced during the first-year experience

Theme	Sub-theme	Associated meaning	Response
Belonging	Feeling accepted	Participants feel that they are individually accepted and part of a larger group.	*The hostel makes me feel accepted and part of a new family, I feel like I belong"* *"Here I can be who I want to be, I can be unique and no one will judge me"*
	Feeling protected	Participants feel safe, supported and protected when part of a larger group.	*"It seems like first-year students in an on-campus hostel is protected by their hostel more than those of us who are not part of an on-campus hostel"* *"Being part of a hostel makes me feel safe, like someone has got your back"*
	Feeling lonesome	Feeling alone, lonely or left out when participants do not experience group acceptance or belonging.	*"I miss my people at home, my group of friends and my family"* *"I felt alone at first not knowing anyone"*
	Feeling excluded	Participants do not feel part of the larger group, they feel left out and as if they do not belong. They might exclude themselves or be excluded by others.	*"As a first-year you feel excluded from the rest of the hostel"* *"I didn't feel like I fit in with the rest of the first-years in the hostel"*
Positive affect	Happiness	Participants seemed to experience positive emotions of happiness, joy, satisfaction and calmness during the first-year experience and also stated that they experience the transition as being nice.	*"I am happy when I make new friends and I can enjoy student life"* *"I am very happy to be here away from school and my family, I am glad I can start fresh and do my own thing"*
	Hope & love	Participants felt a sense of hope when arriving at university and	*"I feel love for my hostel and not just for the hostel itself but the*

		experienced love by means of giving and receiving love to others and loving certain aspects of the first-year experience.	*people in the hostel"* *"When my parents dropped me off at the hostel I was hopeful for my future"*
	Self-empowered	Throughout the transition participants experienced a variety of emotions that led to self-empowerment and personal growth such as emotional discovery, self-assurance and independence, feelings of bravery etc.	*"That self-pride you get when the house committee recognise something good that you have done and then you want to keep up the good work"* *"I feel like now I have the freedom to be myself and I can be an independent and brave woman"*
Negative affect	Uncertainty & Scared	Participants seemed to experience negative emotions towards the transition such as being uncertain, confused and scared with regard to what to do and what to expect and being surprised with the unexpected.	*"We feel uncertain, especially during the first semester when you are not sure where you should be, at what time and what you are going to do"* *"I felt scared because I didn't know what to expect and how things are going to turn out for me"*
	Regret	Experiencing feelings of guilt, regret and disappointment after something had happen or failed to happen.	*"I sometimes feel disappointed in my fellow first-year students when they don't participate in the hostel activities as we should"* *"There have been times where I regretted going out or not studying hard enough before a test"*
	Irritation & frustration	Participants experienced feelings of frustration and irritation towards self, others and situations which they encountered during the first-year experience.	*"I usually get frustrated with myself for the things I did or didn't do"* *"All the rules and regulations set by the hostel committee irritate me and people that doesn't do their work"*
High arousal emotions	Positive (passionate, excited)	Participants experienced intensive / overpowering positive emotions towards the	*"I felt excited the first day when my parents dropped me off at the hostel"*

		first-year experience and the situations that go along with it.	*"I feel passionate about the hostel and hostel activities that we do"*
	Negative (anger, aggression, hate)	Participants experienced intensive / overpowering negative emotions towards the first-year experience and the situations that go along with it.	*"I get angry when the house committee is unfair or unreasonable towards me or someone else"* *"I hate the hostel committee because they make me do stuff I don't want to do"*
Pathological emotion experiences	Emotionally overwhelmed	Participants experience a great amount of different and intense emotions all at once.	*"I feel mixed emotions all at once, like I feel angry and sad at the same time"* *"I feel overwhelmed by all the new things I am experiencing and all the emotions that I experience over and over again"*
	Stress, panic & anxiety	A great deal of stress is experienced during the first year that leads to fearfulness, anxiety and even panic attacks with associated physiological symptoms.	*"When I have to write a test I get so anxious because sometimes I don't have enough time to study"* *"You stress about: am I going to adapt, will I fit in, am I going to be to make new friends, are the tests going to be difficult etc."*
	Depression and apathy	Participants experience a variety of negative emotions that are associated with depression, emotional pain, emotional exhaustion and feeling emotionless (blank).	*"Sometimes when things get rough my emotions just go blank, like I don't feel anything anymore"* *"I feel depressed when I have to go to a lecturer again and again and I still don't understand what to do"*

APPENDIX D

Photograph examples of the World Café data collection

Table 1 – What emotion situations do you experience as a first year student?

Table 2 – What emotions do you experience as a first year student?

Table 3 – How do you manage these emotions or how do you react to these emotions?

APPENDIX E
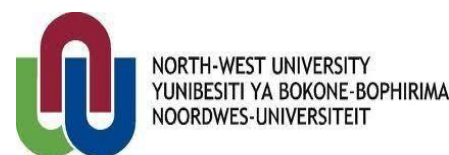
THE WORLD CAFÉ CONVERSATION

INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPATION IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY

(Please fill in all information; it will be treated as confidential. The following personal information will only be used for administration purposes)

WORLD CAFÉ NUMBER: _____

DATE: _____

PARTICIPANT NUMBER: _____

GENDER: _____

AGE: _____

ETHNICITY: _____

HOME LANGUAGE: _____

I RESIDE ON ☐ **/OFF** ☐ **CAMPUS (tick appropriate option)**

THE HOSTEL I AM ASSOCIATED WITH/RESIDE IN: _____

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1. TITLE OF THE STUDY

"An Exploration of Emotion Situations and Emotion Management During the Student First Year Experience"

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As part of the requirements for the Master's degree program in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University, a research study (mini-dissertation) regarding Industrial psychology related concerns has to be completed. The aim of this research study is to explore and to investigate the emotion situations that drive an emotional reaction/experience (positive or negative) and the different emotion management strategies utilized by participants during the first year experience within a South African higher educational institute.

3. THE RESEARCH TEAM

The main researcher (Café Host):   Henriette van der Wal

The research assistants (Table Hosts):   Dean Vermeulen, Ashley Kriel, Isabel Meyer

Registered psychologist/counsellor: Prof. Cara Jonker

4. PROCEDURE

A World Café will be held by the researcher. The researcher will welcome the participants here the research purpose, role of the research team, confidentiality and consent will be discussed. The researcher will then explain the World Café procedure to the participants with a demonstration. The participants will each be assigned to a table and placed in groups of 5. The participants will then be asked to discuss the particular research question they are presented with and to share and scribble their thoughts and ideas down creatively. This will be a simultaneous conversation for about 20 minutes where after the participants will be asked to rotate to the next table to discuss another research question. Afterwards the participant's ideas/thoughts will be put up on the "wall of thought" and discussed. A guest speaker will then have 15 minutes to empower the participants.

5. POTENTIAL BENEFIT OF THE RESEARCH

The participants will be given the opportunity to socialise and share their experiences, thus learning from each other and networking. The participants will also be encouraged to link ideas and be creative in identifying possible solutions and action plans during the debriefment and "Wall of thought" discussion. A guest speaker from INGRYP services will be invited to speak to the participants about the first year experience and how they could improve and sustain their well-being and academic performance. Participants will also be given a self-help tool with necessary and relevant emergency numbers and self-help tips.

6. POTENTIAL HARM OF THE RESEARCH

Sensitive yet important research questions regarding personal experiences and emotions will be discussed within a group. Some participants may feel uncomfortable to share their thoughts, or the discussions may cause distress. For this reason, there will be a registered psychologist/ counsellor on scene. Confidentiality is partial and fellow students might decide to break confidentiality even after they have signed the confidentiality agreement.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY

The information gathered will at all times remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only. The researcher will assign each participant with a number to replace their name/identity in order to ensure confidentiality throughout the study. Participants will also be asked not to call each other on their names but rather their numbers during the recorded discussion. The whole research team has been adequately trained to ensure confidentiality of participants at all times.

8. PARTIAL CONFIDENTIALITY

Within this study partial confidentiality is crucial and will thus be explained fully by the researcher. Participants will be asked to discuss sensitive and important research questions within a group, thus they will be asked to share their ideas and thoughts with others. Therefor participants are asked to sign the following:

I (name)………………………………………hereby agree to keep the information I have learned and the discussions of the group/day regarding the research questions confidential. I will not speak of or repeat what has been said by myself/others outside the walls of the World Café. I will keep my fellow participants' information private.

9. STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate and withdraw your consent to participate at any time during the study. You will not be penalised in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

10. ENQUIRIES

If you need any further information or have concerns, you are free to contact the main researcher (Café Host), Henriette van der Wal (sonskynkind7@gmail.com).

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study voluntarily.

I (name)……………………………………agree to participate in the World Café research study.

Participant's signature_____