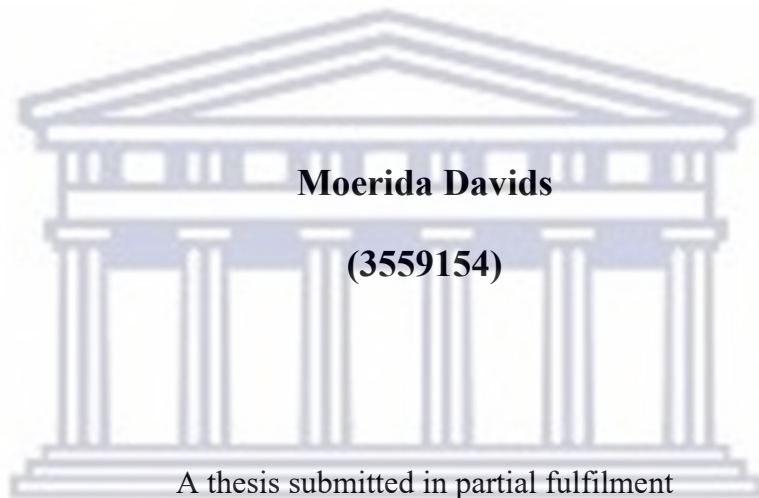


Title of Thesis:

Factors influencing first-year university students' social and academic integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study.



of the requirements for the degree of **Masters in Public Administration**

in the **School of Government**

Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences

University of the Western Cape

Supervisor: Professor Subethra Pather

October, 2024

Plagiarism Declaration

Declaration

Hereby I, Moerida Davids, declare that *Factors influencing first-year university students' social and academic integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study*, is my own original work and that all sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that this document has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university in order to obtain an academic qualification.

Full name: Moerida Davids

Date: October 2024

Student Number:

3559154

Signature __MDavids__

Approved by

Supervisor name

Main Supervisor

.....

Abstract

This study examines the factors that impact first-year students' social and academic integration within the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Understanding these factors is crucial for supporting student transition, retention, and academic performance within the faculty. The literature on first-year transitions highlights that dropout rates are notably high, particularly after the first semester and towards the end of the academic year. Students may withdraw due to academic challenges or external factors such as financial difficulties, family obligations, or personal issues. Additionally, some students leave due to misaligned programme choices or a lack of fit with the university culture. This study aims to identify specific factors influencing first-year EMS students' social and academic integration and to provide recommendations to support their successful transition, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting retention and academic success. A qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on nine purposively selected first-year EMS students. Data were collected through three online focus groups conducted via Google Meet, using semi-structured interview questions to capture the participants' experiences. The study draws on Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model (SIM), which emphasizes the importance of students' social and academic integration, their commitment to degree completion, and their affiliation with their faculty and university. The main research question guiding this study is: *What factors influence first-year students' social and academic integration within the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences at UWC?* Thematic analysis of the data revealed that successful integration for first-year EMS students hinges significantly on forming peer connections and developing a strong affiliation with the university. An unanticipated finding was the prominent role of Communities of Practice (CoP), which emerged as a key factor in fostering a sense of belonging and providing a supportive environment for first-year students. Contrasting with previous research, demographic characteristics and prior academic knowledge were found to have minimal impact on students' integration within the faculty. Based on these findings, the study recommends extending the first-year Orientation Programme to two weeks to enhance support for first-year students' adaptation to university life and to maximize early integration benefits. This research contributes to the field of first-year student experience by offering actionable insights for improving social and academic integration within EMS, aiming to ensure a smoother transition, increase retention, and promote student success at UWC.

Keywords

First-year students

Social integration

Academic integration

Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS)

University of the Western Cape (UWC)

Community of Practice (CoP)

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Thee Almighty Allah SWT, for allowing me to complete this research.

I would like to acknowledge that my journey to complete this thesis was never easy, due to various personal and academic circumstances. Therefore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Subethra Pather, for all her guidance, patience and encouraging me to complete this academic chapter in my life.

I am also grateful to the EMS first-year students at UWC, who sacrificed their time to partake in this study, as without their input, this research would not have been possible.

I would want to thank my mom, Fatima, my son Moegamat Nur, my nephew Fawaaz and the rest of my family, for their understanding and reassurance that I can do this. It was much appreciated.

Dedications

I dedicate my Mini thesis to my princess Hanan Davids, my son Moegamat Nur, his wife Naeelah and my mom, Fatima. For all the unconditional love received from you and given to you. Last but not least, to myself, for never giving up. Self-love.

Abbreviations

CoP	Community of Practice
EMS Faculty	Economics and Management Sciences Faculty
FYE	First Year Experience
FYTP	First Year Transition Programme
HEI	Higher Education Institution
RPL	Recognised Prior Learning
SIM	Student Integration Model
UWC	University of the Western Cape

List of Tables

<i>Table 3. 1 Differences between focus group sessions.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Table 4. 1 Characteristics of the participants</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Table 4. 2 Study Stream of Participants</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 4. 3 Funding of Participants.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 4. 4 Pre-entry Characteristics of Students.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Table 4. 5 Categories of Responses from Participants on Social Integration</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Table 4. 6 Categories of Responses form Participants on Academic Integration</i>	<i>29</i>

List of Figures

<i>Figure 2. 1 Student Integration Model (SIM) Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) adaptation of Tinto's SIM (Tinto, 1975).....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Figure 3. 1 Thematic analysis Caulfield (2023).....</i>	<i>20</i>

Appendices

<i>Appendix A: Participant (focus group) Consent Form.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Appendix B: EMS First Year Participants Consent Form.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Appendix C: Focus Group Confidentiality Binding Form.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Appendix D: Research Project Information Sheet.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Appendix E: Focus group questions</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Appendix F: UWC ethical clearance consent form</i>	<i>63</i>

Table of contents

<i>Plagiarism Declaration</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Keywords</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Dedications</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Appendices</i>	<i>x</i>
CHAPTER ONE	1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction and Background	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	2
1.3 Main Research Question	2
1.3.1 Research Sub Questions	3
1.3.2 Research Aim	3
1.3.3 Research Objectives	3
1.4 The scope of the study	3
1.5 Significance of the study	4
1.6 Research design	4
1.7 Data analysis strategy	5
1.8 Ethical consideration	5
1.9 Layout of the thesis	6
1.10 Chapter Summary	6
CHAPTER TWO	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
	<i>xi</i>

2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Theoretical framework of the study	8
2.2.1 Tinto’s Student Integration Model (SIM)	8
2.3 Critique of Tinto’s Student Integration Model (SIM)	9
2.4 Reviewed Literature	10
2.4.1 The first-year student	10
2.4.2 First-year university transition	10
2.5 Academic and Social integration and student success	12
2.5.1 Academic Integration and student success	13
2.5.2 Social Integration and student success	14
2.5.3 Academic success of EMS first-year students	14
2.6 Chapter summary and conclusion	15
<i>CHAPTER THREE</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</i>	<i>16</i>
3.1 Introduction to Methodology	16
3.2 Research Paradigm	16
3.4 Sample Selection Methods	17
3.5 Data Collection Methods	17
3.6 Data Analysis Methods	19
3.7 Ethical considerations	20
3.8 Validity/ trustworthiness	21
3.9 Chapter summary	21
<i>CHAPTER FOUR</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</i>	<i>22</i>
4.1 Introduction	22
4.2 Findings from the Focus Group Interviews	22
4.2.1 Demographics of the focus groups participants	22
4.2.2 Selection of Course and Finance of Participants	23
4.3 Pre-Entry Characteristics of Participants	24

4.4 Findings related to Social Integration	25
4.4.1 Defining Social Integration	26
4.4.2 Students' understanding of Social Integration and social programmes	27
4.4.3 Factors Influencing social integration	27
4.4.3.1 UWC annual Orientation programme	27
4.4.3.2 The First Year Experience (FYE) Programme	28
4.5 Findings Related to Academic Integration	29
4.5.1 Defining Academic Integration	29
4.5.1.1 Students understanding of Academic Integration	30
4.5.2 Factors Influencing Academic Integration	31
4.5.2.1 Seeking academic support from academics	31
4.5.2.2 Engagement with student support with mentors and tutors	32
4.5.2.3 Creating Community of Practice (CoP)	33
4.6 Conclusion	33
<i>CHAPTER FIVE</i>	35
<i>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	35
5.1 Introduction	35
5.2 Summary of research findings	35
5.2.1 Participants' Characteristics	35
5.2.1.1 Demographics of the participants	35
5.2.1.2 Study Stream of Participants	35
5.2.1.3 Socio-economic status of participants	36
5.2.1.4 Pre-Entry Characteristics of Participants	36
5.2.2 Findings related to Social Integration	36
5.2.2.1 Participants Understanding of Social Integration	36
5.2.2.2 Categories influencing Social Integration	37
5.2.2.3 Factors Influencing social integration	37
5.2.3 Findings Related to Academic Integration	37
5.2.3.1 Students' understanding of Academic Integration	38
5.2.3.2 Categories influencing Academic Integration	38
5.2.3.3 Factors Influencing academic integration	38
5.2.3.3.1 There were three research objectives mentioned in the first chapter of this paper	39
5.3 Recommendations	40

5.3.1	Social integration	40
5.3.1.1	Orientation	40
5.3.1.2	First Year Experience Programme	40
5.3.2	Academic integration	41
5.3.2.1	Seeking academic support from academics	41
5.3.2.2	Engagement with student support with mentors and tutors	41
5.3.2.3	Community of Practice (CoP)	41
5.4	Future research	41
5.5	Limitations to the Study	42
5.6	Final conclusion	42
	<i>Bibliography</i>	44

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Background

Transitioning from high school to university is often an exciting phase for first-year students, yet the process of adjusting to this new academic environment presents various challenges. As the initial thrill of being accepted into a university subsides, first-year students face the task of adapting to both the academic demands and social landscape of university life, a process known as transitioning to university. Following this adjustment period, students enter what is termed the “integration phase” (Petersen, 1992), in which they begin to develop a sense of belonging within their new academic community. This research study explores the academic and social integration of first-year students within the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), with a focus on identifying factors that influence their success in this transition.

Previous studies on student retention at tertiary institutions have noted the critical role that background characteristics and personal attributes play in a student’s ability to integrate successfully (Tinto, 1975). Factors such as academic preparedness, social networks, and a student's understanding of their new environment can all influence students’ successful transition to university, their retention and attrition rates (Tinto, 1975; Perger & Takacs, 2015). While much of the existing literature on first year student transition has focused on education and psychology students Durheim, (1951), research on the integration experiences of students in faculties such as Economic and Management Sciences remains limited. This study, therefore, examines first-year students’ academic and social integration within the EMS Faculty at UWC, aiming to fill this gap and provide insights into the unique challenges faced by these students.

The theoretical framework guiding this research is Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Model (SIM), which posits that pre-entry attributes, such as a student’s socio-economic background, can significantly impact their integration process. This model suggests that students’ pre-entry characteristics could potentially impact their ability to academically and socially integrate into the university environment. This could influence their academic and social connections and how they identify with their new peer groups and lecturers. Tinto’s Student Retention and Success Model (1982) highlights the importance of academic and social integration as

determinants of student success and retention. In this study, I explore how these concepts apply specifically to first-year students within the EMS Faculty at UWC, focusing on three key areas: first-year university students, academic integration, and social integration.

The State Council of Higher Education Virginia (SCHEV), (2023) provides the following definition of a first-year university students were defined as “A student attending any tertiary institution for the first time, at the undergraduate level”. Lakhali et al. (2020) defines academic integration as the student’s performance, their intellectual development and their academic experience. This also included how a student engaged with the lecturer and their tutors in and outside of the classroom and if they sought additional academic support on campus etc. The third concept in this study relating to social integration is defined by Drew, (2023) as students become socially engaged in the university community by developing friendships, working with peers and joining university social clubs.

The Researcher in this study aimed to investigate social and academic integration and factors influencing integration of first-year students in the EMS Faculty at UWC. The above-mentioned components (the social and academic elements) were set out to ensure that the students felt at ‘home’, while pursuing their studies, thus contributing to student retention and success.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Tertiary institutions worldwide continue to grapple with the challenge of retaining first-year students, often seen as a difficult goal to achieve (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). At the University of the Western Cape, the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences faces high dropout rates among first-year students, with some students choosing to leave during or after their first semester and others unable to progress to their next academic level. Macfarlane (2006) highlights this issue within South Africa, noting that approximately 50% of undergraduate students do not complete their studies, with first-year students being particularly affected. This study seeks to identify the factors that contribute to this trend within the EMS Faculty at UWC, with a focus on the academic and social integration processes and their impact on student retention.

1.3 Main Research Question

What factors influenced first-year students’ social and academic integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences at UWC?

1.3.1 Research Sub Questions

- How did first-year students' social integration influence their transition into the faculty and their perceived academic performance?
- How did first-year students' academic integration influence their transition into the faculty and their perceived academic performance?
- How did the factors identified, influence the EMS first-year students', academic and social integration into the faculty?

1.3.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research was to understand the factors influencing first-year students' transition as well as their academic and social engagement into the EMS Faculty.

1.3.3 Research Objectives

- To determine the students' understanding of social and academic integration at the EMS Faculty and their perceived academic performance.
- To understand if the social and/or academic integration into the faculty, influenced their perceived academic performance.
- To identify what factors, influenced EMS first-year students', academic and social integration into the faculty.

1.4 The scope of the study

At the beginning of each academic year, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) attracts thousands of hopeful undergraduate applicants. However, the institution can only accept 4000 first-time, first-year undergraduate students across all seven Faculties. The Researcher looked at the 2023 intake of first-year, undergraduate Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) students and their integration into the EMS Faculty at UWC. The study focused specifically on the students' integration in the first semester at UWC. The above-mentioned period was identified as the most crucial period for first year student dropout not only at UWC, but at many tertiary institutions, globally (Nyar, 2021).

The Researcher conducted a qualitative case study research. A purposive selected sample of nine first-year students from the different Departments and Schools in the EMS Faculty, were carefully chosen. The pre-identified students had to meet a specific criterion before partaking in the research. Firstly, the student had to be a first-time, first-year EMS student. Secondly, the student had to be accepted as a fulltime student in the faculty. Thirdly, the student had to be part of the First Year Transition Programme (FYTP), under the umbrella of the Deputy-Vice Chancellor: Academic's (DVC Academic) First Year Experience (FYE) initiative. Additional

criteria (but not strictly applicable) were, (students from different genders, from a diverse background and from various parts of South Africa, or elsewhere) preferred.

Before the focus group sessions and after the selected participants agreed to partake, a letter of consent was signed by the participant. An online focus group interview or session was scheduled to gather data from the students. During the session, the Researcher used an online voice only transcribing application (APP), as it recorded the conversations the participants had. Participants never agreed (but were given the option) to being video recorded. The data collected represented the students' personal experiences. This reflected their first semester in the EMS Faculty. The data collection was analysed using qualitative methods and the results created an awareness of first-year students social and academic integration (or the lack thereof) into the faculty. The intention of the information gathered was to offer support to future EMS first-year undergraduate students. As noted by Dias & Sá. (2014), when they described the first six months of the student's first year at university as being uncertain and unpredictable, latching on to the retention and attrition rate.

1.5 Significance of the study

Despite the wide pool of research done on academic and social integration, it emerged that most papers focused on either education or psychology students Durheim (1951). This led to a significant gap in the understanding of integration in the EMS, or Commerce Faculty. The study focused on the importance of first-year students being both academically and socially integrated into their faculty. This garnered a sense of commitment to the faculty, with a high retention and success rate in the first year of study, making it a meaningful contribution to the field of integration for first-year EMS students. (Remali et al., 2013).

Tertiary institutions affected by integration understood that effective solutions were needed to apply to the different faculties. The significance of this paper was on the EMS faculty's students at UWC. The Researcher discovered that this study was important as they sought to understand how first-time, first-year students integrate into the faculty. The aim of the study was to provide awareness to the EMS faculty and staff about the integration needs of the students. The results would also assist the student to adjust to their new environment.

1.6 Research design

This study used focus group sessions as a research method to collect data for the study. A focus group is a research method ideal for this study. As a small group of participants were chosen from a predefined demographic characteristic already set out. Three focus group semi-

structured interviews were conducted with three participants in each group. All focus groups were conducted online, via Google Meets. During the focus group session, the Researcher used an automated transcribing application (APP) for notetaking purposes. A set of semi-structured interview questions were structured to create discussions in the groups. Focus groups can be seen as a tool of participation and encouraged participants reluctant to be interviewed, individually (George, 2023; Kitzinger, 2023). Thus, the Researcher used a Qualitative research approach, with a purposive sampling method. Identified EMS first-year students were selected as participants in the study. A purposive sampling technique was used in this qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases with limited resources. The Researcher collected as much information as data collection. An advantage of this type of sampling was that you could match your aims and objectives to the sample. However, a disadvantage was that this sampling could produce inaccurate assumptions (Patton, 2002).

1.7 Data analysis strategy

The Researcher used a Thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis examines qualitative data by reading through the data and looking for patterns to find themes (Villegas, 2023). The Researcher was subjective when making sense of the data by identifying, analysing, and interpreting the data patterns. Some advantages of this method were, (1) interpretation of themes supported by data, (2) allowing the Researcher multiple theories that could be applied and (3) it was applicable to the research questions (Villegas, 2023). Some disadvantages of this method were (1) It was difficult to maintain a sense of data continuousness as the Researcher focused on identifying themes across all data, (2) there was a limited interpretive control without basing the analysis on a theoretical framework Villegas, (2023) to analyse the data collected, by reading through the information and looking for patterns and creating themes from the collected data.

1.8 Ethical consideration

Ethical process of any research is vital and should be practiced, so too was the Researcher by abiding the rules. The Researcher introduced herself to all possible participants and mentioned the reason for the survey and or focus-group interview. The Researcher asked questions relating to and relevant to the research at hand. Consent from participants were asked and they partook in the focus group sessions on a voluntary basis, that ensured their experience were anonymous. These participants were informed that their main role was to serve as sources of data collection for the research. No administrative or political influence were present within the research study

and no monetary or any other form of reward were offered. No political party influenced the Researcher and no monetary or any other form of reward were accepted by the Researcher. No harm fell on both participant and Researcher. Confidentiality was of utmost importance and were practiced. Under no circumstances were any information fabricated, falsified, or misrepresented. This ethical integrity was adhered to when the design, data analysis and data interpretation came into effect. Therefore, when the data were collected, the participants were assured that their privacy was maintained, and the data collected was used in a strict and confidential manner. So too was the storage and later the discarding of such data handled with. Lastly, the Researcher abided by the POPIA (Republic of South Africa, 2013), as the information is sensitive and personal.

1.9 Layout of the thesis

Chapter one introduced the research topic as well as a brief layout and focus of the research. This included the background and linked it to the problem that prompted the research.

Chapter two included the review of the literature. It focused on the research question and sub-questions of the study. The literature was broken down from the broader to a narrowed down perception.

Chapter three referred to the methodology that supported the research. The Researcher referred to the sampling and data gathering methods in the research.

Chapter four reflected on the research findings; data interpretation, analysis and the data were analysed as per qualitative research methodology.

Chapter five comprised of the conclusion and recommendations that emerged from the research.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The research topic referred to the integration of the first-year student into the EMS Faculty at UWC. The mini thesis highlighted the need to investigate factors influencing social and academic integration of the first-year EMS student. The contributions to students' academic achievements in the EMS faculty, would be part of the findings. The main argument of the thesis was to identify social and academic factors that enhanced and or hindered students; transition and success at first year level. The significance of such a study was to create an awareness of first year students social and academic needs and to ensure a smooth first year transition. Moreover, the results of the survey allowed the EMS faculty to design interventions

to support both students that need support to succeed but also support student excellence among our academic strong achievers. The Researcher had one research question and two follow-up questions. This research was based on Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) theory of integration into higher education and the data was collected through focus group interviews. A Thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data. All Ethical precautions and considerations set out by UWC Senate was implemented to ensure this project should be considered ethical.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One of this research project provided a brief background of the Research conducted. Chapter Two outlined the Student Integration Model (SIM) as the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. Literature, supporting or refuting the SIM, were reported on in this chapter as well. The theory developed by Tinto (1975) was described and critiqued by various Researchers, where some found and listed those gaps discovered. In addition, studies done in a South African context, using the SIM, were discussed as well. The literature reviewed in this section included: the integration of first-year students in Commerce or Economic Management Sciences (EMS) faculties in South African and International universities; first year students' integration into the social and academic university environment; and studies on factors influencing first year transition, integration and academic success.

For this project we looked at these concepts: the first-year EMS faculty student; academic and social integration within the EMS Faculty.

2.2 Theoretical framework of the study

2.2.1 Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM)

Tinto's theory of integration provides the perfect framework to investigate first-year students' social and academic integration into higher education. The theory explains the students' ability to succeed in their respective degree programmes. When a student adjusts to their academic and social environment at university, the significance of their decision would show. Tinto also explains that lecturers have a substantial role in the students' academic and social integration. This includes the choices relating to course content, teaching and learning strategies and the appropriateness of the course contents. However, Tinto's thinking and usage of this theory is only focusing on face to face (or on campus) lecturing and as some Researchers noted, that his theory is very traditional. Therefore, when Tinto developed his theory, it seemed appropriate at the time. However, as time passed, his theory (SIM) could easily be labelled skewed, as context of teaching can include online and hybrid as well (Tinto, 1975).

Figure 2.1 below illustrates Tinto's (1975; 1993) model. Where it outlines three distinct stages in the student departure process. In the first stage, Tinto suggests that the student enter the university with diverse background factors. These factors include but is not limited to family background and parental education. Furthermore, individual characteristics such as age, gender, race, and ability are mentioned, and it differs from student to student. The individual's

prior academic experiences, including school performance and grades, also play a role. This initial stage, referred to as the separation phase, highlights how these pre-entry attributes directly impact dropout rates. The first stage also highlights the student's initial commitment to the institution, and persistence goals.

The second stage involves the process of integration. Stage two is where the student's academic and social engagement or integration within the university is shaped. During this stage the student's initial commitment to both the institution and their goal of completing their studies is developing.

The final stage of Tinto's model focuses on structural and normative integration, emphasizing how students become fully incorporated into the academic and social framework of higher education.

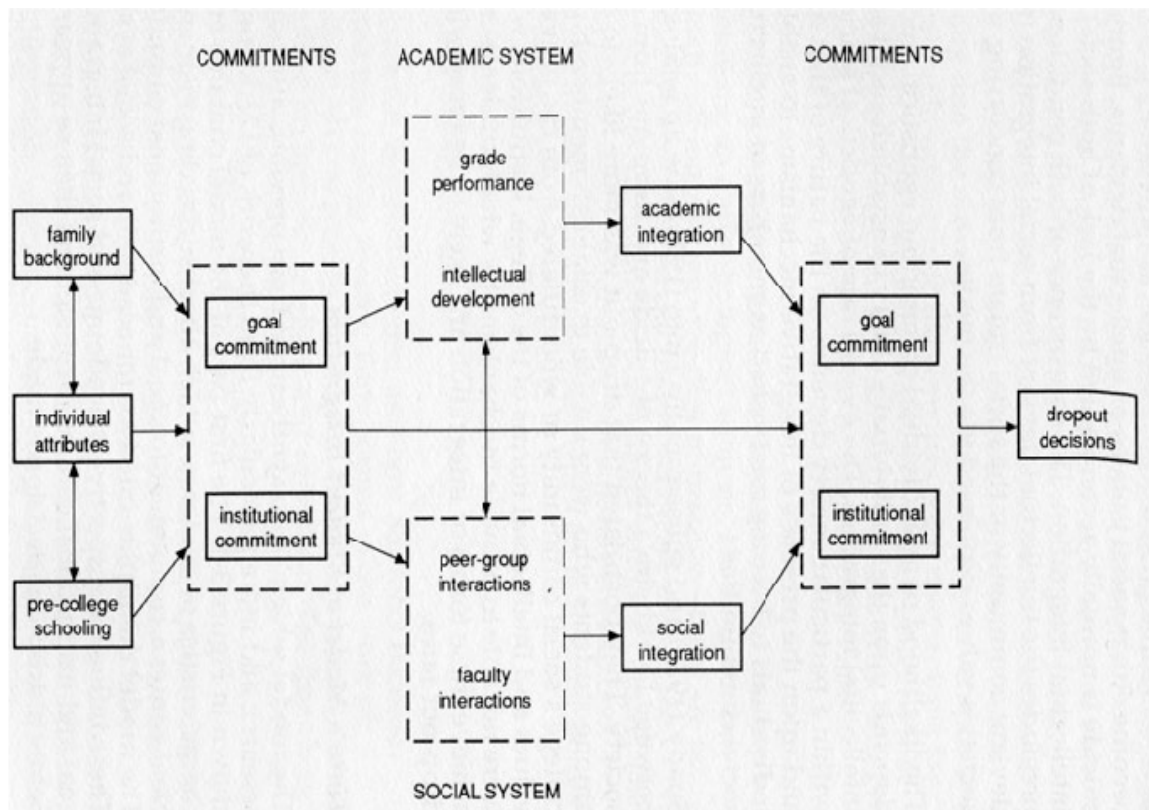


Figure 2. 1 Student Integration Model (SIM) (Tinto, 1975).

2.3 Critique of Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM)

Even though Vincent Tinto's SIM (1975) can be seen as biased, it was for several years, extensively applied to various researches across the world, and because of the research done, it surfaced that the model itself had flaws. These flaws came about as the years progressed

since the inception of the SIM in 1975. Some criticisms were listed below: 1) the model never considered differently abled students, 2) the model was based on traditional students, 3) the model never included or considered female students and 4) English was the only considered language. With these indications, more Researchers found inconsistencies in the theory and further gaps were discovered. McCubbin in his paper (2003), looked at Tinto's model and found the following: 1) the SIM was inadequate in Modelling Student Attrition, 2) the SIM was only applicable to traditional (white, male, 18 or 19-year-old full-time, living on campus) students, 3) Academic Integration was not an important predictor of student attrition in "traditional" student populations.

2.4 Reviewed Literature

2.4.1 The first-year student

The first-year university student, as defined by State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), (2023), is a student attending any tertiary institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. The sooner the first-year student integrates into an institution will determine whether he or she will stay and success or drop out of university. In addition, how a student engages with the lecturer and their tutors inside and outside of the classroom and by seeking academic support, also determines a student's transition to university (Lakhal et al., 2020). Tinto (1975) states that the sooner students integrate into the university environment, the more likely it is that the student will succeed in their studies. Tinto refers to the social integration process, as where students become socially engaged in the university community by developing friendships, working with peers and joining university social clubs (Tinto, 1975; Petersen, 1992 & Drew, 2023). For any first-year student, integration into university is the most essential part for the student to adjust to university. As previously documented, many first-time students experienced great stress and anxiety for various reasons. Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) thus forms an ideal theory to investigate the EMS first-year students' integration.

2.4.2 First-year university transition

According to Aljohani (2014) retention of tertiary students was a worrisome concern for institutions that needed to be addressed. The statement not only referred to the student 'leaving', but included the institution's finances, imminent student applications and importantly, its academic reputation. In his paper, he compared universities in Australia, USA and Saudi Arabia and looked at the 2011 statistics. The data revealed that in 2011, between 15 - 17% of university students in Australia, comparing to the USAs, where between 56 – 67% and Saudi Arabia where between 35 – 65% absconded their studies (Australian Council for

Educational Research, 2012). Further on he noted that between 1994 and 2004, one out of every four, first-year student thought of dropping-out. He tried to understand the experiences or the lack thereof, contributing to the student's decision to "leave" the tertiary institution before the concluding their studies.

In his paper, Aljohani distinguished between student withdrawals and student dropouts, where he identified the factors that suggested why students withdrew prematurely from their studies and compared it to previous studies relating to the drop out of first-year students. He applied these characteristics to Tinto (1975)'s model, by looking at the student's pre-entry characteristics, their social and academic involvement at university, the student's work goals and the student's involvement or commitments to the institution. He noted that institutions with a high attrition rate should investigate the causes that lead to the students' withdrawal from the university, and he proposed that plans to retain the student should be factored.

As for Alder (2016), who indicated in her paper that the first year of a student's tertiary career was crucial. As the experiences lived (or the lack thereof), had a great influence on the accomplishment and continuance of the said student's degree of study. Alder studied the first year, English study students in the United Kingdom (UK) and made a comparison between the English and Scottish students. She noticed that even though Higher Education Institution's (HEIs) do offer support for the first-year student (such as pre-arrival programmes and continue the support throughout the year), the study field specific research, in the UK referring to "transition", was very limited. She suggested that more research be done, looking into the UK's tertiary education conditions and narrowing it down to study specific fields. Alder looked at social integration, the learning style methods, the institutional environment as well as academic integration.

Also, Legese (2018), looked at the factors affecting undergraduate performances at the Raya University in Ethiopia, where their vision was based on a quality assurance standard. However, as he noted, during the 2017/18 academic year, some first-year students academically fared poorly for the first semester and the institution was concerned about leaving performances unchecked. In his recommendation, Legese noted the following: that it was important to study the factors of academic performance. Therefore, he conducted this research to study such factors. He later recommended that variables such as gender, teaching and learning styles at universities, the place where students come from, and the student's optimism played a significant role in the academic performance of the student. He elaborated that if a student does

not understand the method of teaching style the lecturer/s applied in class, the student will not perform well in the module taught. He compared it to the student that understood the teaching style taught and would progress. Furthermore, Legese mentioned that institutions affected, should investigate this mismatch type of teaching, as retention rates depended upon the teaching style taught and understood by students. Legese, claimed that male students manage way better than female students and rural students gain better understanding than urban students. He concluded his recommendation by stating that it would be better if students have an “experience-sharing” university life as it would also enhance the expectation of retaining the student.

Lastly, Pather and Chetty (2015) looked at the “pre-entry academic and non-academic factors” affecting first-year students studying towards a teaching degree. Pather, like Aljohani (2014) and Legese (2018), noted that the pre-university background of the student played a significant role in how the student react to the first-year experience they encounter. The first-year experience had a ripple effect on the integration of the student and their degree study timeframe. Many factors listed by Pather and Chetty, were recorded by Aljohani and or Legese (if not both) in their papers. However, Pather and Chetty looked at the student population in a South African context, post-Apartheid. Moreover, the HEI’s in South Africa, should consider the economical background most of the students came from. Thus, considering the post-Apartheid tertiary student landscape, and the diverse population attending these institutions. The “optimism and determination” of the students were to “better their economic status”, thus, such students identified should be met halfway. When a student is met “halfway”, the possibility of the student dropping out seemed less likely to happened and a better first-year experience, leading to an enhanced undergraduate degree timeframe, could be ensured.

Aljohani (2014), Alder (2016), Legese (2018), Pather and Chetty (2015), all made some reference (if not all) to Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Model (SIM). Thus, indicating that the model is still relevant to some extent. However, adaptation, addition and omission (or the plurality of some or all, of the aforementioned) should be taken into consideration as some factors were not considered in 1975.

2.5 Academic and Social integration and student success

Many documentations about the first-year student’s integration aspect and the success (or the lack thereof) were recorded. Academic and Social integration is where first-year students “formally” interact with academics, other students and support staff. Social integration is the

process by which students become merged into the university community examples would be developing friendships, working with peers outside of the classroom setting and joining university social clubs (Drew, 2023). Academic integration as defined, is the student's performance, their intellectual development and their positive academic experience, as well as their extracurricular activities, for example how a student engages with the lecturer in the classroom, tutors, and seeking academic support etc (Lakhal et al., 2020). However, in the world of tertiary education, it is most likely to have majority of the courses taught in English and this could be a stumbling block, for many first-year students, as the English language is not their mother tongue.

2.5.1 Academic Integration and student success

For the student to integrate “academically”, students had to understand what was taught to be able to contribute constructively to class and to interact with other students. As mentioned before, the academic integration of the first-year student, as well as the importance of how committed the said institution was towards the student, played a noteworthy role in its retention rate. Institutions should like students, be able to adapt to accommodate the diverse and global clientele (potential first-years). Academic integration can also be seen through the examination process at the institution and as the feedback the student obtain from it. This process will help the student develop personally and with the academic integration process. Also, through the interaction with academic and support staff, students found the integration process, easier (Piepenburg & Beckmann, 2022).

Previously mentioned research noted that English as a medium of institutional instruction, played a role in the student's academic integration. Many students received their tertiary education at an English medium institution and had to work harder to not only understand the module and mode of instruction, but also to communicate with staff, academics and other students. Aljohani (2014) debated that language played a role in the retention rate of the first-year student. He noted that because of the preferred language of instruction (being English), many students “voluntarily withdrew” from their institution of study. He further mentioned that there were both benefits and difficulties of “learning by a foreign language in tertiary programmes”. Some of the concerns raised by Aljohani were, 1) quality of their experience during the student's first year and 2), the difficulty of attaining academic achievements.

2.5.2 Social Integration and student success

Researchers found that pre-entry factors could be a concern for some students' social integration. These aspects such as (but not limited to) the level of academic background of the student's family, the area (rural or urban) where the student originate from, the student's home-language, the financial status of the student or the financial assistance for the student, played a significant role in the retention rate of any institution (Piepenburg & Beckmann, 2022). Other Researchers wrote about the first-year student's social integration aspect and its successes (or the lack thereof). Where social integration is the interaction between the student and staff members and other students on a non-academic, yet formal platform. These can be through extramural activities with other students or interacting with academic and or support staff outside of the classroom. Social interaction with students will assist in the integration process of all first-year students, socially. Interacting with academic staff outside of the classroom academically, will boost a sense of belonging to the institution, as it is another contributing factor of integration in HE.

For many South African students, the English language could be their third or even their fourth choice of spoken language. Thus, making it extremely difficult to communicate to first English language spoken students. However, Pather & Chetty (2015) looked at the social integration of the first-year, education students at a university of technology in Cape Town, South Africa. This university is a predominantly non-white university with many cultural divisions among the non-white population itself. In their paper, they refer to social integration as the "non-formal networks and associations" the first-year student had with fellow students, lecturing staff and when students decide to partake in non-academic activities at university. Thus, saying that if the student integrated socially during the first year at university, the better chance the student had to complete his or her studies at university. The student would feel connected to the institute. Pather & Chetty (2015) mentioned that diversity played a significant role in the experience, acceptance and throughput of the student's undergraduate degree. She also alluded that if an institution should understand, appreciate and made adjustments for such diversity", the said institution will see a considerable increase in its pass rate.

2.5.3 Academic success of EMS first-year students

In her paper, Joynt (2023) looked at a longitudinal study of first-year accounting students and their academic performance of the module at an introductory level. These studies were previously done from 1968 till 2022, by other researchers. Joynt indicated that there were several pre-entry attributes that led to the successfulness of the student's studies, and these

included accounting as a subject at high school and the student's competence in mathematics and many more. However, this fact was left open for scrutiny as other researchers indicated that learners who never had accounting as a subject at school, sometimes surpassed those who had the subject at school, when coming to university and studying accounting as an introductory module.

2.6 Chapter summary and conclusion

In this chapter, the Researcher looked at various literature about the first-year student's integration at different institutions. The literature was primarily based on Tinto's (1975) SIM theory, which underpinned this study. Literature about the first-year student's transition, their academic and social integration into the university were consulted and discussed in this chapter under separate headings. Also, literature that supported or refuted the SIM, were reported on as well. This was as, various researchers described and critiqued the theory developed by Tinto (1975), where some found and listed those gaps discovered. A case study depicting a South African Higher Educational institution, using the SIM, was discussed as well. The literature reviewed in this section included: the integration of first-year students in Commerce or Economic Management Sciences (EMS) faculties in South African and International universities; first year students' integration into the social and academic university environment; and studies on factors influencing first year transition, integration and academic success. This chapter will be followed by the Research Methodology chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to Methodology

The Researcher primarily based the research on Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) Tinto (1975). Various literature about student academic and social integration at university were reported on. Other Researchers' findings that supported or disputed Tinto's (1975) SIM were listed as well. The literature mentioned above influenced the retention and attrition rate in the EMS Faculty, at UWC. This chapter was based on the Research Methodology of the research. The Researcher selected a Qualitative Interpretivism Research Design approach and conducted a case study. The research method was best suited to investigate the research questions. Also, the Researcher conducted semi-structured focus group sessions with the purposive sampling EMS first-year Mentees.

By conducting the focus groups, the Researcher aimed to acquire the participants' experience of social and academic integration in the faculty of EMS. The following research question guided the study: "What factors influenced first-year students' social and academic integration into the Faculty of EMS"?

3.2 Research Paradigm

Interpretivism is defined as a sociological method of qualitative research done, and to analyse the data gathered) in the social sciences field. This is as we cannot measure or number the item or idea we are studying (such as your feelings when an event happened). The data is related to human actions in humanities and sociology (Hepler, 2023). By utilising an Interpretivist approach, the Researcher was able to gather the participants personal experienced information from the various online focus groups held (Jansen, 2023).

Also, a case study allowed the Researcher to narrow down the partaking participants to obtain the best information. A case study is a detailed subject specific study of a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon, commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research (McCombes, 2023). Additionally, it was easier to approach the participants on UWC campus. Furthermore, a case study is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. It is also used as a research approach to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. (Crowe, et. al, 2011).

3.3 Qualitative Research Approach

The Researcher chose to conduct a Qualitative research approach with a purposive sampling method to identify the EMS first-year students, selected as participants in the study. Qualitative Research is commonly utilised in humanities and social sciences research (Bhandari, 2023). Purposive sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases with limited resources. Purposive sampling technique has both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage of this type of sampling is that you are able to match your aims and objectives to the sample. However, a disadvantage is that this sampling can still produce inaccurate assumptions (Patton, 2002). For this research, the Researcher was able to collect as much information as data collection. Thus, from the data collected through the focus group interviews, the Researcher tried to understand the participants experiences of social and academic integration. The information gathered, led to highlighting insights on the topic and questions at hand.

3.4 Sample Selection Methods

The Researcher followed a purposive sampling method to identify the EMS first-year students selected as participants in the study. By looking at a particular group of students, with certain characteristics, this method seemed perfect. The targeted population was the 1338, first-year, first-time entry EMS students registered for the 2023 academic year. Narrowing down the selection of participants to consider for the study, was to consider the 237 EMS students who signed-up to participate in the First Year Transition Programme (FYTP) at UWC. A purposive selection criterion process was followed to identify the participants from the FYTP. The selection was spread across the entire faculty, represented by all departments. The identified nine Mentees came from the different Departments in the faculty, (with the following criteria) one male and one female per department and possible different ethnicities as well.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

To gather the information, the Researcher conducted focus group interviews, with a purposive sampling method to identify the EMS first-year Mentees, selected as participants in the study. Purposive sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases with limited resources. The Researcher gathered as much information as possible for data collection. An advantage of this type of sampling was, you could match your aims and objectives to the sample. However, a disadvantage was that this sampling can still produce inaccurate assumptions (Patton, 2002).

A focus group is a research method where a small group of participants were chosen as per a predefined demographic characteristic. The participants met in a group setting and answered semi-structured questions presented to them. The participants answered (by having a conversation among themselves) open-ended, semi structured questions, and these questions shed light on the topic at hand. In this Focus group setting, three focus group interviews were to be conducted, with a total of four mentees per group and the estimated duration of the meeting was 45-50 minutes per group meeting (George, (2023) and Kitzinger, (2023). However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the above criteria could not be followed or met.

The Researcher had to choose to have the focus group sessions either as a face-to-face session or as an online session, with both methods having its positives and negatives.

Table 3. 1 Difference between focus group sessions

Face-to-face focus group		Online focus group	
Positives	Negatives	Positives	Negatives
As a Researcher, you build a relationship with the participants.	This method can be time-consuming/	You can reach a wider sample.	Technology can become a concern for the everyone.
You have a honest human interaction with the respondents.	Participants are restricted to a specific location.	No need to be concerned of hiring venues.	Participants could become distracted.
You get in-depth understandings.	Respondents might be reserved in such a setting	Online groups are easier to record.	Sessions could become “moderator led”

Reference: Angel Fieldwork (2024)

The online focus group sessions seemed to be the best option the Researcher had, seeing that there were time constraints, and the students finished their mid-term examinations. Also, some students left campus and return home and that played a factor in having the focus group sessions online. However, the focus group sessions itself never went as smoothly as it was anticipated. The Researcher had to adapt to the matter at hand and below are some of the difficulties experienced. Firstly, there were supposed to be three focus group sessions with four participants in each group. However, it never occurred, and each online session had three participants. Group One’s participant experienced loadshedding at the given time. Definition of loadshedding – it is when an energy utility uses a temporarily method to decrease energy demand on the production system by switching off energy supply to specific geographical areas (City of Cape Town, 2019). Group Two’s respondent never logged in to the session, even though, the student agreed beforehand to partake in the focus

group. The Researcher messaged the student as the focus group session started, but the student never responded. Group Three's participant had connectivity constraints and after a few attempts to stay connected, the student opted to exit the focus group. The three constraints listed above are some of the unexpected experiences, the Researcher had to endure throughout the data collection period, and she was unable to resolve it, effectively. Thus, the three focus group sessions ended up with three participants each.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was chosen as the best method to analyse the data collected. Thematic analysis is generally applied to analyse texts or transcripts obtained from interviews held. The research makes use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guide. Firstly, the Researcher had to familiarise herself with the data. Secondly, the coding process starts by highlighting certain phrases that are being repeated, or that are similar when repeated. Thirdly, by generating themes, the Researcher grouped the previously identified codes into an over-arching theme code. Then, the abovementioned themes were reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the data represented. Or to see if anything representing the data was overlooked or omitted. Also, the Researcher relooked to identify any new themes that were existing in the data. The Researcher had to relook at the data set and compared it with the themes. Thereafter, the Researcher had to define and name the different themes. Thus, by defining the themes, the Researcher created phrases to help understand the data. And by naming the themes, the Researcher grouped the themes to have it easily recognised. Lastly, the writing up of the analysed data, is like any other academic scripts as it includes an Introduction. Below is an illustrative figure of the Thematic analysis six step guide from Braun and Clarke, (2006) adapted by (Caulfield, 2023).

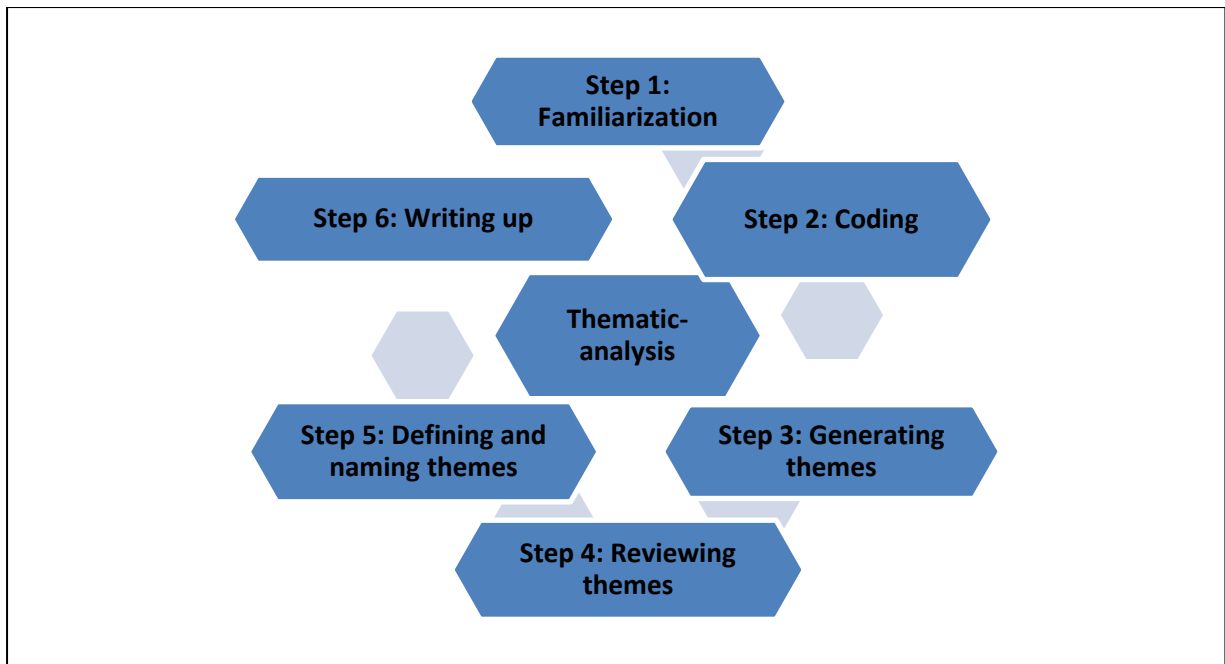


Figure 3. 1 Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) adapted by Caulfield (2023).

3.7 Ethical considerations

When the Researcher contacted the participants, she introduced herself. Thereafter, informing the participant about the purpose of the contact and selection for participating in the research focus-group sessions. Furthermore, the participants were informed about complete confidentiality as the information gathered were solely for research purposes (See Appendix F: UWC ethical clearance consent form). When students showed interest in partaking in the focus-group interviews, they were grouped into three (3) groups of four (4) members each. Thereafter, they were informed that the identity of all the participants (any personal information that could identify the participants) remained anonymous and will never be divulged to any third parties. Moreover, the information gathered was solely for research purposes and will be stored for five (5) years in a safe environment at UWC. The focus-group session was timed for between 45 till 50 minutes per session. Thus, allowing for engagement among participants. Additionally, the focus-groups were conducted online via Google Meets and during an appropriate timeslot for all parties. Also, the participants integrity was kept intact, and it allowed all parties to feel comfortable with each other. A number system was used for participants to be identified as speaker, during the focus group session. Lastly, participants were free to withdraw from the research (even after they initially agreed). Thus, fairness, unbiasedness towards everyone as well as the research project, was ensured.

3.8 Validity/ trustworthiness

Validity in qualitative research refers to the relevance and correctness of the data collected. It further looked at the research question raising the matter if the preferred outcome will be obtained. It also spoke to the chosen methodology and if the data sampling and analysis was applicable. Lastly, it spoke to the results as well as conclusions and if it was valid for the sample and context of research (Leung, 2015).

Looking at Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria of trustworthiness, they listed four important principles, to establish the reliability of the data collected. First is the "Credibility" of the findings. Then it is the "Transferability of the findings, indicating that it is applicable. Thereafter, it is the "Dependability" of the findings, indicating that it is consistent. Lastly, it is "Conformability" of the findings signifying neutrality and no bias from the researcher.

Before collecting data, the Researcher informed the participants of the focus group session being voice recorded. This method was the best option to capture the information. After each session, the participants received the transcripts to verify if the information presented was true. This was part of verifying if data was correctly recorded and part of being ethical and transparent to the research topic (Leung, 2015). By following the feedback from students ensured proper data collected and if corrections had to be done, the Researcher adjusted the data.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter was based on the Research Methodology of the research and discussed the different Methodological steps followed, to gather and analyse the data for this mini thesis. The following headings were the steps followed; 1) Research Paradigm, 2) Qualitative Research Approach, 3) Sample Selection Methods, 4) Data Collection Methods, 5) Data Analysis Methods, 6) Ethical considerations and 7) Validity/ trustworthiness. Each heading expressed its part and value in the research project. The Researcher selected a Qualitative Interpretivism Research Design approach and conducted a case study. The research method was best suited to investigate the research questions. Also, the Researcher conducted semi-structured online focus group sessions with the purposive sampling of EMS first-year Mentees. This chapter was followed by the Findings of the research data collected and discusses the outcomes of the thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the methodology and research strategies used for this study. The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing first-year EMS students' transition at UWC. Addressing such factors may increase, student retention and success, particularly at first year level.

In this chapter the Researcher elaborates of the research findings and the analysis of the findings. Four main themes emerged, which included and discussed those findings. Language/ Language barrier, Finance/ Financial concern/s, students concern/s about their Academic studies, with a focus on module content and finally Friends/ Friendships were mentioned as well. The research aimed to explore the students' personal experiences of the first-year student within the EMS Faculty, at UWC. Also, a brief overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants was listed and the purpose was to give context of the focus group participants.

4.2 Findings from the Focus Group Interviews

Data presents was collected from three focus group interview sessions with a total of nine participants.

4.2.1 Demographics of the focus groups participants

From the interviews with the participants, the table below describes the demographic of the total number of the nine participants that participated in the study.

Table 4. 1 Characteristics of the participants

Information	Percentages
Gender preference	
Females	55,60%
Males	44,40%
Race	
African Black	89%
African Coloured	11%
Indian	0%
European	0%
Age group	
18 - 20 years	100%
21+ years	0%
Home Language	
isiXhosa	33,30%
Afrikaans	11,10%
English	22,20%
isiZulu	22,20%
Tshivenda	11,10%

The table above showed that the majority of the participants were females and accounted for 56% of the sample population and the males were represented by 44% of the participated population. For this study, it was evident that the race distribution was in keeping with the breakdown of students for the four racial groups, intended for this research project. Majority of the participants were Black African (89%) and a small percentage, 11%, were African Coloured representation. All of the participants in the study classified themselves in the 18 – 20-year age group. This indication meant that the participants either came to university directly from school or completed their high school career over the past two years. Lastly, with regards to home language, majority of the participants, 33,3% indicated isiXhosa being the dominant home language spoken by them. isiZulu and English, with 22,2% respectively, was the second most spoken home language with Afrikaans and Tshivenda, with 11,1% each, as home language in third place. The above finding also indicated or alluded to the fact that English was not a dominant home language for students at UWC.

4.2.2 Selection of Course and Finance of Participants

The tables below represent the sample participants' study stream of choice and funding opportunities.

Table 4. 2 Study Stream of Participants

Study Stream	Percentage
BCom General, 3 Year Degree	44, 4%
BCom General 4 Year Degree	22,2%
BCom Financial Accounting, 3 Year Degree	11,1%
BCom Accounting 3 Year Degree	11,1%
BCom Accounting 4 Year Degree	11,1%

The above table indicated that most of the participants were in a three-year BCom General, Degree stream, which represent 44, 4% of the total participants. Other streams or courses identified by the participants were: BCom General, 4 Year Degree (22,2%), BCom Financial Accounting, BCom Accounting 3 Year Degree and BCom Accounting 4 Year Degree streams, representing 11,1% of the total participants each.

Table 4. 3 Funding of Participants

Funding	Percentage
National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding	55, 6%
Applied for bursaries	22, 2%
Self-funded	11, 1%
Unfunded	11, 1%

The above table indicated that majority (55, 6%) of the respondents were students whom have applied for NSFAS funding to pay towards their studies. This was followed by 22, 2% of the students, who revealed that they applied for bursaries and 11, 1% (each) implied that they were either self-funded or unfunded at the time of the focus group session. The latter could become a concern for the student if the situation remained unchanged.

4.3 Pre-Entry Characteristics of Participants

According to Tinto (1975), pre-entry characteristics play an important role in determining student's initial commitment to their studies, for example, where they come from, the language that they speak, their schooling experience and their socio-economic status, can play a role in their retention and success of their studies.

Table 4. 4 Pre-entry Characteristics of Students

Participant	School type	School situated	Funding	First in Family
1	non-paying school	rural area	NSFAS	Yes
2	fee paying school	small town	self-funded	No
3	non-paying school	city	NSFAS	Yes
4	non-paying school	rural area	bursary	No
5	non-paying school	rural area	bursary	No
6	private school	city	bursary	No
7	non -paying public school	rural area	NSFAS	No
8	fee paying public school	city	unfunded	No
9	private school	city	bursary	No

From the table above, it was noted that majority of the participants attended non – fee paying public schools (56%), while a total of 22% was from fee paying public schools. Also, 22% of the participants attended private schools. The table also listed that 44, 4% of the high schools were situated in rural areas, another 44, 4% of the schools were located in the city/ urban areas and lastly, 11, 1% of the schools were found in small towns. Furthermore, 55, 6% of the students indicated that they received a bursary to fund their studies, where 22, 2% of the participants mentioned that NSFAS is funding their studies. Also, 11, 1% indicated that they were self-funded and 11, 1% were unfunded students. The latter indicated a concern for the participants, going forward. Lastly, an interesting fact was discovered when only 22, 2% of the participants revealed that they were first generation students. First generation students are students whose biological parents did not attend or complete their course at any HEI (The Different Voice of Student Success Resource Center, 2025). The greater part of the participants (77, 8%) indicated that they were not first generational students.

4.4 Findings related to Social Integration

Below are some of the findings regarding the participants’ understanding of Social Integration

- *Research sub question 1* - How did first-year students’ social integration influence their transition into the faculty and their perceived academic performance?

4.4.1 Defining Social Integration

All participants indicated that they had some knowledge of what social integration entailed. Here are some of the quotes from the students: One student said,

“I was introduced to the various social programmes on campus, as well as the campus environment self, and this happened during the Orientation week”.

The aforementioned quotation referred to one of the participants understanding of what social integration meant. When the same student was asked if her social integration was successful or not, the student replied,

“Yes, it was successful.”.

Another student, who also attended the annual Orientation programme, indicated that during the above-mentioned programme, she was grouped with other students from her faculty, and the student was quoted when she said,

“It was easier to form friendships with familiar faces as soon as classes started, and it started my year on a good note”.

This previous quotation was in reference to the student attending the annual orientation programme at the beginning of the academic year. At the time, the student was grouped with fellow students, studying towards the same degree. As classes commenced, the student saw some familiar faces in the lectures and as mentioned, friendships were formed. These quotations were gained from the participants of the various focus group sessions held and were backed by the references below.

As Adler (2016) noted,

“...the first-year student’s lived experience was crucial and had a great influence on the accomplishment and continuance of the said student’s degree of study...”

and Drew (2023) mentioned,

“Social integration is the process by which students become merged into the university community and examples would be developing friendships, working with peers outside of the classroom setting and joining university social clubs”.

Table 4. 5 Categories of Responses from Participants on Social Integration

Creating friendships	Attending social programmes
Students learning about each other	Interacting with Peers
Participation in the FYE programme	Meeting people / Making friends

4.4.2 Students' understanding of Social Integration and social programmes

All participants indicated that they had some knowledge of what social integration entailed. Here are some of the quotes from the students: For some, the definitions given, was that “it related to attending various social programmes on campus”, and “these programmes introduced new students to others”. This can be supported by Drew (2023), where the author stated

“... social integration is the process where students merge into the university community”.

The social programmes referred to were the, annual UWC Orientation programme and the First Year Experience (FYE) programme. The orientation programme was held over the first week, at the beginning of the academic year, and the new first year students were introduced to the various programmes at UWC and the campus environment as well. The FYE programme, was presented and students were informed that the programme is a, peer to peer, psycho-social, group mentorship programme, aiming to assist first year students transitioning into the university. The students were also informed that the programme has senior undergraduate students from the EMS faculty, mentoring the first-year student for the entire first year on campus.

4.4.3 Factors Influencing social integration

From the discussions with the students, the following factors were identified as positive influences. This was as most students indicated that they had a “Positive” social integration into the faculty. The student’s quotations were explained, and it was supported by various Researchers previously listed in Chapter two of this article.

4.4.3.1 UWC annual Orientation programme

From the findings it was noted the participants found benefit in the orientation programme as it added to their academic and social integration at university. As noted by Adler (2016) and Drew (2023), both acknowledged orientation programmes to have crucial impact to making

friends and connecting to the university. This was supported by the following quotations of students: One student said,

“I was introduced to the various social programmes on campus, as well as the campus environment self, and this happened during the Orientation week”.

The aforementioned quotation referred to one of the participants understanding of what social integration meant. When the same student was asked if her social integration was successful or not, the student replied,

“Yes, it was successful.”.

Another student, who also attended the annual Orientation programme, indicated that during the above-mentioned programme, she was grouped with other students from her faculty, and the student was quoted when she said,

“It was easier to form friendships with familiar faces as soon as classes started, and it started my year on a good note”.

This previous quotation was in reference to the student attending the annual orientation programme at the beginning of the academic year. At the time, the student was grouped with fellow students, studying towards the same degree. As classes commenced, the student saw some familiar faces in the lectures and as mentioned, friendships were formed.

4.4.3.2 The First Year Experience (FYE) Programme

The other social programme earlier mentioned, referred to the UWC FYE programme. The findings indicated the FYE programme is another programme that they benefitted from. As Drew (2023) noted, *“forming friendships”* is a part of being socially integrated into the university environment and the FYE Programme assisted students transitioning into the university space. When students mentioned the FYE programme and how it assisted them to integrate socially, one student’s experience stood out.

“Looking back to the beginning of the year, to where I find myself at the end of semester 1, I can see some growth in myself, socially”.

This extract referred to the student who joined the FYE programme at the beginning of the year. As mentioned before, the FYE programme is a peer to peer, psycho-social, group mentorship programme, aiming to assist first year students transitioning into the university. The student carried out some introspection and saw the growth in himself. The student ascribed

his growth to joining the FYE programme as it encouraged students to communicate with each other and to form friendships.

4.5 Findings Related to Academic Integration

Below are some of the findings interpreting the participants' understanding of Academic Integration

- *Research sub question 2* - How did first-year students' academic integration influence their transition into the faculty and their perceived academic performance?

4.5.1 Defining Academic Integration

When Lakhal et al., (2020) mentioned that academic integration refers to the students' performance, their intellectual development, their positive academic experiences as well as their extracurricular activities, they choose to do, we found that the students understood what academic performance meant. There are other components assisting the student to integrate academically, and they are consultations and tutorial programmes. Below are the definitions of the two elements. Consultations were defined by Harun, & Mohamad (n.d.) as, students having informal communications or consultations outside of the classroom with lecturers or tutors. Whereas, Pather (2018), defined tutorial programmes as, when students are in a more intimate and personal learning experience other than a large lecture and for students to take ownership of their learning.

Also included was how a student engaged with their lecturers and tutors, in and outside of the lecture halls and tutorial rooms and by seeking academic support. Whereas, Tinto (1975) and Drew (2023), noted that by sharing knowledge Tinto (1975) and working with peers outside of the classroom Drew (2023) could be recorded as informally consulting with peers to understand the workload. This is as friends assisted each other to understand the work. Also, when students ask for assistance from lecturers or interact with support staff it contributes to their integration, academically Piepenburg & Beckmann (2022). The latter would refer to the students' interaction in and outside of the classroom and when they seek advice or assistance from support staff.

All these references were noted by the participants when they answered the questions about academic integration. All participants indicated that they knew what "academic integration" meant. For some it meant to attend as many consultations as possible, attending the mentorship programme, the tutorial programme, assistance from peers, tutors and lecturers and by constantly asking questions. Majority of the students indicated that the FYE Programme

assisted them to integrate academically into the faculty. This is as the programme encouraged the students to seek consultations with both their tutors and lecturers and to attend their tutorial classes. Some students stated that “having study buddies” assisted them to be able to be successful. The students noted that they could bounce of ideas among each other and that was another form of learning for them (Drew, 2023).

Here are some of the quotes from the students: One student said,

“It was all the assistance I received to ensure I pass my modules”.

The above-mentioned quotation referred to one of the participants understanding what academic integration meant. The student also mentioned that as a group, they would meet at the library to study together. When the same student was asked if his/her academic integration was successful or not, the student replied,

“It was positive. I learnt early on in my tertiary life that attending classes and tutorials were important. I also made notes in class and kept it to assist me when I studied”.

Another student was quoted when he said.

“By seeking assistance to understand the modules”.

This student also linked academic integration to looking for academic assistance. When this student was asked if his academic integration was positive or not, the student said.

“It was a positive experience. you needed the assistance of your peers or Tutors or Lecturers to understand the modules. Groupwork helped as well”.

Table 4. 6 Categories of Responses form Participants on Academic Integration

attend as many consultations	the Tutorial programme
the mentorship programme	assistance of your peers
Lecturers and tutors were very helpful	constantly asking questions

4.5.1.1 Students understanding of Academic Integration

All participants indicated that to some degree, they understood what academic integration entailed. The participants’ understanding of academic integration was supported by the following references and was defined by Lakhali et al., (2020) as;

“the student’s performance, their intellectual development, their positive academic experiences as well as their extracurricular activities”.

Also included was how a student engaged with their lecturers and tutors, in and outside of the lecture halls and tutorial rooms and by seeking academic support. Whereas, Tinto (1975) and Drew (2023), noted that

“sharing knowledge”

and Drew (2023), further on stated;

“... working with peers outside of the classroom...”

could be recorded as informally consulting with peers to understand workload. Another reference about academic integration was when, Piepenburg & Beckmann (2022), noted that;

“students would have an easy academic integration when they interact with their lecturers as well as support staff”.

The latter would refer to the students’ interaction in and outside of the classroom and when they seek advice or assistance from support staff.

4.5.2 Factors Influencing Academic Integration

The following actions were identified by the participants, and indicated a positive influence on their studies and transitioning.

4.5.2.1 Seeking academic support from academics

When Lakhali et al., (2020), defined his understanding of academic integration, the author was quoted;

“... the student’s performance, their intellectual development and their positive academic experience. As well as how a student engaged with the lecturer and their tutors in and outside of the classroom and by seeking academic support etc. It was positive. I learnt early on in my tertiary life that attending classes, consultations and tutorials were important. I also made notes in class and kept it to assist me when I studied”.

The aforementioned quotation referred to the student explaining her understanding of what academic integration meant to her. Thus, realising early-on in her tertiary career, the student ensured that she attended her lectures, consultations and her tutorials. When asked what influenced her decision, she noted that,

“I felt more at ease to ask questions during those sessions than asking it in class”.

Both these student quotations were supported by Lakhali et al., (2020), as recorded above.

“by taking notes in class, I had a better understanding of my homework and I could make notes to consult about”.

The student revealed that, she was shy to ask questions during the lecture self however, when she consulted her lecturer/s the academic/s would be forthcoming in explaining the concept consulted about, better. The above quote was supported by Harun, & Mohamad (n.d.) as mentioned above

4.5.2.2 Engagement with student support with mentors and tutors

“The mentorship programme gave me confidence to speak up and encouraged me to attend consultations”.

Students would join university social clubs for various reasons and the aforementioned quotation referred to a student who joined the mentorship programme at the beginning of the year and it built her confidence. During the sessions, students were encouraged to speak up in class or to consult with their lecturers or tutors about the module content. The said student, did just that. She bravely spoke in class and confidently attended her consultations. As referenced before, Lakhali et al., (2020) noted that the students positive academic experiences are part of the academic integration process. Whereas Piepenburg & Beckmann (2022) mentioned that the interaction among lecturers, support staff and students would assist in an easy academic integration. The above quotation spoke to both the references made.

“Better communication with tutors were formed and it was easier, as they would communicate via WhatsApp and replied to questions sent, faster”.

The aforementioned quotation refers to a student interacting with the Tutors outside of the tutorial timeslots. The student found it easier and more effective to rather communicate with the Tutor than with the lecturer. As mentioned, the student claimed that tutors would reply faster than lecturers would. The above quote also refers to the student’s academic integration into the faculty. This student’s experience was also supported by Lakhali et al., (2020). Also, the student felt that by attending the tutorial classes (her assignments, homework and tests), it assisted her more and brought clarity on the module content. The student also presented signs of academic ownership, and this is backed by Pather, (2018)’s definition of tutorials when she mentioned

“... for students to take ownership of their own learning”.

4.5.2.3 Creating Community of Practice (CoP)

The thought behind the CoP Theory is that a group of people share a common interest in a topic or practice. It can be defined as a group of people who share a common interest or concerns, with the objective of focusing on a set of challenges, specific to an industry or discipline (Nelson, 2021). In this case, the CoP referred to was the informal academic assistance students offered and gave each other. The below quotations referred to the practice.

1 “*Yes, it was a positive experience. We interacted and assisted each other to understand the workload better*” and 2 “*...your study buddies explained it to you*” and 3 “*Here where I stay, there are more EMS Students, and we became friends that help each other to understand the work*”. Students would find methods beyond the classroom to assist them to understand the subject matter. The abovementioned quotations were from students who sought the assistance of their friends (an informal method), to understand the module content, and it was supported by Drew (2023)’s reference, “... working with peers outside of the classroom...” and exhibited the theory of CoP in real life (Nelson, 2021). Depicted above, students illustrated the various methods they are willing to apply to understand their module content.

4.6 Conclusion

Both academic and social integration had an important role to play in both transitioning and academic performance. These concepts assisted students with their academic work as they attended their consultations. Also, students joined the FYE Programme on campus and friendships were formed. This chapter focused on the research findings and discussed these findings. Firstly, we reiterated the Problem Statement which was “Factors influencing first-year university students’ social and academic integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS)”. Secondly, the paper had two research sub questions. And it was listed as 1) “How did first-year students’ social integration influence their transition into the EMS faculty and their perceived academic performance?”, 2) “How did first-year students’ academic integration influence their transition into the EMS faculty and their perceived academic performance?”. Various sub – themes were discussed for both social and academic integration were documented. For social integration sub – theses were “attending the annual orientation programme, joining the FYE programme, forming friendships, developing study groups, interacting with peers and meeting people. All these sub – themes were supported by literature reviewed earlier in this paper. For the academic integration, sub – themes listed were, seeking assistance, attending consultations and tutorials, understanding the workload, friends, sharing knowledge, academic assistance. These sub-themes were supported with previously

listed literature as well. Lastly, the purpose of this study was to retain the first-year EMS student at UWC, and as earlier mentioned, the retention rate at many tertiary institutions were a concern to be studied.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave details about the data that was collected by means of the three online focus group sessions, being held with UWC first-year students from the faculty of EMS. At the time the online focus groups were held, the students had just completed their first semester at the university. During the sessions, the students revealed their personal experiences, of semester one. This chapter will conclude and make recommendations on enhancing first-year social and academic integration to ensure increased student retention in the faculty of EMS, at UWC.

The study focused on the importance of first-year students being both academically and socially integrated into their faculty. The significance of this paper was on the EMS faculty's students at UWC. The Researcher discovered that this study was important as they sought to understand how first-time, first-year students integrate into the faculty. The aim of the study was to provide awareness to the EMS faculty and staff about the integration needs of the students. The results would also assist the student to adjust to their new environment.

5.2 Summary of research findings

The following section provides a summary of the findings for the three main areas researched. The first being a description of the characteristics of the participants, the participants engagement with social integration and academic integration.

5.2.1 Participants' Characteristics

5.2.1.1 Demographics of the participants

Of the total number of the nine participants that participated in the study, it revealed that majority were female students and just over 40% were male students. Majority (over 80%) students were of African Black descent and only 11% were of African Coloured origin. All participants were in the 18 – 20year, age group. Majority (over 33%) of the participants had isiXhosa as their home language, other students indicated (22%) English and isiZulu, as their home language and (11%) indicating that Afrikaans and Tshivenda as their home language.

5.2.1.2 Study Stream of Participants

Almost half of the participants (45%), indicated that they are studying towards a BCom General, 3 Year Degree, with 22% studying towards a BCom General, 4 Year Degree. Also,

11% each of the students indicated that they are studying towards, BCom Financial Accounting, BCom Accounting 3 Year Degree and BCom Accounting 4 Year Degree

5.2.1.3 Socio-economic status of participants

The greater part of the contributors (56%) indicated that they are funded through NSFAS and 22% indicated that they applied for bursaries. 11% each indicated that they are either self-funded or are currently unfunded.

5.2.1.4 Pre-Entry Characteristics of Participants

Of the participants, 56% indicated that they attended a non-paying school and 40% of the 56%, attended school in a rural area. The rest attended school in an urban area. 22% of the participants attended fee paying schools in urban areas and 22% of the students attended private schools located in the city.

The findings in the characteristics section underscore the need for a holistic approach to student support in higher education. One, that recognises the diverse backgrounds, financial challenges and academic trajectories of students. Addressing these issues can foster a more inclusive and equitable higher education environment.

5.2.2 Findings related to Social Integration

The research sub question, all participants had to answer was “How did first-year students’ social integration influence their transition into the faculty and their perceived academic performance?” All participants indicated that they had some knowledge of social integration. Students mentioned the annual Orientation programme as part of their social integration process. Whereas others mentioned the FYE, as being instrumental in their social integration at UWC. Some students listed “friends or friendships”, that assisted them to integrate socially into the faculty. Various quotations were listed as proof of the students’ understanding and Students also indicated that their integration were “successful”. Lastly, the students’ quotations were supported by various authors as well.

5.2.2.1 Participants Understanding of Social Integration

All participants indicated that they had some knowledge of what social integration entailed. Students mentioned the annual Orientation week at the beginning of the year as well as the FYE Programme as being instrumental into their social integration at UWC.

The students understanding of social integration was supported by various writers. Writers such as Drew (2023) where the Researcher stated that social integration is the process where students

merge into the university community and as Adler (2016) noted, the first-year student's lived experience was crucial and had a great influence on the accomplishment and continuance of the said student's degree of study.

5.2.2.2 Categories influencing Social Integration

The students listed the following categories on social integration; Creating friendships, Students learning about each other, Participation in the FYE programme, attending social programmes, interacting with Peers and meeting people / making friends

5.2.2.3 Factors Influencing social integration

The following factors were acknowledged as positive influences into the EMS faculty, and this is as the students indicated that they had a "positive" social integration. As previously indicated the UWC annual Orientation programme was one factor, and the other factor was The First Year Experience (FYE) Programme.

The findings indicated the social integration for students in multi-dimensional, with creating friendships, engaging with peers and participating in structured social and academic programmes being key components. The students' understanding of social integration aligns with established academic definitions, emphasising the merging of students into the university community. Two main institutional programmes, which is the annual Orientation and the First – Year Experience (FYE), were found to have a significantly positive influence on the students' social integration into the EMS faculty. Thus, helping to foster a sense of belonging and community among first-year students. These programmes are vital in supporting students' social transitions and their continued emphasis can further enhance the overall student experience.

5.2.3 Findings Related to Academic Integration

The research sub question, all participants had to answer was "How did first-year students' academic integration influence their transition into the faculty and their perceived academic performance?" All participants indicated that they had some knowledge of what academic integration meant. Students mentioned "the assistance they received", "groupwork", "sharing knowledge and "working with peers" as part of their academic integration process. The quotations noted were proof of the students' understanding of academic integration. Also, these quotations were backed by various references mentioned earlier on in this paper.

5.2.3.1 Students' understanding of Academic Integration

All participants indicated that they had some knowledge of what academic integration entailed. Students mentioned academic assistance, peer to peer assistance, groupwork and more.

5.2.3.2 Categories influencing Academic Integration

The following categories were listed as academic integration. Attending consultations, the FYE mentorship programme, the faculty tutorial programmes, assistance from peers, both lecturers and tutors' helpfulness and students constantly asking questions (either during lectures or tutorial classes or during consultations), motivation to be up to date with academics, attending lecture classes, as well as sharing knowledge among peers

The identified remarks were supported by various authors. Authors such as Lakhal et al., (2020), when they wrote.

“the student's performance, their intellectual development, their positive academic experiences as well as their extracurricular activities”.

Or when Piepenburg & Beckmann (2022), noted that.

“students would have an easy academic integration when they interact with their lecturers as well as the support staff”.

5.2.3.3 Factors Influencing academic integration

The following factors were acknowledged as influencing the first-year student's academic integration into the EMS faculty, as this is as students indicated that they had a “positive” academic integration. Firstly, “Seeking academic support from academics”. All participants acknowledged this as being important, and it was supported by as Lakhal et al., (2020). Also, “Engagement with student support with mentors and tutors”. Students noted that it was easier to communicate with mentors and Tutors via WhatsApp, as the reply would be sooner than emailing the lecturers. This statement too was supported by Lakhal et al., (2020), Piepenburg & Beckmann (2022) and Pather (2018). Lastly, groupwork or Community of Practice (CoP). This unsuspecting finding portrayed itself when respondents mentioned they would assist their peers to understand module content their friends never understood and vice a versa. This finding was supported by Drew (2023) and (Nelson, 2021).

The findings indicate that academic integration for students in the EMS faculty is also multifaceted, encompassing a range of support mechanisms and interactions that enhances their academic journey. Participants' understanding of academic integration aligns with scholarly

definitions, particularly emphasising the importance of academic assistance, peer support and active engagement in their academic experiences. Key factors influencing academic integration include, seeking academic support from lecturers and tutors, participating in mentorship and tutorial programmes and engaging in group work and Community of Practice (CoP). These findings underscore the importance of creating an environment where students feel supported by both academic staff and peers and where collaborative and active learning are encouraged. As students in the EMS faculty reported, positive academic integration, these practices appear to have a significant impact on their intellectual development and overall academic performance.

The Research Aim was to understand the factors influencing the first-year students' transition as well as academic and social engagement into the EMS faculty. This was answered as students would mention various factors that influenced their transition as well as their academic and social engagement into the EMS faculty. For the students' social integration into the university as well as the EMS faculty, the following factors, the annual Orientation at the beginning of the year and the FYE Programme, were mentioned. The students mentioned that because of these programmes, they felt at ease to communicate with their lecturers, tutors as well as their peers to seek academic assistance.

5.2.3.3.1 There were three research objectives mentioned in the first chapter of this paper

The first objective was further sub-divided as below.

- To determine if the students understood the meaning of social and academic integration into the EMS faculty. Yes, the students showed some indication of their understanding of what social and academic integration into the EMS faculty meant. Their understanding was supported by references indicated earlier on in the paper.
- Also, students had to indicate if they experienced the integration aspect in the faculty. Here all participants indicated that they experienced integration (both social and or academic) into the faculty
- Furthermore, students had to indicate if their integration was successful or not. Again, students indicated that their integration was “positive”.
- Lastly, the students had to specify if the integration had an influence into their academic performance. Once again, the students noted that the integration had a positive influence on their academic performance as well.

The second objective was to determine the students' understanding of social and academic integration at the EMS Faculty and their perceived academic performance. The answer, yes, the students indicated that they had some knowledge of what social and academic integration is. Their understanding was supported by various references of literature mentioned earlier on in the paper. Students indicated that both social and academic integration had a positive hand in their academic performances.

The last objective referred to the factors that influenced the students social and academic integration into the faculty.

- For social integration, students noted the UWC annual Orientation programme had an influence on their transition into university and the First Year Experience (FYE) Programme as assisting them to integrate into the faculty.
- For academic integration students mentioned seeking academic support from academics and tutors outside of the lecture halls as helping them integrate into the faculty, academically. As well as engaging with mentors for student support as factors assisting them in both their social and academic integration into the faculty and university.

5.3 Recommendations

Below are some recommendations for both the social and academic integration

5.3.1 Social integration

5.3.1.1 Orientation

The first recommendation would be that UWC should consider having its orientation week expanded over a two-week period. This will assist students who are still struggling to register to attend UWC, to have an Orientation experience. The lack of having an Orientation experience could have an effect on the student's transition to university and integration into the faculty.

5.3.1.2 First Year Experience Programme

The programme should be compulsory, as this will ensure more student participation. With more student participation, the faculty should have a smoother student integration in both the social and more importantly, the academic sphere. This is as students are taught soft skills when attending mentoring sessions.

5.3.2 Academic integration

5.3.2.1 Seeking academic support from academics

Academic support seems so intimidating for some students and therefore, it would be recommended that the faculty should put processes in place to destigmatise the consultation concept between lecturers and students (especially first years). This recommendation is based on the fact that there are students who might never have been exposed to the consultation fact with academics thus, finding it difficult to consult with academics.

5.3.2.2 Engagement with student support with mentors and tutors

Students should be constantly informed about the importance of seeking support to assist them with their own academics. The support system at UWC, will assist the first-year student to have a smoother integration into the faculty and more importantly, it is a free service. Should students consult with their Mentors or attend the mentoring circles, they will discover that the structure of such a programme is to assist them into university life. At UWC, the students will find that the FTYP is a free service on campus, especially designed for first-year students having difficulties to transition into university life. Tutorial consultation should be emphasised as much as attending the tutorial classes. Some respondents noted that during their consultations, they understood the content better and they walked away with more and clearer information about the module. Therefore, highlighting the valuable source available to all students

5.3.2.3 Community of Practice (CoP)

The Community of Practice or CoP concept can be considered as an informal assistance concept. This concept was a surprised finding, and the Researcher never consideration this concept in its entirety. This finding can be an indication of two contrasting perceptions, 1) the willingness of what some of the students would go through, to be able to understand their module contents or 2) the comfortability the students feel to consult with their lecturers or Tutors.

5.4 Future research

This paper was researched at the EMS faculty at UWC, by looking at the social and academic integration of the first-year students. The participants were part of the FYE Programme as well as. Further studies can be done at all the other faculties on campus, with students who are either part of the FYE Programme or with students who are not. The latter will give a better

comparative view of the students understanding of social and academic integration and how it influences their academic performances as well.

5.5 Limitations to the Study

As with all research papers that had study limitations, so too did this research paper. It addressed the restrictions of the findings, and those that were never found. The boundaries of the study, the awareness the Researcher aimed to bring afore, the complications experienced during the different phases of the study, were part of the limitations found in this study. Firstly, did students understand the meaning of “social and academic integration”? This answer was revealed throughout the data collection period when the online focus group sessions were conducted, as the students had some knowledge of what the meaning for both social and academic integration meant. Secondly, were students aware what it entailed to “integrate into the faculty”? Yes, students again had an idea of what integration into the EMS faculty meant, and they could present examples of their personal integration. Lastly, did students understand what was meant by “how social and academic integration influence the student’s transition into the faculty and their academic performance”? Again, yes. Students understood how their personal integration had an influence on their perceived academic performance.

However, as the focus group interviews commenced, the Researcher was presented with other unforeseen limitations as well. These obstacles included that even though students agreed to the focus group session, they would ignore communication from the Researcher. Also, the projected sample size became smaller. This was as some students were unable to attend the focus group sessions as they experienced load shedding at the scheduled time. Or students never attended their focus group session in its entirety, and no reasons were given for being absent. Moreover, students would attend the session, but either refrained from answering the questions, or replied with a one sentence answer. Furthermore, at times, the Researcher had to encourage students to elaborate on the one-line answer given.

5.6 Final conclusion

Chapter 5 discussed the results of the study at the EMS faculty at UWC and the various challenges the students faced. The findings of the study provided a comprehensive overview of the participants’ understanding of social and academic integration together with factors influencing the integration into university. Their demographic and educational backgrounds highlighted their diversity in terms on gender, language, study stream and pre-entry characteristics, which also could have influenced their social and academic integration. The

funding information also sheds light on the socio-economic contexts in which these students are pursuing their studies, which may also be a factor influencing their academic experiences and outcomes. The recommendations included expansion of the annual orientation programme at UWC and the compulsory implementation of the FYE Programme. With the two recommendations, more students will be included in the social integration from an early start at university. This could also, increase the retention rate of the EMS first-year student.

Bibliography

- Alder, E. (2016). Becoming a Student of English: Students' Experiences of Transition into the First Year. *sage.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav*, 185-203.
- Aljohani, O. A. (2014, June 10). Student Attrition in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing Student Retention at a Tertiary English Language Centre in Saudi Arabia. *A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*. Saudi Arabia: RMIT University.
- Alpert, H. (1941). Emile Durkheim and the Theory of Social Integration. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 172-184.
- Angelfish Fieldwork. (2024, July). *Angelfish Fieldwork*. Retrieved from <https://info.angelfishfieldwork.com/market-research-fieldwork-blog/face-to-face-vs-remote-focus-groups#:~:text=The%20advantages%20of%20face%2Dto%2Dface%20focus%20groups&text=It's%20much%20easier%20to%20build,means%20better%20insights%20for%20you>.
- Australian Council for Educational Research. (2012). *Australasian Survey of Student Engagement 2012 Institution Report*. Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
- Babbie. & Mouton. (2001). The Practice of Social Research. *The Practice of Social Research Cape Town: Oxford*.
- Bhandari. P. (2023, June 22). *www.scribbr.com*. Retrieved from Scribbr: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-research/>
- Billah, A. (2014). Factors Affecting Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students at International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Bangladesh. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 143-153.
- Bitzer. E. M. (2009). Academic and Social Integration in three first-year groups; A holistic perspective. *SAJHE 23 Unisa Press*, 225-245.
- Braun. V. and Clarke. V, .. (2006). Qualitative Research in Psychology. *Using thematic analysis in psychology*, 77-101.

- Brunsdon. V. Davies. M. Shevlin. M. & Bracken. M, .. (2010). Why do HE Students Drop Out? A Test of Tinto's model. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 301-310.
- Brunsdon. V. Davies. M. Shevlin. M. & Bracken. M. (2000). Why do HE Students Drop Out? A Test of Tinto's Model. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 301-310.
- Caulfield. J. (2023, June 22). *Scribbr*. Retrieved from scribbr.com: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>
- City of Cape Town. (2019, December). *Load Shedding Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from [westerncape.gov.za: https://www.westerncape.gov.za/110green/sites/green.westerncape.gov.za/files/atoms/files/Load%20Shedding%20FAQ%202019_FINAL_0.pdf](https://www.westerncape.gov.za/110green/sites/green.westerncape.gov.za/files/atoms/files/Load%20Shedding%20FAQ%202019_FINAL_0.pdf)
- Conley. D.T. (2007). *Redefining college rediness*. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center. Eugene, Oregon: Bill * Melinda GAtes Foundation.
- Crowe. S. Cresswell. K. Robertson. A. Huby. G. Avery. A. & Sheikh. A, .. (2011). The Case Study Approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11-100.
- Daniel. M, .. (2013, April). Workshops for Transition to First-Year Commerce Program. *A Project to the Saculty of Education in comformity with the requirement for EDUC 898, Master's Project*. Kingston, Ontario, Cannada: Queens' University.
- De Bruyn. S. and Van Eekert. N. (2023). Understanding the Academic and Social Integration Process of Students Entering Higher Education: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Social Sciences*.
- Dias. D. & Sá. M. J, .. (2014). The impact of the transition to HE: Emotional feelings and sensations. *European Journal of Education*, 291-303.
- Drew. C. (2023, June 01). *Helpful Professor*. Retrieved from <https://helpfulprofessor.com.social-integration-sociology/>
- Drew. C, .. (2023, June 01). *Helpful Professor*. Retrieved from [helpfulprofessor.com: https://helpfulprofessor.com/social-integration-sociology/](https://helpfulprofessor.com/social-integration-sociology/)
- Dudovskiy. J. (2011). *Research-methodology*. Retrieved from [research-methodology.net: https://research-methodology.net/research-philosophy/interpretivism/](https://research-methodology.net/research-philosophy/interpretivism/)
- Durkheim. E, .. (1951). Theory of Social Integration . *6 J. SOC. PHIL*, 172.

- Franz. S and Paetsch. J. (2023). Academic and social integration and their relation to dropping out of teacher education: A comparison to other study programs. *Frontiers in Education*.
- George. T. (2023, June 25). *Scribbr.com*. Retrieved from www.scribbr.com: <http://www.scribbr.com/methodology/focus-group/>
- Harun. N. & Mohamad. R, .. (n.d.). *Consultation Hours: The Effectiveness of Face-to-Face Consultation Outside the Classroom*. Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia: Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam.
- Hepler. R. (2023, November 21). *Study.com*. Retrieved from study.com: <https://study.com/learn/lesson/interpretivism-sociology-concept-origin.html>
- Jansen. D. (2023, July 19). *Grad Coach*. Retrieved from [Gradcoach.com](https://www.google.com/search?q=grad+coach+interpretivism&oq=grad+coach+interpreti&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgCECEYoAEyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATI HCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigATIHCQAQQIRiPAjIHCAUQIRiPAtIBCjMxMDU3ajBqMTWoAgiwAgE&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid): https://www.google.com/search?q=grad+coach+interpretivism&oq=grad+coach+interpreti&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgCECEYoAEyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATI HCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigATIHCQAQQIRiPAjIHCAUQIRiPAtIBCjMxMDU3ajBqMTWoAgiwAgE&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid
- Joynt. C. (2023). Factors that Influence First-year Students' Academic Performance in Introductory Accounting. *A Systematic Literature Review and Avenues for Future Research*. Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa: University of Pretoria, South Africa.
- Kitzinger. J. (2023, June 29). *Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups*. Retrieved from [thebmj](http://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.3117000.299): <http://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.3117000.299>
- Kitzinger. J. (2023, June 29). *Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups*. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.3117000.299>
- Lakhal. S. Mukamurera. J. Be'dard. M-E. Heilporn. G. Chauret.M. (2020). Features Fostering Academic and Social Integration in Blended Synchronous Courses in Graduate Programs. *International journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 1-22.
- Lakhal. S. Mukamurera. J. Be'dard. M-E. Heilporn. G. & Chauret. M, .. (2020). Features Fostering Academic and Social Integration in Blended Synchronous Courses in Graduate Programs. *Synchronous Courses in Graduate Programs. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*.

- Legese. H. (2018). Factors Affecting the Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students': The Case of Raya University, Maichew, Ethiopia . *Journal of Education and Practice* , 83-91.
- Lenepa. K. E. (2008, November). Student Choice: What Factors and Conditions Influence University of the Western Cape Undergraduate Students' Change of Programmes of Study? Cape Town, Cape, South Africa: University of the Western Cape.
- Leung. L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 324-327.
- Lincoln. Y.S. and Guba. E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, California, USA.
- Liu. R. & Liu. E. (2000). Institutional Integration: An Analysis of Tinto's Theory. *First-Generation College Students. ERIC Digest*.
- Macfarlane. D. (2006, September 22). Shock varsity dropout stats. *Mail & Guardian*, p. 6.
- McCombes. S. & George. T. (2023, November 20). *Scribbr*. Retrieved from scribbr.com: <https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/methodology/>
- McCubbin. I. (2003). *An Examination of Criticisms made of Tinto's 1975 Student Integration Model of Attrition*. Research Gate. Retrieved from researchgate.com.
- Nelson. L. (2021). *seeincolors.com*. Retrieved from www.seeincolors.com: <https://seeincolors.com/what-are-the-benefits-of-a-community-of-practice-cop/>
- Nevill. A. & Rhodes. C. (2006). Academic and social integration in higher education: a survey of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within a first-year education studies cohort at a new university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 179-193.
- Nyar. A. (2021). The 'Double Transition' for First-Year Students: Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's First-Year University Students. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 77-92.
- Okoedion. G. E. Okolie. U. C. Udom. I. D. (2019). Perceived factors affecting students' academic performance in Nigerian Universities. *Open Access*, 409-422.
- Pascarella. E. T. & Terenzini. P. T. (1983). Predicting Voluntary Freshman Year Persistence/Withdrawal Behavior in a Residential University: A Path Analytic Validation of Tinto's Model. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 218-226.

- Pather. S. & Chetty R, .. (2015, April). Pre-Entry Academic and Non-Academic Factors Influencing Teacher Education Students' First-year Experience and Academic Performance. *Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree: Doctor of Education*. Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa: Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
- Pather. S. & Chetty. R. (2015, April). Pre-Entry Academic and Non-Academic Factors Influencing Teacher Education Students' First-Year Experience and Academic Performance. *Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree: Doctor of Education*. Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa: Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
- Pather. S. (2016). A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Pre-Entry Factors Influencing First-Year University Experience. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 1-21.
- Pather.S. (2018). *Tutorial Enhancement Programme: UWC Stars Guideline of the University of the Western Cape on Tutoring*. Cape Town, WESTERN CAPE: The University of the Western Cape.
- Patton. M. Q. (2002). Two Decades of Developments in Qualitative Inquiry. A Personal, Experiential Perspective. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.)*, 261-283.
- Perger. M. & Takacs. I. (2015, November 25). Factors Contributing to Students' Academic Success Based on the Students' Opinion at BME Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences. Budapest, Budapest, Hungary: Budapest University.
- Petersen. H. K. (1992). First-Generation College Students. *ERIC Digest.*, 1-5.
- Piepenburg. J. G. and Beckmann. J. (2022). The relevance of social and academic integration for students' dropout decisions. Evidence from a factorial survey in Germany . *European Journal of Higher Education*, 255-276.
- Rajandran. K. Chun Hee. T. Kanawarthy. S. Kik Soon. L. Kamaludin. H. and Khezrimotlagh. D. (2015). Factors Affecting First Year Undergraduate Students Academic Performance. *Scholars Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, 54-60.
- Remali. A. M & Ghazali, M. A. (2013). Understanding Academic Performance based on Demographic Factors, Motivation Factors and Learning Styles . *International Journal of Asian Science*, 1938-1951.

- Republic of South Africa. (2013). Protection of Personal Information Act, No. 4 of 2013.
- Rovai. A. (2002). In search of Higher persistence rates in distance education online programs. *Internet and Higher Education*, 1-16.
- Ryan. G. (2018). Introduction to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. *Nurse Researcher*, 41-49.
- Samoila. M. E. & Vrabie. T. (2023). First-year Seminars Through the Lens of Vincent Tinto's Theories of Student Departure. A Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Education*, 1-11.
- Schreiber. B. Luescher-Mamashela. T. & Moja. T. (2014). Tinto in South Africa: Student integration, persistence and success, and the role of student affairs. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 5-10.
- Smart. J. C. (1975). Institutional Goal and Congruence: A Study of Student, Faculty, and Administrator Preferences. *Springer*, 285-297.
- State Council of Higher Education. (2023, May 15). *State Council of Higher Education*. Retrieved from State Council of Higher Education: <https://research.schev.edu/info/Glossary/First-time-first-year-freshman-student#:~:text=Glossary,time%20at%20the%20undergraduate%20level>.
- State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). (2023, May 15). *State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)*. Retrieved from State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV): <https://research.schev.edu/info/Glossary/First-time-first-year-freshman-student#:~:text=Glossary,time%20at%20the%20undergraduate%20level>.
- The Different Voice of Student Success Resource Center. (2025, March 6). *The Chronical of Higher Education*. Retrieved from [chronical.com](https://www.chronicle.com/featured/student-success/student-centric-institution/who-is-a-first-generation-student) : <https://www.chronicle.com/featured/student-success/student-centric-institution/who-is-a-first-generation-student>
- Tinto. V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 53(6), 687-700.
- Tinto. V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 89-125.

- Tinto. V. (1975). Dropout from higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research. *Review of Educational Research* , 89-125.
- Tinto. V. (1999). Taking Retention Seriously. *Taking Retention Seriously: Rethinking the First Year of College* (pp. 1-5). Denver, Colorado: Syracuse University.
- University of the Western Cape. (2024, September 10). *UWC* . Retrieved from www.uwc.ac.za:
<https://www.uwc.ac.za/admission-and-financial-aid/apply/definition-of-terms>
- Vallmuur. K. & Schweitzer. R. (2001). Who Succeeds at University? *Factors Predicting Academic Performance in First Year Australian University Students*. Carseldine, Queensland, Australia: Queensland University of Technology.
- Villegas. F. (2023, June). *QuestionPro*. Retrieved from questionpro.com:
<https://www.questionpro.com/blog/thematic-analysis/>
- Vinz. S. (2022, October 14). *Scribbr*. Retrieved from scribbr.com:
<https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/theoretical-framework/>
- Webster. M. (2023, June). *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Retrieved from Merriam-Webster: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faculty>.

Appendix A: Participant (focus group) Consent Form

Project Title: Factors influencing First-year University Students' Social and Academic Integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study.

Researcher:

Please initial the boxes to show your agreement and understanding of what is expected for this study.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I wish to withdraw, I may contact the lead researcher at any time to do so).
 3. I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential.
 4. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my responses without revealing any part of my identity.
 5. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research.
 6. I agree for the **anonymized** data collected to be used in future research. (*Circle the appropriate answer*). Yes / No
 7. I hereby agree to be audio recorded. (*Circle the appropriate answer*). Yes / No
-

8. I hereby agree to be video recorded. (Circle the appropriate answer). Yes / No

[delete pt 8 if not applicable]

In terms of the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013), personal information will be collected and processed:

I hereby give consent for my personal information to be collected, stored, processed and shared as described in the information sheet.

I do not give consent for my personal information to be collected, stored, processed and shared as described in the information sheet.

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent
(If different from lead researcher)

Date

Signature

Supervisor

Date

Signature

Copies: All participants will receive a copy of the signed and dated version of the consent form and information sheet for themselves. A copy of this will be filed and kept in a secure location for research purposes only.

Researcher:

Supervisor:

HOD:

Provide necessary details here

Appendix B: EMS First Year Participants Consent Form

RESEARCH TITLE: Factors influencing First-year University Students' Social and Academic Integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted towards the MPA Programme at the School of Government (SOG) at the University of the Western Cape.

This study has been described to me in a language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered.

I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and I was also informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time by advising the student researcher.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Name : _____

Participant Signature : _____

Agree	Disagree

I give consent for recordings to be taken:

Date : _____

Place : _____

Student Researcher Signature : _____

Student Number : _____

Mobile Number : _____
Email : _____
I am accountable to my supervisor : _____
Telephone : _____
Email : _____

Appendix C: Focus Group Confidentiality Binding Form

PROJECT TITLE: Factors influencing First-year University Students' Social and Academic Integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study.

Researcher name:

Please initial each box to show agreement with the following statements:

- 1 The study has been described to me in a language that I understand.
- 2 Any questions I may have about the study have been answered.
- 3 I understand what my participation entails and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will.
- 4 I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone by the researchers and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.
- 5 I also understand that confidentiality is dependent on participants in the Focus Group maintaining confidentiality.
- 6 I hereby agree to uphold the confidentiality of the discussions in the focus group by not disclosing the identity of other participants or any aspects of their contributions to members outside of the group.**
- 7 I agree to be audio-recorded. (**Circle your answer**). Yes / No
- 8 I hereby agree to be video recorded. (**Circle the appropriate answer**). Yes / No
[delete pt 8 if not applicable]

In terms of the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013), personal information will be collected and processed:

I hereby give consent for my personal information to be collected, stored, processed and shared as described in the information sheet.

I do not give consent for my personal information to be collected, stored, processed and shared as described in the information sheet.

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent
(If different from lead researcher)

Date

Signature

Supervisor

Date

Signature

Copies: All participants will receive a copy of the signed and dated version of the consent form and information sheet for themselves. A copy of this will be filed and kept in a secure location for research purposes only.

Researcher:

Supervisor:

HOD:

Appendix D: Research Project Information Sheet

Date: _____

Topic: Factors influencing First-year University Students' Social and Academic Integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study.

Dear Participant I would like to invite you to be a participant in my research study. It is in partial completion of my researcher thesis towards a Masters in Public Administration (MPA) degree at the School of Government (SOG), at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

The purpose of my research is to highlight "first year EMS students" experiences in integrating into the university and particularly the EMS Faculty. Your participation would really provide valuable information for my study. Please take time to read the following information carefully and if you are unclear of anything, contact me and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

My name is Moerida Davids (student number) and I am pursuing my MPA degree in SOG at UWC. I would like to invite you to take part in my research project. Again, please read the following information carefully, and feel free to ask questions if anything you read is not clear to you.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to understand the first-year university students' experiences and how they socially and academically integrated in the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS).

Why are you being invited to participate this study?

As a first-year student located in the EMS faculty, your present experiences in engaging with your studies, lecturers, peers, support staff, tutors and mentors will help the faculty get a better understanding on the first-year experience of EMS students and how to further support them so they can successfully pass their first year of study and reach graduation in the required time.

What will you be expected to do?

Firstly, if you do volunteer to be a participant, I would like to thank you for sharing your valuable information. I will be conducting online focus group interviews. Which means you will be with three other first-year students talking about your first-year experience. A set of questions will be provided to you prior to the focus group which will not be longer than 45 minutes. All information shared will be confidential, no names will be mentioned. The information shared by the participants will become the data for my study.

What are the potential risks involved in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this research as all identities will be kept anonymous to ensure your privacy.

What is the potential benefit involved in this study?

The Benefit of this research is outlined as follows:

To gain a better understanding of:

- First year students' experiences of academically and socially integrating into the EMS Faculty; and
- How the first-year students' integration contributes to their academic performance.

How is confidentiality managed in a Focus Group?

Please be advised that the results of the study will never divulge the individual's name or other personal information, as to maintain confidentiality at all times. Any information that can connect the responses to an individual will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your focus group interviews will be recorded. The recording and the signed consent form, which is required from you, should you agree to participate in this research study,

will only be kept for the duration of the study and locked away at all times. Finally, please note, all information collected from the focus group interview, is used solely for research purposes.

What can I do to maintain confidentiality in a Focus Group?

In terms of the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013), please note additional information.

What type of personal information will be collected?

The interviewer, which will be me personally, will collect the participant's name and contact details (both cell phone number and or email addresses). This is solely to contact the participant if further information is needed.

Who at UWC is responsible for collecting and storing my personal information?

The interviewer, which is me personally, will collect the information and the storing will be on UWC campus. The information will be kept on a computer stored in a locked storeroom.

Who will have access to my personal information outside of UWC?

The information will only be available to myself and my project supervisor at UWC and no one else. The information will be stored on a computer at UWC.

How long will my personal information be stored?

Electronic data will be kept on the researcher's/supervisor's password protected computer for five years and deleted thereafter. Hard copies will be kept in a locked drawer for five years and deleted thereafter.

How will my personal information be processed?

The information will be protected on a computer that is password locked. The supervisor and I will be the only people that have access to the computer.

What are the following key concepts?

1. **first year university students** – A student attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level (State Council of Higher Education, 2023).

2. **social integration** – it is the process by which students become merged into the university community examples would be developing friendships, working with peers and joining university social clubs (Drew. C., 2023)

3. **academic integration** – Tinto defines academic integration as the student's performance, their intellectual development and their positive academic experience, as well as their extracurricular activities, for example how a student engages with the lecturer in the classroom, tutors, seek academic support etc. (Lakhal. S. Mukamurera. J. Be'dard. M-E. Heilporn. G. Chauret. M, 2020).

Who are the participants that will be involved in the study? And how will the information be gathered?

First year EMS students from the 2023 cohort. A purposive sample of 12 students will be selected from the different departments in the EMS faculty. The sample will be from the first-year students who joined the First Year Experience (FYE) Programme. All mentees will be invited and 12 participants' will be selected. Purposive sampling will be used to select a total of 12 mentees spreading across all departments to partake in focus group meetings.

Focus group – Focus group is a research method where a small group of participants are chosen as per a predefined demographic characteristic. The participants meet in a group setting and answers semi-structured questions presented to them and these questions aim to shed light on the topic at hand. In this Focus group setting, three focus group interviews will be conducted, with a total of 4 mentees to a group and the duration of the meeting, will be between 45-50 minutes per group meeting (George. T, 2023) and (Kitzinger. J, Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups., 2023)

3 What is a case study?

A **case study** – is a detailed subject specific study of a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon, commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research (S. McCombes., 2019 & 2023). Furthermore, it is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences, where it is also used as a research approach to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. (Crowe. S. Cresswell. K. Robertson. A. Huby. G. Avery. A. & Sheikh. A, 2011).

4 Which is your case that you are studying?

My case study is in the faculty of EMS at a particular university (UWC). Where I will be examining a cohort of first-year (2023 cohort) students sharing their experiences during the first semester of their first year at university.

Who do I contact for further information?

Should you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me, Moerida Davids, on my cell phone () or via email at (). Alternatively, you may also contact my supervisor () at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), ().

To report any serious or adverse effects emergent from this research, please contact the ethics committee below:

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Research and Postgraduate Support

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

Tel: 021 959 4111

Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

This information sheet is for you to download so that you can be aware of the purpose of the study. With your signature on the attached consent form, you indicate that you understand the purpose of the exercise.

Appendix E: Focus group questions

Topic - Factors influencing First-year University Students' Social and Academic Integration into the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS): A University Case Study.

My name is Moerida Davids. I am a University of the Western Cape (UWC) student in the Economics and Management Sciences (EMS) Faculty working towards my Master's Degree. The purpose of my Mini-Thesis is to investigate factors influencing first-year students' social and academic integration into the EMS Faculty. You are invited to participate in a focus-group interview. The interview will consist of 4 participants, all of whom will be from the Ems faculty, the first year of study. Under no circumstance would you be threatened, bribed, or obligated to participate in this focus-group session. However, your participation would be much appreciated in helping the faculty better understand how to support the first-year EMS student integration and also assist me in the competition for my Master's degree.

I have formulated focus-group questions to help gather relevant information.

The following questions will be discussed in the focus group.

Definition of Social integration: it is the process by which students become merged into the university community examples would be developing friendships, working with peers and joining university social clubs (Drew. C, 2023).

Definition of Academic integration: Tinto defines academic integration as the student's performance, their intellectual development and their positive academic experience, as well as their extracurricular activities, for example how a student engages with the lecturer in the

classroom, tutors, seek academic support etc. (Tinto. V., Dropout from higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research. , 1975) and (Lakhal. S. Mukamurera. J. Be'dard. M-E. Heilporn. G Chauret.M., 2020).

Focus group participant questions.

Question 1- Each participant is to introduce themselves, the school they attended (private or public; fee-paying or no-fee, situated in the city or rural area), and the name of programme registered for. Are you a bursary student? Are you the first member in your family to attend university

Question 2 – Can you share with us some expected and unexpected experience you had in your first semester at UWC?

Question 3 – Let’s talk about social integration. Would you say that you were able to successfully integrate into the social environment of the EMS faculty? Let’s talk about that and please feel free to use examples – talk about positive and negative experiences.

Question 4 - What factors do you think influenced the positive and negative social integration experiences? **Question 5** – Let’s talk about Academic integration now. Would you say that you were able to successfully integrate into the academic environment of the EMS faculty?

Question 6 – What factors do you think influenced the positive and negative academic integration experiences?

Question 7 - Do you think your level of social and/or academic integration in the faculty had an impact on your academic performance. Please explain.

Question 6 – Reflecting on your integration into the EMS – which aspect – social or academic integration played a more influential role in your first semester’s success/transition?

Appendix F: UWC ethical clearance consent form



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

Directorate: DVC: Research and Innovation
Research Development & Postgraduate Support
Tel: +27 21 959 4111
Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

08 December 2023

Ms M Davids
School of Government
Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences

HSSREC Reference Number: HS23/9/27

Project Title: Factors influencing first-year university students' social and academic integration into the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS): A university case study.

Approval Period: 7 December 2023 – 6 December 2024

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology, and ethics of the above-mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit an annual progress report at least two months before expiry date. Failure to submit your annual progress report on time will result in the immediate lapse of your ethics approval and you will have to resubmit an entirely new ethics application.

For permission to conduct research using student and/or staff data or to distribute research surveys/questionnaires please apply via: <https://sites.google.com/uwc.ac.za/permissionresearch/home>

The permission letter must then be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Coordinator: Research Ethics
University of the Western Cape

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC-130416-049

University of the Western Cape, Robert Sobukwe Road, Bellville 7535, Republic of South Africa

