

# SUPPORTING EAST ASIAN STUDENTS ENROLLED AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

by

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# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree

## **Master of Arts in Higher Education Studies**

is entirely my own work, except where reference to other sources has been indicated, which I did under the guidance of my two supervisors.

I further certify that this dissertation has not previously been presented for a degree to this or any other university/faculty.

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Xie Tao

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January 2019

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## SUMMARY

Over the previous 30 years, most East Asian (South Korea, China, Japan) countries have achieved remarkable economic success, and are entering the global economic market. Therefore, more and more East Asian parents support their children to study in other countries. Chinese parents, for example, may consider that studying overseas *inter alia* would enhance their children's competitiveness in terms of learning other languages, especially English and understand different cultures, getting a good quality of education, learning from other countries' different sets of values. They thus consider studying overseas as a long-term investment towards global citizenship.

Due to different language, culture, and learning styles between the East Asian and English-speaking countries, these students often find it difficult to adapt to the new environment. As an East Asian student myself, I had found it difficult to adapt to the circumstances in South Africa. As I could find no reference in literature to the problem in the context of South Africa, the aim of my dissertation was to explore and describe the challenges of East Asian students studying at one South African English-medium university towards improving the support provided by higher education institutions.

Based on my literature review I gathered that East Asian students studying abroad often find challenges with academic and social practices. The literature also highlighted difficulties in terms of transport and accommodation. The level of support varies at different institutions, and in different parts of the world.

Based on my literature review, I developed some interview questions which I posed to six East Asian participants and seven staff members at the University of the Free State. I transcribed the data, and sorted similar themes based on what the literature and data indicated as relevant.

My study showed that East Asian students experience barriers with regard to language and the academic practices. In terms of language, the students shared that it was difficult to understand English, and in particular also to follow the different accents. Adjusting to continuous assessments, with diverse assessment tasks was also difficult, as it is quite different from the systems used in their own countries.

The interviews with the staff members revealed that many units exist to assist the students, albeit not specifically for East Asian students. Services include support for international students in terms of administrative issues such as study permits, registration and so forth. There are units that assist students with academic writing, studying methods and many more. For me, the most significant observation was that while the East Asian students were struggling, the university seemed to have numerous support structures in place that could help them to overcome these challenges. However, the students seemed to be unaware of the services that they could make use of. It became clear that it is vitally important that universities find a way to continuously make English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students aware of the services that could assist them.

**Key words:** International students; student support; foreign students; East Asian; South African University.

## 文献摘要

在过去的 30 年时间，主要的东亚国家（中国，韩国，日本）在经济上取得了令人瞩目的成绩，同时他们也越来越多的在国际市场经济中扮演着日趋重要的角色。基于这样的因素，更多的东亚家庭开始考虑将他们的孩子送到其它国家学习。例如，中国的家长就希望自己的孩子能够到其它国家学习，这样他们的孩子或许在未来的竞争中能够脱颖而出。这些竞争力包括：掌握其它国家的语言，特别是英语；让孩子接触不同国家的文化；接受更高质量的文化教育；以及让他们更多的了解这个世界的多元化价值观。家长们把送孩子到海外学习的经历作为一种成为国际公民的长期投资。

然而现实情况是，由于这些东亚学生在语言，文化以及学习方式上和这些以英语为背景的国家在教育，文化方面有着巨大差异，他们发现自己很难适应这种新的学习环境。作为一名东亚学生，笔者也发现自己很难适应在南非的学习和生活。同时，由于笔者不能找到相关的文献材料去阐述东亚学生在南非生活，学习的种种问题，因此我的学术论文的目的就是去探索和阐述他们在南非大学学习和生活所面对的各种挑战。我希望我的学术论文能够引起南非高校的重视，从而能够对东亚学生提供更多的帮助。

在文献回顾的章节，我回顾了一些东亚学生在海外高校所面临的种种挑战。这些挑战主要是在学习和生活方面。文献中，我同时也强调了东亚学生在交通和住宿方面所面临的困难。就总体而言，不同国家的各个高校还是给与了他们不同程度的支持。

基于这些文献回顾材料，我设计了一些与文献回顾相关的问题进行采访。采访对象包括 6 名在南非自由州大学学习的东亚学生和 7 名在南非自由州大学工作的校职工。采访之后，我把他们的采访转述，然后把相似的观点分成一类。分类的这些观点与我在文献回顾中所提出的问题密切相关。

从我对学生的采访中不难发现，东亚学生的主要障碍就是语言和专业的学习。在语言方面，学生们抱怨用英语去听课让他们很难理解课堂内容，特别是很多老师还带有不同程度的口音。另一方面，由于这些东亚学生在本国已经适应了自己国家的考试评估方式，这让他们很难去适应新的，同时多元化的考试评估。在采访校职工的过程中，他们谈到了自己所在的机构如何去支持南非自由州大学学生的学习，然而他们也强调，自己所在的机构并没有专门针对东亚学生群体的特殊服务。

然而一些机构还是能够为东亚学生提供帮助，例如帮助国际留学生更换学习签证，帮助他们注册等等。与此同时，一些机构还可以指导学生更好的完成学术写作，提供有效的学习方法等等。对我个人而言，最重大的发现就是一些东亚学生很纠结于的一些困难，大学的相关机构似乎都可以为他们提供帮助。然而这些学生并没有意识到这些机构的相关服务，也没有有意识的去利用这些机构去解决一些自身的困难。这就很清楚的表明了这件事的重要性，大学的这些机构该如何找到一种有效的沟通方式去让这些东亚学生能够有效的利用好这些机构，从而让他们更好的适应在南非大学的学习和生活，这对大学机构而言是一种挑战。

**关键词:** 国际留学生; 学生支持; 外国留学生

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

BICS	Basic interpersonal skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CET4	College English Test
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
CUADS	Centre for University Access & Disability Support
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GPA	Grade Point Average
OIA	Office for International Affairs
PGS	Postgraduate School
PRU	Postgraduate Research Unit at the library
PSU	Portland State University
SA	South Africa
UFS	University of the Free State
USA	United States of America

# CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years, the world has witnessed the development of the East Asian economies in different areas such as production, import and export trade, investment and finance (Dent, 2017: 1). For example, over the last three decades, China has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and this has helped many Chinese people to rise from poverty (Headey, Kanbur & Zhang, 2008: 2). With the increase in international trade and the global economy, China has become an important economic role player internationally. This requires Chinese people to become global citizens, and communicate and interact with ease in the so called global village.

According to Yang (as cited in Yu, 2013: 14), Chinese parents thus think that an overseas education will have several advantages for their children such as learning other languages and cultures, getting a better education, learning from Western countries' different sets of values, and so on. They regard studying overseas as a long-term investment as it will build better skills for future competition in the job market. The same phenomenon is occurring in South Korea. According to Park (2009: 50), many children are sent to so-called cram schools (private institutions that offer intensive tutorial lessons) to study English and many South Korean parents send their children to study overseas for the purpose of getting a globally competitive level of education. The prospective international students, however, are not always well prepared in terms of their academics and social life in a foreign country (Lyken-Segosebe, 2017: 66). According to Lin and Scherz (2014: 22), language barriers have a great impact on Asian students' academics; for example, some students find it hard to keep up with the speed of spoken English, as well as different accents and vernacular and local use. They also find it difficult to participate in classroom discussions. Most of them struggle to express themselves and their point of view because of language barriers.

Although English has been introduced as a compulsory subject in all Chinese schools from primary school level, progress is quite slow. In the Chinese education system, the focus is predominantly on students' marks, and emphasis is placed on tests and examinations. This negatively impacts the full acquisition of a new language, as there are few opportunities for speaking or listening to English in the environment in which they study. Therefore, most

learners cannot speak English properly and cannot really understand English. We call this phenomenon “mute” English or “dumb” English (Zhang, 2009: 32). The same phenomenon also is observed among other East Asian students. Japanese students, for instance, also spend much time studying English as an important subject in their curriculum: However, most of them are unable to communicate with other English-speaking people. Furthermore, they lack English academic writing ability and listening skills (Otomo, 2018: 8-10). Therefore, it is evident that although East Asian students study English at school, many often struggle with the more communicative aspects of the language. This has implication for students studying abroad.

In the study, I work from the premise that if East Asian students are to be successful internationally, they will need assistance and support from the host institutions where they choose to study. In order to shed light on the situation, I briefly discuss the matter of English as a medium of instruction by providing some information about the situation in South Africa and East Asia. Although, as is explored in Chapter 2, many issues may be barriers to learning, like culture shock, teaching methods, finances and accommodation, language often is regarded the biggest challenge of all in the context of studying at a higher education institution.

## 1.2 THE LANGUAGE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND EAST ASIA

The context for this study is South Africa, and specifically the University of the Free State. It is important to note that the education contexts of South Africa and East Asia differ significantly, particular with regard to language.

### *1.2.1 THE LANGUAGE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA*

During the period of apartheid (1948–1994), South Africa had an unequal educational policy. Compared to other ethnic groups, white students had more educational resources (Rakometsi, 2008: 2). However, the post-apartheid government established the new school curriculum for all students, aimed at improving the quality of education, especially for black students (Stumpf & Niebuhr, 2012: 4). All students now have equal study opportunities in South Africa.

Post-1994 South Africans often were referred to as the Rainbow Nation because of their rich cultural diversity. Part of this diversity is the many languages spoken in South Africa. Due to

policies of the past, most students receive their education in English, which is their second or third language. According to Taylor and Fintel (2016:2):

*South Africa is a prime example of a country facing the dilemma of how to most effectively equip the majority of its population with a second language, in this case English. Although there are 11 official languages in South Africa, Afrikaans and English are the only languages with a developed academic literature and in which it is possible to write leaving examinations.*

Afrikaans is still a prominent language at many secondary schools. However, when most Afrikaans students go to a tertiary institution, they have to speak, write and read English fluently. In a discussion with my black classmate, he told me that in contrast to many white Afrikaans students who receive schooling in their mother tongue, many black students were schooled in an English environment, so they are exposed to English from a very early age. However, in a discussion with an Afrikaans primary school teacher, she explained to me that in most Afrikaans schools, they are also exposed to English from a very early age. Afrikaans learners often start learning English from as early as Grade 1.

From the above discussion, they seem to have acquired both the BICS (Basic interpersonal skills) and the CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). There are two types of language proficiencies that we can define as BICS and CALP. According to Cummins's (2008:2) definition "BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language, while CALP refers to students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school".

Therefore, I can conclude that it seems that although English is a second language to most South African students, they seem to be fluent in speaking, writing, listening and reading by the time they get to tertiary institutions.

### ***1.2.2 ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA AND OTHER EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES***

My learning experience with regard to English education is very different, based on growing up in a Chinese context. Although most Chinese students have to study English from primary school until they leave school, their real progress is quite slow. Most of them cannot speak English fluently. For this reason, many Chinese parents send their children to the 'best' schools,

because there their children could get the most advanced education, especially in learning English. But how does the educational context in China and other East Asian countries influence student's English ability?

### 1.2.2.1 PRIMARY ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA AND OTHER EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES' SCHOOLS

From primary school, English is taught as a compulsory subject in all Chinese schools. According to the Chinese National Curriculum, English, as one of the three main subjects, starts in Primary Three (which is Grade Three in South African terms), in most primary schools; however, local education departments follow a flexible curriculum according to which they decide when to start with English lessons. Generally speaking, in schools situated in the big cities of China, such as Shanghai and Beijing, children start learning English earlier than in rural schools. The rural students do not always have the benefit of educational resources such as high quality textbooks and study material, and the best qualified or most experienced teachers. This might be the reason for their English level being much lower than that of urban students. Some of the students from rural schools only start to learn English at the end of primary school (Qi, 2016:1).

Similarly, in Japan, all students from the fifth to sixth grade study foreign languages. Therefore, English is introduced as a compulsory subject in the elementary school curriculum. Although the government emphasises the importance of communication ability, this is rarely implemented in the classroom. The quality of English language education in schools has been criticized as the main reason for the lack of success in developing students' communication ability in English (Hosoki, 2011: 207).

In South Korea, the Ministry of Education stipulates that lower grade learners must have English classes two times a week and higher grades must have English classes three times a week. Most South Korean students, actually, are interested in studying English; however, some students' English ability is much better than that of their classmates. The inference is made that the students who have a better command of English might have been exposed to English somewhere else, for example in a private academy.

According to Kim (2011: 1-2), some students, therefore, struggle with English, while others find it easy. Thus, the learners teachers have to deal with in the same classroom have mastered English at different levels.

It thus may be concluded that East Asian countries place a high premium on learning English from an early stage, however, there are certain challenges that might hinder students from achieving English communication abilities.

Therefore, I can conclude that compared to South African students, East Asian students may have CALP, but not necessarily BICS. That means that most East Asian students seem to be good at writing and reading but lack speaking and listening abilities.

#### 1.2.2.2 SECONDARY ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA AND OTHER EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

In China, all students between the ages of 12 to 17 have to attend secondary school. All students have to study English from Grade 7 to 12. All students strive for high marks, because their grades will determine whether they will gain access to top universities (similar to IVY league universities in United States of America), middle-rank universities, or institutions such as vocational colleges.

Students with higher grades will attend top universities, and finally, when they graduate from these universities, have the probability of finding an excellent job. The admission exams are very difficult and only small numbers of students pass them. The exams assess students' skills and knowledge in Chinese, mathematics, a foreign language (usually English), and a few other optional subjects. Thus, due to the nature of the exam, students are encouraged to improve their marks in English writing, reading and listening skills, but not their oral skills. Consequently, the Chinese students may not have any motivation to study English as a communicative language. They only study written English from question papers and textbooks (Li, 2010:445).

In South Korea, English is one of the most important subjects for the National Matriculation Examination. Thus, students try their best to get higher Grade Point Average (GPA) in order to be accepted by South Korean universities.

The bureau of Education thus focuses on training students how to get good GPA marks and to tick the right answers on the English multiple-choice assessment than on developing the students' communicative ability. Therefore, many South Korean students struggle to communicate with English-speaking people (Jambor, 2011:6-7).

In Japanese secondary schools, the environment is not conducive to developing students' communicative ability. First, most of them never have an opportunity to communicate with English-speakers outside the school. Second, they are used to teacher-centred instruction in the school, thus they do not have opportunities or a need to develop their communicative skills. Third, because the students are preparing for university entrance exams, they only focus on improving their marks (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008:134-135).

It thus is clear that in most East Asian secondary schools the focus in mastering English is on achieving good marks in standardised tests that focus on reading, writing and listening skills instead of focusing on communicative skills.

### 1.2.2.3 TERTIARY ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA AND OTHER EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

In Chinese universities every student has to pass the CET4 (College English Test) to get the diploma or degree to find a good job. If one fails the CET4, one cannot obtain a degree or certificate in China, thus most university students study English only for purposes of passing the CET4 exam to obtain their degrees (Liu, 2016:93). All university students have to put in a huge effort to prepare for the CET4 – what is called their 'certificate motivation'. According to Zhao (2012:1100) the result is many "high marks but low ability" students, as they only are good at using mute English.

Because of a decrease in the birth rate in Japan (Shimada, 2009: 1), it has become easier for students to enter university than it was before. However, many university lecturers complain that their students are struggling with English because of poor vocabulary. Moreover, they cannot read English materials, write proper English essays and converse with native English speaking teachers. Furthermore, some students enter university without writing the entrance exam. They are recommended due to special skills such as musical or sports abilities. Therefore, they do not have any passion to study English at university even though most universities require English as a compulsory subject (Ikegashira, Matsumoto & Morita, 2009:4).

Thus, at tertiary level East Asian students seldom get the chance or have the motivation to improve their communicative English abilities.

### **1.3 RATIONALE**

My interest in doing this study on the challenges faced by East Asian students at a South African university is due to my being from China and studying in South Africa. In the seven years I have studied in South Africa I experienced some learning barriers. When I studied hospitality management at the Central University of Technology, I had difficulty understanding what lecturers said. It also took me a long time to read the study material and to answer questions in tests and examinations. My Chinese friends had similar issues and therefore I became interested in doing research on the challenges and support for East Asian students in South African higher education.

I believe that if South African universities accept students from East Asia, they have a responsibility to support these students towards success. Although the students themselves need to take charge of their own learning, and work hard, they do need support to overcome cultural, linguistic and other barriers.

In attempts to acquire academic support from the University of the Free State, I was on numerous occasions referred back to my lecturer. After consulting my lecturer, I was referred to the Centre for University Access & Disability Support (CUADS) during the final honours examinations. This specific unit strives to help students who need learning support to obtain crucial resources to enhance learning. CUADS also helped me to obtain permission for additional time to write the honours examinations, due to the language barriers. This experience brought to my attention the support structures to assist students like me, although I had not been aware of these structures from the start of my studies at the University of the Free State (UFS).

I only had my own experiences to go by, as it is very hard to find literature on existing support for East Asian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in South Africa. I thus identified a gap in the existing literature as very little research has been done on support for East Asian university students in the Southern African context.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the rationale and in view of the increasing presence of East Asian students at foreign universities, I posed the following main research question for this study: **How can East Asian students enrolled in an English-medium university be supported?**

In order to answer this question, I scaffolded my study to find answers to the following secondary research questions:

1. What practices exist globally to support international foreign language students to overcome their challenges?
2. What are the challenges of East Asian speaking students at the University of the Free State?
3. What student support exists for English foreign language (EFL) students at the University of the Free State?
4. What suggestions can be made based on the answers to the above questions to improve the support for East Asian and other EFL students at English-medium universities?

## 1.5 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research was to study and critique how East Asian students are supported when enrolled in an English-medium university in order to improve their learning experiences.

Linked with the secondary research questions, the following objectives will be pursued:

1. To review literature on practices that exist globally to support international foreign language students to overcome their challenges.
2. To understand the challenges of some East Asian students at the University of the Free State.
3. To explore existing support structures at the University of the Free State that might be used by English foreign language (EFL) students.
4. To make suggestions on how English-medium universities can provide sufficient support for EFL students.

## 1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the plan or blueprint according to which a study is conducted. This design includes a suitable method for the collection of information to find answers to the research questions. I used a qualitative approach according to which I made use of interviews to gather data.

### 1.6.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Kuhn (as cited by Huitt, 2011:1):

*Paradigms as accepted examples of actual scientific practice, examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together, [that] provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research .... [scholars] whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice.*

One of the paradigms that focus on practice, including practices in higher education, is pragmatism, in which my research was positioned. According to Morgan (2007: 72), researchers working within the pragmatic paradigm consider the ethical aim of research to find the solution that one intends to find. Thus, my research focused on the challenges that East Asian students experienced at the UFS, and possible practices that might improve their experiences. As such, I aimed at making a contribution to solving the problems that East Asian students have when they study at a foreign university.

Pragmatism is based on the conviction that there are many ways of knowing, and emphasises practical thinking and problem solving (Mertens, 2010:36). I identified with this statement and believed that while there were many ways of knowing about the challenges that East Asian students experienced, from a practical point of view, tapping into their experiential knowledge would render the insight necessary to complete the study. I also collected data from staff members of the different units that provided student support at the UFS.

Thus, pragmatism is an appropriate paradigm to use in the study because this approach did not only create the opportunity to gather information from the participants, but also focused on their challenges of and how to support East Asian students studying at a South African university.

## 1.6.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Based on my secondary research questions, and linked to my objectives, I selected particular methods that I deemed most fit to provide me with the information that I needed. I used a comprehensive literature review after which I conducted semi-structured interviews with East Asian students and university staff. I will explain these in more detail later, but the methods can be summarised as follows (Table 1.1):

*Table 1-1: Summary of research instruments*

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Chapter</b>
To review practices worldwide to support foreign language international students	Literature study	2
To understand the challenges of Chinese speaking students at the university of the Free State	Semi-structured interview	4
To describe structures of support that exists at the University of the Free State that can be used by foreign students	Semi-structured interview	5
To comment on the challenges of non-English speaking students studying at English universities and how these can be overcome	Interpretation and synthesis of the above	6

Each of the methods of data collection will be discussed in more detail below.

### 1.6.2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is the exploration of academic articles, books, and journals in order to describe, summarise, and assess existing scholarly work. In research, it is important to use different avenues to find relevant resources. Thus, I used numerous academic data bases to identify primary sources relating to my study such as EBSCO host (including ERIC), Google Scholar, and so on. Like any good researcher, I explored academic articles, books and journals on the topic of international students studying in a foreign language. This provided me with some essential viewpoints linked to my questions (cf. Shunda, 2007: 3-4). Eckstein (2018:3) explains that a thorough literature review will help people understand how the researcher sees his field of study. At the same time, when the researcher reports on the literature review, the academic content should not only be explained in a reporting approach, but the researcher

should evaluate and interpret the information for the purpose of advancing the readers' state of knowledge.

Therefore, I can conclude that the purpose of a literature review was to demonstrate to the reader that I read widely to understand the topic fully, but also to provide myself and the reader with information about the topic. Thus, the review should not simply be a copy of what others published but should take the form of a critical discussion. As such I had to provide the links between sources and make sense of what the sources provide. In Chapter 2 I present my full literature review.

### 1.6.2.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In the study I used semi-structured interviews to collect my data. According to Ayres (2012: 2):

*The semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. The researcher has more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews, but in contrast to structured interviews or questionnaires that use closed questions, there is no fixed range of responses to each question.*

Therefore, I had carefully to formulate the questions I needed to ask carefully, and at the same time remember that other issues, not listed in the set of questions, might also come to the fore. This links with what Ayres (2012: 2) wrote in addition to the above quote:

*Researchers who use semi-structured interviewing develop a written interview guide in advance. The interview guide may be very specific, with carefully worded questions, or it may be a list of topics to be covered. The interviewer may follow the guide to the letter, asking the questions in the order they are given, or the researcher may move back and forth through the topic list based on the informant's responses.*

From the above it is clear that the advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that one can prepare questions beforehand, and given my own limitations in English, my supervisors could scrutinise the questions to make sure they were appropriate, but also grammatically correct. Still, I had to listen carefully to the responses of the participants, and when necessary, changed the order of the questions to let the conversation flow. I realised that by asking open

questions directly to the participants, rich data could be generated regarding the secondary research questions, and by doing that, I would contribute to answering my main research question.

The interviews were designed with the selected participants in mind, but also taking into account the existing body of knowledge, as will be described in the report on the literature review. As a researcher, I made sure that all the questions and statements were in line with the conceptual focus of the study.

### 1.6.2.3 SAMPLE SELECTION

Merriam (2009:76-77) explains that the researcher needs to make a decision regarding who to include in the study as participants. She advises that purposeful selection makes the most sense when doing qualitative research, as the aim is to understand the situation of particular people. My sample was thus purposefully selected in order to get participants who could assist me to understand the barriers that East Asian students experience, when studying at a foreign university as a population, as well as support provided to them. The purpose of purposeful sampling is to choose useful data sources which could provide good viewpoints to the research questions (Emmel, 2014:2) and thus I selected participants with the most relevant experience and knowledge to help me explore and answer my research questions.

In terms of selecting a sample, I decided to ask East Asian students to participate, as well as institutional support organisations like The Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (CUADS), The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Post-Graduate Research Unit at the SASOL library, the Postgraduate School and the International Affairs Office at the UFS. I was convinced that the East Asian students studying at the UFS, although few in numbers, were best suited to help me understand the barriers that they experienced, and the support staff from the different units were best able to provide me with an understanding of the support that was available to students.

### 1.6.2.4 DATA COLLECTION, INTERPRETATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Brophy, Snooks and Griffiths (2011:4-5) warn that semi-structured interviews consume a large amount of time, and during the interview, it may be very difficult to make notes that adequately record all that people say in the interview, and to be able to listen to every word at the same time. I realised that I would have to be prepared for this, as I might find it difficult

to follow the English conversation, in particular, with the UFS staff members. I learnt from literature that it is most important to record and then transcribe the interviews, so that I could manage a set of 'transcripts' as database.

The next step was to code the result into themes and then categories. According to Sutton and Austin (2015: 228):

*Coding refers to the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences that are revealed through the participants' narratives and interpreted by the researcher. This process enables the researcher to begin to understand the world from each participant's perspective. Coding can be done by hand on a hard copy of the transcript, by making notes in the margin or by highlighting and naming sections of text.*

I read each interview carefully, distinguishing topics and issues and labelling them so that I could easily find them again and put together all the similar bits of interviews into themes. My planning was to do the coding with different coloured highlighters on the hard copies, and then also to do it on a computer. I relied on my literature review to inform the themes as well.

The last step was to link information obtained from my literature review in support of my findings (Sutton & Austin,2015:228), or to point out opposing views. Thus, in the final chapter of this report I will juxtapose what I found with what I learnt from the literature.

## 1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Mertens (2010:12-14), the following ethical principles should be followed:

1. Beneficence: Maximizing good results for the participants and avoiding harm.
2. Respect: Treating participants with respect, including their privacy, lifestyle and so on.
3. The researcher should have the ability to conduct the research.
4. Voluntary, informed: Participants agreed to join in the interview based on information (informed) and without threat (voluntary).
5. Justice: I made sure that all participants would benefit from the study and not be exploited, I never was unreasonable during the procedures.
6. Sample selection: Purposeful selection - I chose sufficient and appropriate participants for my interview.

I adhered to the guidelines set out above, and I applied for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of the Free State to conduct this study. I focused on my role as researcher, and also on informed consent, confidentiality and protection from harm. I discuss these in chapter 3.

## **1.8 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY**

This study is embedded in the field of Higher Education Studies. Bitzer and Wilkinson (2012:383) refer to the Tight's classification of research in this field and explain that "student experience" is one of the fields. Because I specifically focused on the experience of East Asian students, and how higher education institutions can improve their experience, this study links with this theme, and clearly fits within this field.

Although students from many parts of the world might experience a variety of problems, including those relating to being a student from a foreign country, the focus of this study is specifically on East Asian students studying at a university that uses English as its main medium of instruction. Furthermore, this is a limited study as I only focused on the case of one university, and I do not claim that this study will provide universal truths. Rather, I believe that this study will contribute in a small, but relevant way to our understanding of the challenges that students experience in higher education, and particularly the challenge that East Asian students experience at a South African university.

## **1.9 OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT**

My dissertation is structured as follows:

In Chapter 1 I introduce the East Asian economic background and explain the reasons why East Asian parents send their children to study overseas. Then I elucidate the Chinese and other East Asian countries' education system to relate how East Asian students study English from primary school to tertiary education. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations of my study.

Chapter 2 is devoted to a literature review of practices worldwide to support East Asian students. I discuss the academic, social and other practices, challenges, support to assist them overcoming language barriers, class room behaviour of East Asian students, social rules, culture shock, social support, financial support, transportation support, accommodation support, and so forth.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the research problem and purpose, research paradigm, interviews as a qualitative data collection method, and the integrity of the research. I also state why I used the pragmatic research paradigm or approach in my study and why I used semi-structured interviews to collect data for the study. I also elucidate the trustworthiness of my research and the ethical considerations related to my study.

In Chapter 4 I discuss six interviews with East Asian participants aimed at collecting data to help me understand the challenges of East Asian students studying at the UFS. The information gained from the interviewees helped me to investigate the perceptions of East Asian students regarding their challenges at the UFS.

In Chapter 5, I explore the one-on-one interviews with staff members from some of the units providing support at the UFS. The aim of the interviews was to help me to understand the different services that they provide to assist students. In this chapter I also share information that I gained from the UFS web pages on the various support units at the UFS.

Chapter 6 is devoted to a discussion of the literature and data gathered about the challenges of East Asian students studying at English universities and how these challenges can be overcome. An overview of the study is given, and the findings about support for East Asian students are discussed. In terms of reflection, I discuss recommendations based on the findings, the contribution of the study, limitation of the study, and suggestions for further research.

## 1.10 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the study. I introduced the research topic and gave a background about English language education in some East Asian countries. I explained why East Asian parents sent their children to study abroad and explored why language barriers were considered the biggest issue for most East Asian students studying abroad. I explained and justified my methodology and provided a road map for my study.

In order to develop viable and reliable interviews, a thorough review of the literature was required. Therefore, in the next chapter, a review of the literature on practices to support foreign language East Asian students worldwide will be discussed.

# CHAPTER 2: PRACTICES THAT EXIST GLOBALLY TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS TO OVERCOME THEIR CHALLENGES

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 I put forward some of the reasons why many East Asian students opt to study in other countries. These include viewing it as important to learn from other cultures and to learn foreign languages. I also explained a few of the challenges that East Asian students experience, from my own perspective, and I stated my research question, namely: *How can East Asian students enrolled in an English-medium university be supported?*

In this chapter, I discuss literature I reviewed to investigate the existing research on the following: *What practices exist world-wide to support international foreign language students to overcome their challenges?*

For most international students, studying abroad is an important decision that can shape their future and may hold many benefits to them (Tamas, 2014:68). Hopefully their English conversation skills will improve, they will learn to adapt to another culture, and they will become more independent. Most higher education students find bridging the gap between school and higher education (university) difficult; however, compared to the local students, the international students may face additional barriers such as language barriers, culture shock, legal barriers, and so forth. Thus, they require more support as they have to adjust to another country (De Araujo, 2011:2).

In the following section, I first explore some of these barriers including social, financial, academic, and legal barriers. In order to respond to the research question, I will investigate existing support mechanisms and structures for EFL students internationally and in the South African context. To make clear sense of the literature, I sometimes juxtaposed what I found in the literature with my reflections on my own experiences.

## 2.2 ACADEMIC PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS

Many East Asian students go to other countries with high expectations to achieve academic goals. However, in the new context, they do not only have to master English (or other languages) as their second language, but they also must adapt to the different education systems and academic standards (Han, 2007:8-9). In the next section I discuss various academic practices, and then elucidate available support mechanisms and structures.

### *2.2.1 WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ACADEMIC PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WORLDWIDE?*

Across the globe, international students experience different academic practices and challenges in their host countries. This is because countries differ in terms of education systems, classroom behaviour, teaching methods, assessment practices, and more. Therefore, these factors will most probably influence international students' studying behaviour while adapting to new social environments. In this section, I explore some of these practices and challenges.

#### 2.2.1.1 CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR OF EAST ASIAN STUDENTS

Tani (2005: 1) found that in Australia, teachers could not understand Asian students' minimal involvement in class activities. It was shown that Asian students rarely would answer the teachers' questions and would not partake voluntarily in classroom discussions unless they were called upon in the classroom (Joo & Nori, 2007:6).

According to the East Asian culture, which most often follows Confucian values, students should pay respect to their teachers and elders. They usually listen quietly when their teachers talk to them in the class (Lee, 2011:76-77). For this reason, some lecturers from other parts of the world experience East Asian students as not willing to ask questions and to participate in group discussions when compared to their classmates. According to this aspect of the East Asian culture, asking many questions and talking often may be regarded as challenging and disrespectful towards the lecturer.

Additionally, most East Asian students cannot communicate fluently in English. They feel embarrassed to express their ideas and afraid to 'lose face' in front of the classmates if they expose this weakness (Joo & Nori, 2007:6). According to Ho (as cited in Dong & Lee: 2007:

402), the Chinese concept of losing face can be described as: “the respectability and/or deference that a person can claim for him/herself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in the social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in the position as well as acceptably in his social conduct”. So, if a student is directly questioning a lecturer’s opinion or pointing out lecturers’ mistakes, that will cause the lecturer to ‘lose face’.

Furthermore, if an East Asian student asks too many questions in the class, he or she may be teased by other students and may regard him-/herself as ‘losing face’, because it means that only he/she cannot understand the lecturer’s instructions. If the lecturer does not know how to answer a student’s question, it would create an awkward situation in front of the students, causing the lecturer to ‘lose face’. This is one of the reasons why East Asian students usually do not often ask questions in the class (Lee, 2011: 76).

Confucianism impacts greatly on shaping the values and public behaviour of East Asian students. Confucianism is a complex and nuanced philosophy that cannot be explained by a simple definition. Chu (2016:1) explains that Confucianism’s main philosophy is centred around five fundamental human relationships: father and son; husband and wife; younger brother and older brother; ruler (the state) and subject; and friend and friend. In a Confucian philosophy the proper maintenance of these relationships is important and this is guided by hierarchy, authority, and responsibility. Within this understanding it is thus expected of people to fulfil their duties and obligations in order to maintain a certain moral code. “The supreme expression of this fulfilment is the manifestation of humaneness (*ren*), revealed through sympathy and empathy, observance of rites and commonly accepted social conduct” Chu (2016:1). In order to understand the way that education systems function in Asia it is important to understand Confucianism.

The values of Confucianism emphasize the importance of harmony over argument, and of communal rather than individual expressiveness, which may cause students asking questions in private rather than in the classes (Tani, 2005:4-5). Due to such conduct, some lecturers might perceive East Asian students to be too quiet and shy in the classes (Medved, Franco, Gao & Yang, 2013:9). Not only does East Asian philosophy influence the students’ behaviour, but traditional culture also plays an important role in affecting their behaviour. Therefore,

most East Asian students have difficulty to adapt to the different classroom behaviours and expectations in their host country.

### 2.2.1.2 TEACHING METHODS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

According to Levinsohn (2009:12) who writes on teaching methods in New Zealand, it seems that Asian students (especially Chinese students) have a tendency to learn new knowledge by rote. In a Chinese class, teachers use textbooks to teach their students and the students just follow their textbooks to study and memorize facts (Lu, Chin, Yao, Xu & Xiao, 2010: 119). Therefore, imitation or teaching for rote learning is regarded as an important teaching method and accepted by the Chinese education system (Edwards & Ran, 2006: vii). In East Asia this method has been used and influenced by Confucianism for two thousand years (Littrell, 2005:1). Consequently, students are usually educated to be obedient and quiet in the class. They just write down everything that lecturers say in the class and accept that, as they will not express their ideas or opinions unless asked to do so by their teachers.

Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006: 422) found that when Taiwanese and Chinese international students arrive in a different context (like America); they want to stick to their old ways of learning. However, American professors use different ways to teach students, thus these East Asian students find it troublesome to adapt. Consequently, it is not easy for many East Asian students to adapt to a new environment in a short time. Some students find it difficult to keep up with the good performance they previously had. For many students, this could lead to stress and even make them susceptible to mental health problems (Bai, 2016:96).

On the whole, it is evident that East Asian students need to adapt to the host country in order to achieve academic success. This means they have to adapt to new learning styles, time management, and new study skills, and furthermore, they have to participate more in university activities.

### 2.2.1.3 LANGUAGE BARRIERS

As already discussed in Chapter 1, there are a vast number of East Asian students who face the issues of language barriers. Compared to other issues that East Asian students have to face, language barriers perhaps are one of the main challenges in adapting both one's academic and social life.

Language plays an important role in the academic life of international students. Language is very important for them because it is a medium of communication and of doing their academic reading. However, Asian students report that they struggle to understand what lecturers and classmates are talking about in American classrooms (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015: 5). Obviously, language barriers will influence the academic success of East Asian students. As they do not wish to 'lose face', some students might pretend to understand what lecturers and classmates are talking about because they feel embarrassed by the fact that they are unable to communicate effectively (Terui, 2012: 168).

In South Africa, similar language barriers may hamper East Asian students' academic progress. For instance, one of my Chinese classmates admitted that he had difficulty in understanding lectures and discussions with other classmates. According to him the lecturers and fellow students speak very fast and some of them with a strong South African accent. Even when he might have some ideas and opinions to express and share, he could not state his views or perspectives in the class. It was very difficult for him to express his viewpoints in-depth, due to a lack of self-confidence and also as a result of an inadequate English academic vocabulary.

Similarly, when Asian students study in Australia, they complain that they have to spend more than double the amount of time the local students spend on reading their textbooks. Some of them are frustrated with academic reading and writing since they lack adequate applicable English abilities. Consequently, this shortcoming influences their academic credits (Lu, Le, & Fan, 2012:3). This is in line with my personal experience. When I studied at the Faculty of Education at the University of the Free State, I struggled to understand the study material and to answer questions in tests and examinations. At that time, I always used my electronic dictionary to translate English into Chinese. It also took me a long time to finish my reading material and write my assignments.

According to Liu, Liu, Lee and Magjuka (2010:185), Asian students can be supported by allowing them a preview of the course schedule and studying materials before the start of lessons, so that they can prepare for the course. Getting the study material in advance not only helps these students to understand the course content, but also allows them to review the content repeatedly in order to overcome the language barriers.

In the next section, I will discuss more support structures that are in place to assist EFL students globally.

## *2.2.2 CURRENT SUPPORT THAT EXISTS FOR INTERNATIONAL EFL STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITIES GLOBALLY*

Studying abroad is a good opportunity for international EFL students to be exposed to different systems of education. They will have the chance to compare the education systems of their home country and that of the host country. However, as explained in the previous section, international students and specifically East Asian students will experience more challenges with their academics because of different educational and cultural backgrounds.

This is the reason that international students need additional academic support.

### *2.2.2.1 ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

When universities open their doors for international EFL students, they need to put certain support structures in place. Institutions cannot wait for international students to get used to the host country's academic life without suitable support and planning (Andrade, 2006: 133). Therefore, they should provide academic and cultural support to make sure that international EFL students can adapt and be academically successful.

In Canada, Zhang and Zhou (2010: 52) found that some international students are not well prepared to write academic papers in humanities or social science programmes. Therefore, most Canadian universities help international students by providing them with writing skills services, which can assist them to check over academic assignments. These services provide them with comments in terms of grammar mistakes, sentence structure and general editing. They also provide new international students "with academic advice and some universities also provide academic advisors to follow the progress of international students" (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs, 2012: 13).

It is important to emphasise that it is extremely difficult to find literature regarding this topic in the South African context. I strived to obtain such information on the websites of numerous South African tertiary institutions, such as the University of Cape Town, the University of the Free State and the University of Pretoria. However, there is very little information about academic support for EFL students at South African universities.

## 2.3 SOCIAL PRACTICE, CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS

### *2.3.1 CULTURAL CHALLENGES THAT EFL STUDENTS FACE*

Leaving home and going to study in another country can be a good experience. But, when international students enter another culture, they are taken out of their comfort zone. He or she is like a fish out of water (Oberg, 1960: 1). They need to adapt to the new community they live in and to the new school they attend (Stevenson, 2010:2). Most international students find it extremely difficult to fit into the other country's social dynamics and this may limit students' participation in classrooms and in other student activities (Khatiwada, 2012:4). This might lead to a culture shock for international students and especially for some East Asian students, because of their specific language barriers and cultural background as discussed below.

#### 2.3.1.1 CULTURE SHOCK FOR AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

According to Oberg (2006: 1), the definition of culture shock is as follows: "Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse." Culture shock therefore might be described as the crisis that international students may experience when they move from a familiar culture to an unfamiliar culture.

Culture shock sometimes is aggravated by experiences of racial discrimination, as will be explained below.

Different cultures share basic ideas, but view the world from different standpoints and perspectives. Sometimes local students behave in a way which international students may consider ridiculous or offensive (Pooley, 2005: xvi). Some East Asian students might be offended by local students' jokes or questions. For instance, in South Africa I was sometimes asked questions like: "Can you open your eyes please?" or "Do you like to eat dogs or cats?" This could come across as very rude. Coming from an East Asian background, I therefore experienced these questions as extremely offensive. The values of the Confucian and Buddhist are truth, honesty, kindness and courtesy. Those who live by these values automatically respect other races' cultures and try to avoid being rude, ironic, and causing travesty for them (Pooley, 2005: 13). People asking such questions are regarded as ill-mannered and impolite by East Asian students. Bochner (2003: 6) found that culture shock may ensue from unpleasant

encounters with persons having different value systems and, therefore, international students may quickly descend into bitterness and resentment because of this.

As described above, culture shock sometimes is linked to racial discrimination. Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell and Utsey (2005: 62) in the article “Examining the Cultural Adjustment Experiences of African International College Students: A Qualitative Analysis” report their interview with a Nigerian female participant about her experiences of an American university. When she first moved into her dorm, her roommates from Taiwan and Japan asked to be moved to another room because they did not want an African lady to be their roommate. She also heard some rumours from European international students being afraid of Africans. They had strong stereotypes about African students. Therefore, many international students might feel ‘othered’ in the new environment.

Brown and Jones (2013:9) in their article, “Encounters with racism and the international student experience,” discuss their interviews with a Korean student and he/she mentioned some bad experiences like in Plymouth when some young British people threw apples at them and called them “dirty Chinese” and shouted, “Yellow monkey, go back to your country!” These assaults which included verbal comments and physical attacks were very hurtful to these students studying in Britain.

Similarly, Amiya Nonomiya (2016:11), a PhD student at the University of Sheffield, ran a campaign called “Say no to 'ni-hao' racism and stereotypes East and South-East Asian students face”, and released an online report in 2016. Some of her experiences included descriptions of how local students would come up to East Asian students and mock their accent while saying “ni haooo” and “konnichiwaaa”. Some of these students called East Asian students “chink” or “chinky bastard”. This phenomenon negatively influenced East Asian students’ feelings and caused negative health results such as anxiety and depression.

In my own learning experience in South Africa, I have found that it is difficult for me to get involved in social activities. When I studied hospitality management at the Central University of Technology, I experienced that people treated me differently. Some people mocked my Chinese accent by saying things such as “Ching, Chong, Chang”. I felt like I was an idiot in these people’s minds. Some students would ask me to buy lunch or cool drinks for them, but I refused. Consequently, some of them spread a rumour that I was very stingy and I felt

depressed when I heard the rumour. I felt that I was being stereotyped as being wealthy, based on my East Asian appearance.

Racial discrimination in the extreme might even be viewed as xenophobia. In South Africa, xenophobia often manifests because of a perception of some South Africans that foreigners will take over their jobs. Therefore, they take revenge against foreigners. This often has led to violence. This is described as xenophobic violence (Hadland, 2008:13-14). African foreigners compose the majority of these victims (Harris, 2002: 4). In 2008, xenophobic violence exploded across South African townships. At the time, the local media focused on black African migrants (Park & Rugunanan, 2010: 4). However, there has been a case of Chinese foreigners also experiencing xenophobia in South Africa. In March 2014, some Somalis and Chinese were reported to have run away from the Moletlane Village in Limpopo Province, because residents put fire to their shops. Some residents harboured the belief that state authorities would not provide help for these foreigners; therefore, they intentionally attacked these innocent foreigners (Mothibi, Roelofse & Tshivhase, 2015: 153). Culture shock, racial discrimination and xenophobia could all contribute to the climate of racial tension that East Asian students might experience in the South African context.

### 2.3.1.2 SOCIAL RULES AND BEHAVIOUR

Over the past 20 years the world has been linked in different fields, such as economics, technology and health care. Despite this globalisation, many East Asian students still may find it difficult to become accustomed to other cultures, because of different cultural values and differences in social behaviour. Let us take a look at these differences.

In New Zealand a study conducted by Li, Baker and Marshall (2001:147) found that most Chinese students faced many difficulties in adapting to life and making friends in their host countries.

According to my experience in South Africa (SA), most people here are not aware of East Asian cultural values. When I first studied hospitality management at the Central University of Technology, I noticed that physical contact between people in public is usually more acceptable in SA than in China. On my first day of studying, some ladies asked me to give them hugs. I felt very awkward and refused their request. Nowak and Dong (1997:3) explain that one seldom would see people hugging or kissing in public areas in China, especially between

male and female. Similarly, in America the “physical contact” rate is more frequent than in Japan (Seki, Matsumoto & Imahori, 2002: 310). Different people have different cultural rules about physical interactions in public and this may cause confusion. Therefore, it is imperative for students who go to a foreign country for study purposes to learn and understand that country’s cultural rules and values.

I learned, for example, that in the South African context people express themselves more directly than in the Chinese context. When I worked in the Chinese government, we became accustomed to expressing our requests in indirect ways. For instance, if we were busy doing something, and we wanted to ask a person who was keeping us from our task to leave, we would just say: “Do you want to have a seat?” or we would constantly check the clock. The other person would understand what we meant and would say: “We can hang out later”, and then would leave. I use this as an example of how people are more used to using indirect ways of expression in China. In South Africa I find that people use direct ways to express themselves. For instance, if I had made an appointment with my lecturer, after one hour he or she wanted me to leave, then he or she would say directly, “Can we please make another appointment; I have a meeting with someone.” Clearly, there are different ways of expressing requests between the Chinese culture and South African culture.

From the example discussed above it is evident that studying in other countries can pose many challenges for East Asian students. It might entail unpredictable situations and sometimes a feeling helplessness. However, studying abroad is beneficial in terms of acquiring language skills, knowledge of different education systems, and cultures. Therefore, despite the challenges like adapting to different social rules and behaviours there are many benefits for East Asian students who choose to study abroad.

### *2.3.2 SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

Globalisation has made studying aboard both possible and necessary for many people (Yusoff & Othman, 2011: 1-2). For many of these students, there will be challenges to overcome as they adapt to the new environment.

Loss of their social background may bring about negative effects such as sadness, gloominess and feelings of isolation (Chuah & Singh, 2016: 132). Weiley, Sommers and Bryce (2008: 3)

maintain that they found that international students suffered a stage of social isolation and depression for the period of the first three to six months after arrival in Australia.

According to Berry (as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011: 3), most international students will experience a hard time at the beginning of the period, therefore it is very important for international students to get social support from universities during this initial period.

In order to conquer isolation and depression, Wang and Shan (2007: 9) posit that it is helpful to make local friends and take initiative to participate in social activities on campus. This will help them to get to know the new culture, and to learn English and other cultures' languages of communication.

However, according to Kauffmann *et al.* (as cited in Wang and Shan, 2007: 10), in Australia some campus activities were not appropriate for international students, for example, drinking too much alcohol at parties. Due to different cultural backgrounds, some international students might feel awkward with these informal social activities. They do not want to break relationships with the local students, but they might feel uncomfortable to participate in certain activities.

According to the Ontario Committee on Student Affairs (2012: 13) in Canada, Ontario universities provide international student resource centres as international student services. Meanwhile, universities also organize some activities over weekends or during holiday breaks for on-campus international students. These activities may enrich the social life of international students (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs, 2012: 28).

It is evident that worldwide universities do make an effort to offer social support to international students. For East Asian students, it is worthwhile to participate in these activities in order to learn about other cultures and get some support from the host country's organizations. With a little help from the universities, and willingness to adapt from their side, East Asian students might have positive experiences when they go studying abroad.

However, a search of literature on this matter did not turn up any evidence of or literature on positive experiences of East Asian students studying abroad.

## 2.4 OTHER PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT

Apart from issues relating to the academic practices and social practices discussed above, some other issues emerged from the literature.

### *2.4.1 FINANCIAL ISSUES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

In America it was found that for many international students the lack of financial support was the biggest barrier they faced (Bista & Foster, 2011:6). Compared to local students, international students have to pay more in tuition fees and have fewer opportunities to obtain bursaries at American universities. Even if they do get good marks and are more than qualified for bursaries, they still are not even offered an opportunity to apply for a bursary. The international students experience that as very stressful and they feel frustrated by not getting an equal chance (Khatiwada, 2012:15).

Studying at a South African university is much cheaper in terms of living cost and tuition fees than in other countries such as the USA, Australia or Britain. Therefore, my parents decided to send me to study in South Africa. However, it is my experience that at the University of the Free State, compared to local students, international students need to pay double tuition fees. I was informed that this is due to the subsidy structure of government. Thus, some of my Chinese classmates had to apply for financial support because their families could not afford their tuition fees and living cost. The real situation is that only a few of them had a chance to get funding in South Africa. Consequently, some of them had to leave South Africa because of financial stumbling blocks. Although South Africa is less expensive than other English-speaking countries like Australia, America or Britain, the country's economy is weak and financial stress is a common issue that also might cause stress for East Asian students studying in South Africa.

Literature suggests that some universities in the United States of America (USA) do provide financial support for international students. Portland State University (PSU), for example, welcomes international students to study in Oregon and provides partial tuition scholarships to brilliant students from many countries all over the world (Bista & Foster, 2011:8-9); however, it is not a common phenomenon. Khatiwada (2012: 14-15) found that some South Asian students in the USA complained that compared to local students, they got no or few chances to secure scholarships and financial aid. It placed a financial burden on their parents. Some of them tried to look for on-campus job opportunities to decrease the financial burden;

however, mostly they are not successful. It seems that except for a number of exceptional international students, international students do not seem to be afforded the opportunity to apply for bursaries.

#### *2.4.2 STUDENT ACCOMMODATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

Bista and Foster (2011: 1) point out that apart from academic challenges, the culture shock, and financial difficulties, the most important issue that international students are facing seems to be finding proper accommodation. Because of inadequate on-campus facilities, the process of finding housing near the campus also may be difficult for many international students (Roy, Lu & Loo, 2016: 23). Unlike local students, international students do not have family or friends close by to support them. Therefore, the moment they get to their new environment, they need to find accommodation. This is not always easy.

According to a needs assessment conducted in Sydney, Australia, for instance, international students found it difficult to find proper accommodation on their own. In order to save money, most international students reported that they tried to find cheaper accommodation near their universities. However, it was difficult to find cheaper accommodation near universities, as such accommodation is limited and the demand is high; therefore, these students had to move into the surrounding suburbs to find accommodation (Turcic, 2011: 11). And even then, those who could find accommodation in the suburbs were of the opinion that they most probably still were exploited. In the USA, an international student was asked to pay one month's rent and a security deposit in advance. After one or two weeks, the landlord asked her to vacate within 24 hours, but kept the month's rent and the security deposit. The student was told that if they had not moved out by the next day, their personal belongings would be thrown out (Moffett, 2006:9). It is obvious that some landlords exploit international students because they lack knowledge of their rights and the law of their host countries (Turcic, 2011: 11).

I had a similar experience in South Africa regarding my security deposit. Three years ago, I left my accommodation for another place. However, my landlord wanted to keep my deposit because she said I had not told her in advance that I would be leaving. In fact, I told her before I left. We hotly debated this for a while, and finally, I got my deposit back. Another issue in South Africa is finding accommodation that is safe and secure. The crime rate in South Africa is very high and students become victims to muggings and burglaries easily because they live

in unsafe environments and are targeted by criminals. According to news reports, criminals in Bloemfontein wait for students who are on their way home from class to steal cell-phones, laptops and money (*NEWS 24* 21 June, 2017:1). Therefore, another problem that East Asian students face is getting proper accommodation which is safe and affordable. Furthermore, the students are at risk of being exploited because of their lack of knowledge about the local laws.

In some cases, support is provided by host institutions. Many Canadian post-secondary institutions and departments provide books, brochures and other information sources to international students to make the process of finding their feet easier. In Canada it is reported that universities' international student offices offer information that includes specific details on housing and tenants' rights and responsibilities. The student information centres also provide a listing of students who are looking for flatmates (Calder, Richter, Mao, Kovacs Burns, Mogale & Danko, 2016:100).

In Ontario the Universities, Housing or Residence Programmes provide specific services and accommodation which complies with the needs of on-campus international students. These programmes also support students to build relationships with students from different cultures and backgrounds. (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs 2012: 28). The UFS also has a Housing and Residence Affairs Unit; however, it does not place international students in a specific programme to get a placement, thus international students must compete with local students for placements.

To summarise, thus, we can say that in certain countries and at specific universities provision is made for support for international students, although the extent and quality of such support differ.

### *2.4.3 TRANSPORTATION ISSUE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

Another challenge that international students might face concerns transport. In Malaysia, as an example, there are not enough reliable public transport systems. The existing system also does not meet the needs of all international students. Some international students, especially those living off-campus, complain that the buses to and from the University of Putra, Malaysia are always late (Talebloo & Baki, 2013: 140).

Mugoro (2014:4) maintains that the Tanzanian government pays very little attention to transportation for students, which in that country is a fundamental need.

Students in Australia also complained about the public transportation. Turcic (2011: 12), in a report on the needs of international students, declares that the high cost of public transport is a major contributor to their expenses, which make it difficult for them to stay and study in Sydney.

In Ontario international student organizations offer students' transportation for example to drive them to or pick them up from the airport (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs 2012: 28). The Sheridan College in Ontario provides a transport service called "Safe ride" that offers taxi pick-ups from the institution's city limits to the students' homes. This service is provided to the students from early evening until early in the morning. The institution also offers a shuttle bus service between its three campuses, which also is available to those students who have evening classes; therefore, the service also provides a late shuttle to commute back to their homes (Ghalayini, 2014:116).

At American universities, in order to provide a convenient service for students and staff members, bus stop maps are made available on buses, at the bus stations and on the internet. Most of these buses do not charge students and provide them with free transit passes. They are funded by student fees or partnerships with local public transportation systems (Luo & Tang, 2016:90).

Transportation is a very important issue for international and other students. Therefore, some universities provide transportation services in order to support students to get to and from the university campus more effortlessly; however, this does not happen in all countries.

In short, issues like finance, accommodation and transportation are additional barriers that East Asian students face when they study abroad.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

The above review shows that international students face many barriers when studying in other countries. The focus of this study is on the barriers that East Asian students face when they study in other countries. They are bound to experience different challenges and they do get

different forms of support from host countries in terms of academic, social, financial, transport, accommodation and other matters. In terms of academic challenges, it was shown that East Asian students experience different academic challenges in their host countries. These challenges include different classroom behaviour, different teaching methods, and language barriers.

Furthermore, it was shown that in the classroom Confucian values cause East Asian students to be non-responsive in the classroom and they rarely answer teachers' questions. Furthermore, they rely on their familiar method of studying, namely rote learning, but this often is not acceptable at international universities. Apart from the different classroom behaviours expected of students, and diverse teaching methods used by the lecturers, East Asian students also have language barriers to overcome in their host countries. Due to language barriers, these foreign students find it challenging to adapt to both academic and social life. Thus, in countries accepting international students, universities need to be prepared to provide academic support (as mentioned in 2.2.2.1) to help these students to adapt to the completely different version of academic life. Language proficiency is one of the most debilitating aspects of international students' academic progress, and support such as opportunities to have their academic assignments reviewed in terms of grammar mistakes, sentence structure, and so on, and providing assistance to improve their academic language usage will make a major difference to these students chances on success.

Social challenges are another big issue for East Asian students. They often have to endure culture shock, racial discrimination, and social isolation. Therefore, it is very difficult for East Asian students to live and study in other countries. In order to help these East Asian students, some universities organise a variety of activities to help them to adapt to their host countries. These activities may help them to get used to the new academic and social life.

Financial, transport and accommodation challenges are additional problems which international students have to cope with. Many international students lack financial support to study in other countries. Therefore, in the end, they need to leave the countries to which they have come to study. International students often find it difficult to find proper accommodation in their host countries and some of them are exploited by their landlords. At the same time, the cost of public transport is high in some countries and there might be other

challenges concerning commuting to campuses; for example, in SA the public transports system is expensive and difficult to use if one does not know the local signs or languages.

From the literature it seems that in some countries (for instance Canada), special effort is made to support international students in various ways. These include academic, social, financial, transportation, and accommodation support.

In terms of academic support, some universities provide international students with writing skills services to help them to correct and improve academic assignments. Most Canadian universities, for example, offer support to their students by means of comments in terms of grammar mistakes, sentence structure and other editing matters. In Canada (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs, 2012: 13), universities also make the necessary arrangements for the newly admitted international students to be supported "with academic advice and some universities also provide academic advisors to follow the progress of international students". It could help them to adjust to the new learning environment.

Concerning financial support, I found that in the USA universities provide partial tuition scholarships to attract brilliant students from many countries all over the world. A major problem for international students is finding suitable accommodation, Canadian postsecondary institutions and departments seem to lead the field in that they make available information books and pamphlets to international students to make the process easier.

Transport is also a stumbling block for students studying in other countries. In this regard too, Canadian universities take the lead by providing students with transport.

To summarise, concerning support for international students studying in foreign countries, it became clear that only basic levels of support are made available by the host universities. International students' feedback in various studies indicates that they have a dire need for more support in the financial and academic fields. They express a need for more assistance from local universities.

In this chapter, I explored different challenges and supports for international students, especially East Asian students. Through this study, I wanted to determine how East Asian students can be supported by South African universities, with specific attention to the UFS. In the next chapter, I explain the research design and methodology used for the study.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I discussed, based on literature, the challenges that foreign language international students face at universities and the support they are offered. Very little literature is available on this topic in the South African context, and thus I also drew from my own experiences to make sense of what I read in the literature. The deficit in literature on the topic, together with my own experiences, prompted me to undertake an empirical study to understand the phenomenon in the context of a single case, namely the University of the Free State. Subsequently, in this chapter, I explain and justify my choice regarding research methodology. I will discuss matters such as the purpose, research paradigm, research approach, research methods and integrity of the study.

## 3.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Chapters 1 and 2 I have already elaborated on the literature finding that many international students face different challenges such as language barriers, academic barriers, social issues, and so on. From my own experience at the University of the Free State (UFS) which offers its instruction in English, most East Asian students struggle at one point or another. When we sit together to socialise, we complain about how difficult it is to adapt to the new academic life or social life in South Africa. Some of us complained about problems with communication with our classmates or lecturers. Some of us complained that we were isolated by local students. Therefore, I can say that we are confronted with these issues that lead us to experience pressure in our new surroundings.

In this study I therefore wished to investigate and describe the challenges of East Asian students studying at a South African English-medium university with a view to improving the support provided by the higher education institution.

## 3.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The aim of this research was to study and critique the manner and extent to which East Asian students are supported when enrolled in an English-medium university in order to make recommendations to improve their learning experiences.

I think this is an important issue because most East Asian students would be experiencing different challenges in an English-medium university, such as language barriers, culture shock, and similar problems. Therefore, this research has as purpose the investigation of existing support mechanisms and structures, as well as the additional support required by East Asian students enrolled in an English-medium university in South Africa.

### 3.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Kuhn (as cited in Hudson, 1992: 836), a paradigm can be defined as basic suppositions and methodology. It provides the researcher with general guidelines and aims for conducting a study. Thus, as a researcher, I have chosen a suitable approach to be related to my study. I approached this study as a pragmatist. It was important to determine what questions have value, not only for myself, but for the practice. According to Biesenthal (2014:2),

*Pragmatism is better described as a philosophical method for doing rather than a philosophical theory per se. It is not simply a collection of viewpoints about a specific concept, such as truth, identity or reality. Pragmatism concerns how humans should conduct business, as managers, accountants or researchers, whenever engaging in any form of inquiry. In its narrow interpretation, pragmatism is a method of determining the meaning of concepts to show that there is no meaning without practical consequences. All concepts, therefore, are contextual by nature and have different meanings for different people in different situations. The meaningfulness of knowledge is determined by its ability to solve a practical problem.*

It thus is clear that pragmatists focus on problems from a practical point of view, looking at the consequences of the problem too, rather than merely using abstract theories to understand the problem. This was indeed the approach that I took, focusing on practices of universities to support students, and foreign language speakers in particular.

While pragmatism is often associated with mixed methods, in my study I followed a qualitative approach only. I drew from Jacobs (2012: 14) who explains it as follows:

*From a pragmatic point of view researchers argue that there is no such a thing as absolute truth, neither is there a specific way to access the 'truth'. Richer modes*

*of enquiry, which use the widest possible range of techniques, propagate a clearer understanding of complex social issues, and stress the importance of common sense.*

Therefore, there is no specific data collection method or research instrument to use within pragmatism. I considered that East Asian students, who often have specific language barriers, might be suspicious or feel uncomfortable to disclose information in a questionnaire. There also was a probability that they would not interpret written questions correctly. Therefore, I decided to rather conduct individual interviews to put them more at ease. Furthermore, due to the different foci of the different support units, a single questionnaire to staff members would not be suitable, as questionnaires must be appropriate for the context of the person who responds (Jacobs, 2012: 181). I thus took the practical and common-sense decision to use interviews as means of data generation.

### 3.5 INTERVIEWS AS A QUALITATIVE DATA GENERATION METHOD

Most qualitative researchers use interviews to generate data. According to Merriam (2009:13), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world”. I was interested in understanding the meaning that East Asian students constructed regarding studying at a South African University. According to Easwaramoorthy and Zarinpoush (2006:1), interviews are about making a conversation between interviewer and interviewee to gather information related to the research. There are many ways to do the interview, such as face to face interviews, telephonic interviews or text-based interviews (e-mail), but I chose face-to-face semi-structured interviews as data generation method.

Taking cognisance of views in research literature, I contemplated that face-to-face interviews would be the most suitable way to collect data from East-Asian students because I am an East Asian student and probably the students would respond to me with more trust. Four of the participants were of Chinese origin, thus we also shared a cultural background. As a cultural insider, I thoroughly understand the Chinese culture, and would make sure to be more respectful during a person-to-person interview with the Chinese participants than would be possible over the telephone.

Also, due to my limited fluency in spoken English, I argued that face-to-face interviews would be the best way to interview staff members of different units at the UFS. It would help me to ask them follow-up questions if I did not understand their initial responses.

### *3.5.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW*

According to Easwaramoorthy and Zarinpoush (2006:1), in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer uses more, and less structured questions, and interviewees answer these questions in their own words. Merriam (2009: 90), however, emphasises the fluidity of the conversation, explaining that a semi-structured interview is not bound to the exact phrasing and a specific order of the questions. Such a format allows the researcher to be responsive to different views or ideas from the respondent and to generate new ideas on the topic.

During the interviews, I posed questions to my interviewees. Although I did have sets of questions prepared, I did not necessarily keep to a specific format and I changed the order and format based on their answers. In essence, semi-structured interviews have the advantage of being flexible and therefore it gave me an opportunity to explore the information shared by the participant in a conversational manner.

### *3.5.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY*

In 1.6.2.3 I explained that the selection of participants was done in a purposeful way, in order to get information that would assist me to get the data that I needed to answer the research questions. I thus followed Merriam's (2009: 78) explanation of a "typically purposeful sample" by using student participants who were East Asian students studying at an English-medium university, to gain an understanding of their challenges.

The demographics of these students are displayed below in Table 3.1:

Table 3-1: Details of the student participants

Gender	Male	4
	Female	2
Level of programme	Undergraduate	4
	Postgraduate	2
Countries of origin	China	4
	Japan	1
	South Korea	1
Faculty	Education	2
	Natural and Agricultural Sciences	2
	Theology and Religion	1
	Business school (Faculty of Commerce)	1
Number of years in South Africa	0—3	1
	4—6	3
	7—9	1
	10 or more	1

I provided pseudonyms for each of the students to protect their identities:

- #PP and #ZSY are males, and #MSY is a female, all three from China. They are busy with their undergraduate studies.
- #Ji is a female undergraduate student from South Korea.
- #XT is from China, while #YS is from Japan. Both are males, engaged in postgraduate studies at the UFS.

The data generated from these interviews are reported in Chapter 4.

The second round of interviews was conducted with staff members of support units at the institution. They were selected because of their unique and specific institutional knowledge (cf. Merriam, 2009:78). Table 3.2 provides a list of units from which the participants were invited to take part in the study, and I also provide the description and pseudonym of each.

Table 3-2: Staff participants from the institution

Description	Unit	Pseudonyms
2 females	Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)	#CTL
1 male	Office for International Affairs (OIA)	#OIA
1 female	Centre for University Access & Disability Support (CUADS)	#CUADS
2 females	Postgraduate School (PGS)	#PGS
1 female	Postgraduate Research Unit at the library (PRU)	#PRU

### 3.5.3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Based on the literature review, I compiled two sets of interview questions to ask the East Asian students and support staff members at the UFS.

#### 3.5.3.1 STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

In terms of students' questions, I identified the theme of language barriers from the literature review. For this reason, I asked questions such as:

- How was your study experience so far?
- How do you find the lectures? Was it easy for you to be part of the class, to understand what was going on, to ask questions and to take part in the activities?
- How do you experience the teaching during lectures? Are you able to understand what is going on? Does it help you to learn the work? Is it similar to what you experienced back home?
- How is your study going?
- How do you find the assessment tasks and tests?
- So, how do you survive? /How do you succeed?

- What is your mother tongue? And how do you deal with the English medium that is offered here?

From the literature review, I also identified the theme of social behaviour, which ensued in interview questions like the following:

- How is your social life on and off campus? How do you get along with other students? Do you find it easy to make local friends?

With regard to students' financial, accommodation and transportation issues, I posed the following interview questions:

- Do you get any financial support and is it adequate to study in South Africa?
- Where do you stay? Are you satisfied with your accommodation; is it safe? How did you find the accommodation?
- How do you get about, moving between your residence, the campus, the mall, etc?

I identified the theme of needing sufficient assistance from the institution, and therefore I asked the following question:

- When you got to South Africa, and to the campus, did you get sufficient assistance from the institution? What could they have done better?

### 3.5.3.2 STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

As the participants were staff members from various support units at the university, I identified the theme of their normal services for students and asked the following question:

- What services do you offer to support students in general?

Considering most of challenges faced by East Asian students I identified the theme of their specific services and support in terms of academic and social life and asked the following question:

- Do you have any way to support non-English speaking students? Do you have specific assistance for East Asian students, such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students?
- Are you aware of any facility in your unit or on campus where non-English speaking students can improve their command of English?
- Many of the students that I interviewed felt isolated in classes, and they feel that they are not part of the student body. How and where do you think these students can be assisted to interact easier in the classes?
- Another issue that came up from the interviews is the difficulty the students experience to manage all the assessment tasks, particularly those that are not tests. Assessments here are very different from how it is done in China, Japan or Korea. Do you think there is any way that students can be assisted to overcome this challenge?
- Students could find it difficult to navigate their way around with regard to public transport and accommodation. Where could such a student go for assistance?
- Some students might have experiences with theft, not only money and food, but also clothes. Do the university offer guidance to international students who are not streetwise when they arrive in South Africa?

#### *3.5.4 DATA COLLECTION*

For data generation it is standard procedure to make contact with participants. Therefore, researchers must be mindful to act within the same protocol for each participant. Standardized performances decrease "trouble" in the data the researcher collects by making sure all results are based on the main questions (Wilson & Joye, 2016:9).

As part of making contact with the East Asian students, I initially sent four of my Chinese friends' messages to invite them to participate in the interviews. They all agreed to participate. Furthermore, I also invited a Japanese student whom I had met by chance. He agreed. Finally, I invited a student from South Korea, whom I had known for some time, and she also agreed to participate. I thus was able to secure six participants who were willing to share their insights

regarding their experiences of studying at the University of the Free State. I interviewed these East Asian participants in the library at a time of their convenience.

I interviewed the Chinese participants in Mandarin; consequently, I got more detailed information from them. I also got good feedback from the South-Korean participant who was very fluent in English. However, I encountered challenges with the Japanese participant, since his accent was different from what I am used to. He had to repeat his responses until I could understand.

In a way, as an interviewer, I was extremely careful to behave in the same way towards all interviewees, even though the fact that I am Chinese myself made it easier to interview the Chinese participants in their first language.

With regard to contacting the staff members at the institution, I first sent out e-mails in which I attached all the relevant information: letters to different units, interview questions, and the ethical clearance letter. They all replied to my e-mails and were willing to participate in the interviews. I made appointments with them and met them at their offices. I must wholeheartedly express my gratitude for their assistance because all staff members devoted themselves to my interviews. Some of the staff members understood that I have limited fluency in the English language and therefore they preferred to write down their responses to my interview questions, rather than have me record their answers. That was really helpful in making it easier for me to understand their responses more accurately.

### *3.5.5 DATA ANALYSIS*

As described in the previous section I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data. The next stage was to transcribe the information. Transcription is considered an important step of the analysis process - the moment a researcher transcribes the data, he/she starts to engage in the analysis. However, transcription could be a tedious process that needs several hours to finish (Simon & Goes, 2013: 2), and that indeed was my experience. In this study, the moment I had my raw data in the form of recordings of the interviews, I started the transcribing process. Some of them spoke Mandarin, so I transcribed their recorded data in Mandarin first, and then translated the transcription into English. Other interviewees spoke English to answer my interview questions, so I transcribed their recorded data directly in English.

I then started analysing the data. I followed the guidelines of Silverman (2016: 336):

*There is something very interesting about adding some sort of code to your data archive. By that I mean you make some analytic choices about which lines, chunks, or sections of data to highlight. In highlighting some things as belonging to a particular code, you begin inductively to create a local coding schema, a specific way to see and understand the phenomena.*

Once I had transcribed and translated the recorded data and the written responses, I read through the transcriptions in detail. I coded the data using different colours of highlighters on the hard copies that I printed out; I sorted the themes and put all the similar themes together, comparing and contrasting views, and fitting and integrating themes that surfaced from the themes identified from the literature. These findings I used to report in Chapters 4 and 5. I used direct quotes from the interviews to substantiate my claims.

## 3.6 INTEGRITY OF THE RESEARCH

In order to increase the integrity of my research, it is critical to explain the trustworthiness of the study and also the ethical considerations related to the study.

### 3.6.1 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Merriam (2009: 209) states that trustworthiness promotes rigour and clearness in the research. I followed specific strategies towards trustworthiness, and will discuss them under separate headings below:

#### 3.6.1.1 AUDIT TRAIL

An audit trail in qualitative research describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam 2009:223). Additionally, Kelly (2006:376) states that unless the researcher leaves a trail and describes in detail what is done, the reader is left at the mercy of the researcher's ability to smooth over the cracks. My audit trail involved the documentation and justifications of the decisions that informed the research process, and the processes that I followed, as set out in 3.5 above.

### 3.6.1.2 TRIANGULATION

Denzin (1970) and Flick (2007) (as quoted by Denzin, 2012: 82) state that for triangulation purposes, multiple research methods are used, such as the life story, case study, interviewing, and observation. Merriam (2009: 216) suggests that triangulation should be based on using multiple sources of data. I followed the latter approach to triangulation in my research. This means comparing and cross-checking data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people. For this reason, I interviewed both the students and then also relevant UFS staff members, because they could provide me with different perspectives on support for students. I believe that in doing this I was able to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

### 3.6.1.3 TRANSFERABILITY

Merriam (2009:226) refers to transferability as being able to apply the findings of a particular study to other situations. In order to enhance transferability, I provided details about the setting and how I went about to do the research (cf. Merriam 2009:227). This will enable others to assess the level of similarity between their situation and what is reported on this research. Therefore, my research should be transferrable to other research contexts, for example, similar institutions in South Africa would be able to transfer my work to their academic environments, and it might also be transferred to similar higher education institutions in other parts of the world.

### 3.6.1.4 CREDIBILITY

Given (2008: 138) defines credibility as "the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expression and the researcher's interpretation of those expressions". Gerber, Abrams, Curwood, and Magnifico (2016: 86) further elaborates on credibility as follows: "Participants may be able to offer insight into certain patterns or themes noted by the researcher". Therefore, I spent extra time with some participants during the period of my interviews and I did provide more opportunities to follow-up interviews where I felt it was necessary. Finally, I tried to take out relevant extracts from the interviewees' responses and made sure that each interview could be linked to the research questions. I then substantiated my claims with direct quotes, to show the connection between the information the participants shared and my interpretation.

### 3.6.1.5 MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER

Lincoln and Guba (as cited by Merriam, 2009:219) state that related to the integrity of the qualitative researcher is a fourth strategy, sometimes labelled the researcher's position or more recently, reflexivity, that is, the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher. I therefore find it important to define my role as the researcher in this study.

In 2012, I started to study hospitality management at the Central University of Technology. At that time, I really went through a number of learning barriers. I was struggling to understand what lecturers were talking about and I also could not communicate with my classmates. In class tests, many of the lecturers helped me by explaining the question papers. However, I still struggled to understand the questions. Sometimes I was teased by my classmates because of my Chinese accent; others would ask me for money, which made me very uncomfortable. On enquiring from my East Asian friends, they informed me that they had had similar experiences. Our shared challenges and experiences really motivated me to do this research that could assist other East Asian students in the same position, as well as institutions that accept these students, so that these students could be helped to perform well academically.

My first-hand knowledge was valuable during the data collection process - it made my search more focused as I already had an idea of the information that would make a meaningful contribution to this study. However, I had to make some difficult decisions in terms of reporting the data. I am aware that my personal bias might have shaped the way I viewed the data and thus might compromise the findings, but a serious attempt was made to remain objective. I tried to look at the documents that I reviewed without imposing my preconceived notions and experiences on them. I strove to be open-minded during the process of data gathering as well as during data analysis.

### 3.6.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Undertaking research requires one to act with integrity, and that involves, among other things, doing things ethically. The involvement of human beings as participants in this study and my presence at the research site brought a set of ethical issues that I needed to pay attention to. In the research, an ethical issue is important to consider for the researcher. Thus, in this study, I set some criteria for myself to ensure ethical research.

### 3.6.2.1 CONFIDENTIALITY

Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles (2008:417-418) explain confidentiality as follows:

*Where possible, researchers aim to assure participants that every effort will be made to ensure that the data they provide cannot be traced back to them in reports, presentations and other forms of dissemination ... disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual. In a research context, confidentiality means (1) not discussing information provided by an individual with others, and (2) presenting findings in ways that ensure individuals cannot be identified.*

I thus treated the interviews with respect and caution and took all the possible steps to prevent others from identifying the participants. Drawing from Sieber (2011:2), to protect their privacy, the following measures were followed:

1. I had to ensure that students and staff members were not traceable by their names in my analysis.
2. I provided students and staff members with pseudonyms.
3. I requested my institution to review the study report after its completion, and then decided whether the contents of the dissertation had to be kept confidential, as the institution is identified in the work. Any publication that may follow from this dissertation will use a pseudonym instead of the name of the institution.
4. Students' majors and staff members' job descriptions were not divulged.
5. The audio recordings were stored on my computer, but password protected. After completion of my study I will keep it for a time as is required by the institution, and thereafter destroy all the files.
6. The *Word* documents with the transcripts also were password protected.

Confidentiality is very important for interviewees, and I did my best to make sure that I protected the identities of the participants.

### 3.6.2.2 AVOIDANCE OF HARM

According to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (as cited by Swain, 2016: 90), the avoidance of harm" refers to any potential or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to any participants (and participating groups, organizations and funders) that a research project might generate". In my case, I never forced my participants to take part in interviews. I set our interview times at their convenience. I did not ask questions that might be sensitive. Researchers always must try to prevent harm, although this concern may not be shared by participants (Ogden, 2012:2-3). It is essential to enquire whether participants are aware of any possible harm before they give consent, and to develop strategies to decrease possible harm.

Therefore, I made an effort to stick to basic ethical principles like avoiding harm to participants, and protecting their independence, comfort, and dignity (cf. Iphofen, 2013: 11).

I conducted one-on-one interviews with six East Asian students and seven staff members from the different support units. I sent the student participants the ethical clearance letter and the interview questions, as well as the informed consent in Mandarin and English before the interview. Thereafter I made an appointment for an interview with each participant. During the interview, I did not ask them any sensitive questions and respected them all the time. After the interview, I did not disclose any personal information. Concerning staff members, I sent the interview questions to the different divisions of the institution, to inform them about the questions that I would ask them. I also sent them the ethical clearance letter (Appendix A), and the letter gaining permission to do the research (Appendix D). I made appointments at times that were convenient to them.

The purpose of the study was to highlight the many challenges faced by East Asian students studying at the institution and to investigate how the existing structures could be utilised or expanded to help students overcome these challenges.

I conclude that it is imperative to keep the personal information of all the participants in the research confidential, to respect their privacy and personal information and to make sure that publications that may emanate from this research be approved by the institution beforehand.

### 3.6.2.3 INFORMED CONSENT

A letter of consent was linked to the interview. Bulger (2002:3) indeed points out:

*Informed consent is a vital step to any research project. It is the process in which a patient/participant consents to participate in a research project after being informed of its procedures, risks, and benefits.*

It is important for the researcher to ensure that each interviewee understands what the research question is about and what the research requires from them. Then they have to agree and volunteer to be interviewed, and if they do not, the researcher has to accept their wishes.

In this study, I had to invite all the participants to volunteer to participate in the interview and I gave them all the required details about my study purpose, risks, and benefits beforehand. Their rights were respected, such as physical, emotional and psychological capability. In addition, I applied for ethical clearance to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee and obtained ethical clearance (number UFS-HSD2017/1384).

## 3.7 CONCLUSION

Having considered various research methods and approaches based on literature I read in this regard, I reached the conclusion that a pragmatic approach would be most appropriate for what I aimed to achieve with the study. In the light of the nature of the research problem and objectives, I had clarity that qualitative data collection methods would suit my effort to find answers to the research questions best; therefore, I decided on interviews. This proved to have been a good choice, as language proficiency was an issue, and the interviews provided space for explanations in participants' home language and for staff members to give written responses which made my task of understanding and interpretation easier.

The approach and methodology I applied served me well to attain the objectives I formulated for the study, namely to gain a clear understanding of the challenges of foreign-language speakers studying at an English-medium university, to get a picture of the support structures and methods in place at the university for such students, and to consider possibilities to overcome the challenges of these students.

I am confident that I adhered to the principles of ethical research as expected of a responsible researcher.

In the next chapter, I shall report on the data collected through interviews with East Asian participants.

# CHAPTER 4: CHALLENGES OF EAST ASIAN STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, I explored existing literature on barriers for international students such as academic barriers, language barriers, social barriers, financial issues, and more. I also explored the support that students received from the host countries in terms of academics, social life, financial matters, transport, accommodation and so forth.

In Chapter 3, I explained and justified my research methodology. The purpose of this chapter was to relate how I had investigated the perceptions of East Asian students regarding issues at the UFS, using data generated from semi-structured interviews. This was done by means of a qualitative approach. In order to address my secondary research questions, I also posed some scaffolded questions, namely:

- What practices exist globally to support international foreign language students to overcome their challenges?
- What are the challenges of East Asian speaking students at the University of the Free State?
- What student support for English Foreign Language (EFL) students exists at the University of the Free State?
- What suggestions can be made from the above to improve the support for East Asian and other EFL students at English-medium universities?

As mentioned earlier I collected data through conducting and recording semi-structured interviews. The advantage of conducting interviews is that I was able to probe and ask follow-up questions in order to clarify certain answers from the participants. Also, in the case of East Asian students, my opinion was that a face-to-face meeting would put them more at ease in order to overcome possible language barriers.

## 4.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

I conducted one-on-one interviews with East Asian students who studied at the UFS. From these interviews, I could learn and determine their opinions regarding their learning experience and challenges at the UFS. Moreover, I could listen to the students' viewpoints and gain feedback regarding academic practices and possible support they received or would have liked to receive. I used open-ended questions and recorded their responses for the transcription and coding.

In the following section, I report on the qualitative content analysis. In the analysis I identified seven categories based on the literature review.

### 4.2.1 ACADEMIC PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

#### 4.2.1.1 LANGUAGE BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS

The literature suggests that language is one of the important barriers that students in foreign countries face (cf. 2.2.1.3) and my study confirmed this.

##### *a) Difficulty understanding in the classroom*

The participants shared how, at the beginning of their learning journey in South Africa at the UFS they struggled to understand what their lecturers were talking about because of language barriers.

#PP explained his frustration because of language barriers in the class (*It was difficult for me to understand in the class, because my mother tongue was not English. In China, I used to attend classes in Mandarin*). Similarly, #MSY lamented as follows: *In the beginning, it was hard for me to understand in the class because my mother tongue was not English. Other participants shared corresponding views (In the beginning, I have experienced language barrier, because I was not exposed to English as much in South Korea (#Ji); In my first year of studying, I could not understand what the lecturers were talking about in the class. In China, I was not exposed English in Chinese educational system (#XT)).*

#ZSY in particular had problems with studying his major in English because English was not his mother tongue:

*Unfortunately, English was not my mother tongue therefore I struggled to study my major in South Africa.*

On the other hand, #YS had a different experience, because of his unique situation that he stayed in another country for a while. He explains:

*My mother tongue is Japanese. I used to work at a Japanese company in Hong Kong. I got enough experience to live in another country to speak some basic English. Therefore, I felt that I could understand what my supervisor was talking about.*

In spite of this advantage, he experienced that his slow reading speed in English hampered him (*But, I needed to read a lot of materials at that time. Compared to other Masters students, I could not read these materials as fast as they did.*)

From the interview extracts above I concluded that these participants expressed their frustration, albeit different levels of frustrations, regarding their language barriers in the class. It is clear that irrespective of past experience, the East Asian students in this study did find English to be a barrier to learning.

#### *b) Lecturers' accent or speaking speed*

In the previous section I related the difficulties that the East Asian participants experienced in general in terms of language. Being from non-Anglophone countries, and not being used to the sound of English in different contexts, many of them complained that their lecturers had strange accents or spoke English very fast. They thus had difficulty to follow the discussion, in particular in their first year of study.

#PP, for instance, complained about some of his lecturers who spoke with strong accents and who spoke very fast:

*In the class, most of my lecturers spoke Standard English, thus I could easily understand what they were saying, but a few lecturers spoke heavily accented English or spoke English very fast thus I could not understand what they were talking about.*

#MSY also complained about the same issue, as she struggled to keep up with her lecturers in the class because of their accents or speaking speed:

*In the class, most lecturers spoke English so fast and some of them spoke English with heavy accents. I could only pick up a few of the words and was quite hard to keep up with their pace in my first year.*

While #XT also complained about the fact that he could not follow his lecturers' pace, he appreciated that some of them explained the work to him in simple English words or used signs and gestures to clarify issues for him. Still, he felt embarrassed:

*It was a horrible learning experience in my first year. I did not get used to my lecturers' accent and some of them speak so fast that I could not catch up their pace. Sometimes, my lecturers had to speak very slowly and explained to me in simple English words or drew me a picture or used the sign language [sic] to explain some words' meaning. I always felt very awkward in front of my classmates at that time.*

While #ZSY's experience was similar to that of the other participants' (*Different lecturers have different accents. I sometimes struggled to understand a few of lectures what they were talking about in my first year.*) #YS differed from them. He stated that he was able communicate with his supervisor without a problem:

*As a master's student, we do not have any classes in this phase. I only make some appointments with my supervisor to discuss my progress of the dissertation. I could discuss with my supervisor in English; therefore, I could not have any issues about my supervisor's accent, etc.*

#Ji shared that her situation was completely different, as she attended school in South Africa, and thus she had no trouble to get used to their lecturers' accents:

*I was very lucky compared to the other East Asian students. I was schooled here. Therefore, I got used to South African lectures' accent and speed. I had no difficulty in following through.*

From the above East Asian students' interviews, I could thus conclude that the East Asian students struggled with their lecturers' accent or lecturing speed because they were not schooled in South Africa, or in English. Therefore, most of them went through a tough time in the beginning of their study.

c) *East Asian students adjust their study methods*

From the previous section I deduced that most East Asian students experienced language barriers during their study time at the UFS. The students, however, showed resilience as, in order to overcome this barrier, they modified their studying methods in order to be able to adapt to the new learning environment.

#PP, for instance emphasized that he did prepare for the class beforehand, and that helped him to not fall behind his classmates' study progress (*Generally speaking, if I previewed the subjects before the class, it would not be difficult for me to understand them in the class*). #MSY also modified her studying method to preview her subjects, but then she also studied with her local peers (*Due to my language barriers, I had to adjust my study method. I previewed the subjects before the class. I also made some local friends and studied with them. They would help me to study my subjects.*) #ZSY, on the other hand, made a habit of visiting his lecturers after class to clarify issues (*If I do not understand some knowledge [sic] in the class, I preferred to look for my lecturer's assistance*). As a postgraduate student, #XT regularly made an effort to communicate with other master's students, and relied heavily on the assistance of the research librarians:

*As a master's student, I also faced language barriers so I had to adjust my study method. I always discussed with other Master students so that we could learn from each other such as how to find some good academic resources from the Internet and how to interview participants, etc. Sometimes, I asked the research librarians to help me look for some academic articles.*

From the above responses, I thus concluded that adapted studying strategies helped these East Asian participants to do better in their studies.

d) *More efforts in their study for most East Asian students*

Based on students' feedback, most of them struggled to understand their subjects because of language barriers, thus they had to put more effort into their subjects.

#PP's explained that due to language barriers he had to study longer in his subjects, especially when reading academic articles:

*For me, I could not find a good way to overcome the language barriers thus I had to spend more time on my study. My major was Micro-biology, so I needed to read*

*some academic articles for my major. However, there were some difficult terms in these articles; hence I had to spend double, triple times to read them.*

There seemed to be consensus amongst the participants that they had to study harder than the local students. The following are extracts from what the different participants shared:

#MSY:

*English was a huge challenge in terms of my subjects therefore I needed to study my subjects harder and longer. I had to spend more time in my studying.*

#ZSY:

*I struggled to understand some main points of knowledge, therefore I had to spend more time in my study.*

#XT:

*English is a huge challenge for my study; therefore I need to study harder to improve my English and spend more time in my study.*

Even though #YS lived in another country for a while, he explained that he still needed to put more time into his academic reading:

*Compared to other master's students, I could not read my academic articles as fast as other master students so I had to spend more time on my academic reading.*

While #XT also expressed his viewpoint that his lack of fluency in English hindered his study, as time went by, he seemed to adapt to his study in South Africa.

*However, after one year, it was going to be better. Compared to my first-year study, I gradually adapted to South African education system.*

From the above citations, it is clear that most of the East Asian participants had to spend more time on their study because of language issues. Still, gradually things seemed to have improved for them.

#### 4.2.1.2 DIFFERENT EVALUATION SYSTEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND CHINA

One of the issues that emerged from the interview data was how different assessment is approached in South Africa compared to East Asia. In the South African higher education system marks are obtained in various ways, including group assignments, presentations, class

tests, and more. On the other hand, in China and other East Asian countries, the students are simply graded based on their performance in the final examination of each semester module.

Quite a few of the participants explained that the final examination is the only assessment that takes place in their home countries (*The Chinese evaluation system only focuses on passing final exams (#XT)*; *The Chinese education system only focuses on final exam marks (#ZSY)*). #PP elaborated as follows:

*Compare to China and South Africa [sic], they have different educational systems in terms of assessing students' marks. For example, in Chinese universities, it only needs to focus on final exams. If the students pass their final exams, they will pass their subjects.*

#MSY pointed out that in South Africa, she did not have to only focus on her final marks, but was also required to focus on her semester marks, as they both were important:

*In South African universities, it is more complicated to pass the subjects. The students not only focus on final exams, but also focus on their semester marks. For the students, semester marks is an important part of marks, such as group assignments, presentations, class tests and so on.*

In South Africa the students had to adapt to a completely different way of assessment. #PP explained that *In South African universities, there are many ways to assess students' subjects such as group assignments, presentations, class tests and so on*. Participants highlighted the importance of semester marks based a number of different assessment tasks (*We also need to focus on semester marks such as class tests, assignments, group assignments, and presentations (#ZSY)*; *Semester marks include group assignments, presentations and on-line tests. (#XT)*).

Another difference that only #XT pointed out was that the pass mark in China is 60% and not 50% as in South Africa.

*For examination, each subject only has a final examination in each semester (In China we have two semesters: February to June first semester, July to December second semester). For example, Financial 1 in first semester, we only had a final exam. If you got over 60 percent, you pass - lower than 60 percent you fail, and then you have to attend a re-assessment at the beginning of the second semester.*

In conclusion, from the above interviews, the East Asian participants elaborated on the different evaluation practices in South Africa as compared to those in their home countries.

#### 4.2.1.3 DIFFICULTY IN CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

During the interviews the participants explained how they had to navigate their way to become involved in class activities, given the expectation by many of the lecturers that students have to work interactively in class. For most East Asian participants, it was a huge challenge to be involved in the class activities while they were studying at the UFS.

#PP for instance expressed his joy in terms of eventually joining in group discussion and making some local friends:

*It was another challenge for me to participate in the group discussion because most of my classmates knew each other from their high school. Thus, it was easy for them to build up different groups in the class or in the lab. However, as an international student, some of my group members never took initiative to discuss some questions with me. Sometimes, I felt that I was isolated by them, especially in my first years.*

#MSY was similarly frustrated because not only was it a challenge for her to find some common topics with her classmates but she was unsure of how to work with them:

*In my first year, it was a challenge for me to participate in the group discussion, because most of my classmates were from South African high schools. They had some common topics, same cultures, similar backgrounds with each other, Thus they were easy to build up discussion groups in the class. For me, I did not grow up in South Africa and I really did not know how to work with my classmates.*

These views were shared by other participants as well. #ZSY stated that he did not know how to get involved in the class discussion and activities with his classmates:

*In the beginning, it was difficult to be involved in the class activities. I did not know how to communicate with my local classmates and to build the study group with them;*

while #XT narrated that it was difficult to make friends with his classmates:

*In my first year of studying, it was difficult for me to discuss the work with the local students in the class and make local friends to be closest friends, because we have different languages, cultures, etc.*

On the other hand, #Ji expressed that she got along with her local students:

*I think my social life is good. I do get along with my classmates and most of them are local friends. There were some racial stereotypes in the beginning of the relationship, but I told them what is right and wrong.*

As a master's student, #YS did not have any classes where he had to work with others:

*As a master's student, I did not have any classes in my course. I usually had a one-on-one meeting with my supervisor so I did not get through the tough situation like other East Asian students in the class.*

The above citations clearly indicate that for most East Asian participants it was difficult to get involved in the class activities because of different educational backgrounds, cultures, and other differences. The participants felt like outsiders. Their perception was that most of the classmates were from South African high schools, and thus they seemed to form groups to study together with ease. This caused the East Asian students to feel isolated by the local classmates, even when they were supposed to take part in the class activities. Therefore, most of them complained that it was difficult to become involved in the class activities.

#### 4.2.1.4 GRADUAL ADAPTION

Although the participants shared many challenges that they experienced, it was also evident that they were able to gradually adapt. For instance, after several years, the East Asian participants could understand what their lecturers were talking about. They also got involved in the classroom activities and made some local classmate friends.

#PP for instance expressed his joy in terms of eventually joining in the group discussions and making some local friends:

*After three years, I have already got involved in the group discussions in the class or in the lab with my classmates. As times go by, local students gradually understand my situation and they do not force me to know their cultures, backgrounds or speak English as fluently as they can. They try to talk to me in proper English. Therefore, I could make some classmates be my friends. .*

#MSY similarly shared that in her second year, she started to get involved in the class

*This is my second year in the University of the Free State. I gradually get involved in the class activities and adapt to study in South Africa.*

#ZSY also adapted to his learning environment and made some local friends:

*Compared to my first year of studying, I gradually adapted to my study activities. In the class, I have already got involved in the group discussions and made some local classmates be my friends.*

#XT similarly said that he could get involved in the class discussion after a few years:

*After a few years, I could understand what my lecturers were talking about. I have been to South Africa for several years therefore I could get involved in the class discussion, group activities, etc.*

From the above quotes from the interviews, it became evident that most of the East Asian participants gradually got involved in the class activities and made some friends among the local classmates.

Meanwhile, they also seemed to understand their lecturers better.

#PP expressed his viewpoints that he could understand his lecturers better than in his first year

*Compared to my first year of study in South Africa, I could understand what my lecturers were talking about. Thus, after class, I do not need to study extra time in my subjects. I make a great progress in my study.*

#MSY also agreed that she could now understand what her lecturers discussed in the class:

*This is my second year of my study, I could understand what my lecturers are saying now, I am really proud of my progress compared to my first year.*

#ZSY said that he could keep up with his lecturers' pace this year:

*This is my second year of studying my major, I could gradually follow up my lecturers' pace. Therefore, I could pass my subjects.*

#XT also said that he could understand their lecturers better than in his first year:

*I really struggled to understand what my lecturers said in my first year. But this year, I could understand better than in my first year. I am feeling awesome.*

From the above feedback of the participants, it may be inferred that after a few years' study many East Asian participants could understand what their lecturers said in the class. This helped them to make huge progress in their studies. Therefore, the data discussed in this

section indicate that after a year or two the East Asian participants could understand better what their lecturers talked about. At the same time, they also got involved in the class activities and made friends with local classmates.

## 4.2.2 SOCIETAL ISSUES

Apart from the issues directly related to the academic success of the students, societal differences and challenges also seem to hamper the students' adjustment and progress. These includes matters related to finance, accommodation and transport

### 4.2.2.1 FINANCIAL ISSUES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Most East Asian participants relied on their parents for financial support (*I get my financial support from my parents (#PP); I got lucky because my parents support me to study in South Africa (#MSY); My parents help me to pay for my study fees and living cost (#ZSY); My parents support me to study in South Africa. They help me to pay for my living cost and study fees (#XT); My sole financial support is from my parents (#Ji)*). However, #YS revealed that he was partially supported by the church, yet still carry some cost:

*The DRC [Dutch Reformed Church] in South Africa and Reformed Church in Japan only provided me with living cost in Bloemfontein. I have to pay for the rest of fees such as study fees, my children's school fees and so on. I can survive in South Africa.*

As most East Asian participants got financial support from their parents, they did not look for part-time jobs while they were enrolled as full-time students. The main reason seems to be pressure to perform well enough in their studies. As #PP explained:

*My major is very difficult and hectic, so I have to study longer and harder. Therefore, I do not find a part-time employment.*

Most of the other participants agreed (*I do not seek a part-time employment because I have to concentrate on my studying. I really do not have extra time to find a part-time job (#MSY); I do not seek a part-time employment. In my spare time, I have to study therefore I do not look for a part-time job (#ZSY); In my spare time, I have put more efforts in my study, therefore I do not look for a part-time job (#XT.)*).

I concluded that most of the East Asian students did not look for part-time jobs because of their studies, and because they had sufficient financial support from parents or other organizations.

Another contributing factor seems to be that relative to European countries, it costs less to study and live in South Africa (*Compared to other European countries, it costs less money in terms of study fees and living cost (#PP); It is cheaper than other European countries such as living cost and study fees (#MSY); It is a good choice to study in South Africa because it costs cheaper than other European countries (#ZSY); My parents can support me to study in South Africa because it cost less money in terms of study fees and the cost of living (#XT)*). However, #Ji complained that as an international student, she could not get the same opportunity as the local students to apply for the bursaries in South Africa:

*But I did not apply for bursaries, because most of it does not include international students. It is a good environment to learn different things than in South Korea, but the fees are expensive considering we pay 50% more than South African students.*

From the interview extracts above, it is clear that most of the East Asian participants did not look for part-time jobs because their parents could support them (their study fees and living cost) in South Africa. Another reason is that compared to other European countries, it costs less in terms of living cost and study fees in South Africa. Therefore, I must conclude that most of the East Asian participants did not suffer unduly from too much financial stress.

#### 4.2.2.2 ACCOMMODATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

From most East Asian participants' feedback, they seemed to be satisfied with their living environments. Most of the participants reported living in private student accommodation in a suburb close to the UFS, and that they stated that they were satisfied (*I live in the Universitas district [suburb]. I am satisfied with my living environment. It is safe (#PP); I live in the Universitas district and stay with my other Chinese friends. I am so happy with my living environment. It is clean and tidy (#MSY); I live in the Universitas district with my Chinese friend. My neighbours are friendly. The environment is very safe (#XT)*). On the other hand, some students stay with their parents in different parts of the city (*I stay with my parents and live in the Universitas district (#ZSY); My family stays in Heuwelsig in Bloemfontein. It is a good environment (#YS)*).

#Ji responded that she lived on the campus and that she liked it there because of the good environment:

*I stay in the campus residence. I am satisfied with my accommodation; it is very safe. There are a lot of regulations in place which make it more convenient to stay.*

The participants indicated that they usually go about finding accommodation in different ways, including mobile applications (*I used the mobile application-OLX to find my accommodation. It was really convenient (#PP); I found my flat from a mobile application-OLX (#XT)*) and referrals by friends or associates (*My friend recommended me to live in the student accommodation (#MSY); My local friends recommended me to stay in the campus residence (#Ji); My pastor helped me to find my flat (#YS)*). These quotations show that the participants all either got help from people outside the structures of the university, or through their own on-line searches. None of the students suggested that they got any assistance from the UFS. As the researcher, I did ask a staff member from the Housing and Residence Affairs Unit in passing about this lack of involvement in arranging accommodation for foreign students<sup>1</sup>. Her response was that the university structures did not provide any specific programme or assistance to get placements for international students. They had to compete with the local students for accommodation.

#### 4.2.2.3 TRANSPORTATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Most of the East Asian participants had their ways to solve their transportation issues.

The two female participants indicated that they walk around or call their friends or a taxi to drive them to different areas (*Mostly I walk around or my friends drive me (#Ji); Mostly I walk to campus or my friends drive me to [the] shopping mall. Sometimes I call a taxi (#MSY)*). The male participants reported that they have their own vehicles (*I drive my car to university or [to] go shopping (#PP); I drive my car to somewhere [sic] such as university or shopping mall (#YS); I drive [with] my car to university, go shopping or travelling to different cities with my family (#ZSY); I drive my car to university or [to go to the] shopping mall with my friends (#XT)*).

It thus can be concluded that transportation did not seem to be a big problem for East Asian participants studying at the UFS. They can handle the problem by themselves, and again, no mention was made of any support from the institution.

#### 4.2.3 USING DIFFERENT UNITS FOR ASSISTANCE

Some of the East Asian participants stated that they did get some assistance from institutional structures.

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<sup>1</sup> She gave me permission to use the information in the study

In particular, the Office of International Affairs seems to provide assistance with regard to study permits and other matters. #PP, for instance shared *that there is a unit called the Office for International Affairs. Its assistance includes these kinds of services such as renew the study permit, register for the new course, and do on.* #XT similarly shared his experience, and said that *the Office for International Affairs can provide different services for international students, such as renew their study permit;* and likewise, #Ji expressed her viewpoint that *there is sufficient help such as from the Office for International Affairs that assists us throughout our study.*

Some students experienced some challenges with regard to the International Office. #PP complained about the fact that they moved to another building:

*The Office for International Affairs kept on moving from one place to another, therefore it was difficult for me to find it.*

Some of the East Asian participants wished that some of the staff members would support them in other ways, such as with their studies or in their social lives. #XT wished that *the staff members of the International Office could pay more attention to us such as study, social life, etc.;* while #MSY also expressed the viewpoint that *the staff members of the Office for International Affairs may be more concerned about us, such as the studying schedule in my major, and my social life.* Furthermore, #Ji found some of the staff members were uninviting (*They could have done better with being friendlier, most of them are very sour*) but was under the impression that the higher tuition fees of international students pay for services at the Office (*I am very well aware we do pay for their assistance*).

In addition to the Office of International Affairs, one participant got some assistance from his faculty, such as in registering for his course (*The staff members of my faculty helped me to register my course. I am satisfied with their assistance* (#YS)) Another participant improved his English at a language school in Port Elizabeth (PE). #ZSY wished that a UFS language school could arrange similar activities (*I attended a language school in PE. A language school could help non-English speakers to improve their English*). In addition, such a school could also help with social interaction (*I hope that the staff members of the language school [at the UFS] could organize some activities to help us to know each other between local students and international students* (#ZSY)).

From the above extracts, I thus concluded that most East Asian participants got some assistance from the Office for International Affairs, but some of them felt that the service could

be better. One participant received assistance from his faculty and another from a language school. Thus, these students received a certain degree of assistance from specific support units at the UFS.

### 4.3 DISCUSSION

This presentation of the findings gave a clear indication that East Asian students who participated in the study experienced different challenges at the University of the Free State.

In terms of language barriers, most East Asian participants found it difficult to follow proceedings in the class. Most of them also complained that their lecturers spoke English with strong accents or spoke very fast in the class. For the reasons given above, most of the East Asian participants had to adjust their study methods such as doing more preparation work before the class, asking lecturers for assistance and discussing the learning material and lectures with other master's students.

However, no matter how hard they tried to catch up with their classmates' learning progress, most of the East Asian participants still spent longer hours than local students studying their subjects. Furthermore, for these East Asian participants the different educational evaluation systems that they faced in South Africa in terms of assessing the students' work was a challenge. In the Chinese evaluation system, for example, the students only focused on their final exams. In South Africa, however, attention is not only paid to the final marks, but the assessments throughout the semester, such as group assignments, presentations, class tests, and on-line tests are included in the final mark. Therefore, they had to become accustomed to the South African evaluation system. Such differences in the education systems of the different countries compelled the East Asian students to make adjustments to the ways they used to study to accommodate the different ways to study in South Africa. It is clear that they needed assistance to help them in this regard. For example, as they experience difficulty in writing assignments, specific units may support them to fix grammar mistakes or give them guidance in writing assignments to assist them.

From the above interview extracts and discussion, I can thus conclude that East Asian students may need more assistance to help them overcome these challenges.

Most East Asian participants admitted that it was a huge challenge for them to get involved in the class activities. They felt that they were isolated by the local students. The impression that the participants had was that the local students knew each other from their high school days, and thus they found it easy to make friends or form study groups in the class. As times went by, the participants gradually made new friends and were able to become involved in the group discussions in the class.

Most East Asian students received financial support from their parents to study in South Africa. Therefore, they did not need to take part-time jobs in their spare time. It must be noted that compared to other Western countries, it costs less to study in South Africa in terms of living cost and study fees, and subsequently most East Asian participants were not concerned about their finances, although one complained about not being allowed to apply for bursaries and study loans. The participants were generally satisfied with their living environments. They used different ways to find accommodations, such as the Internet, and through their friends. Most of the East Asian participants (mainly males) own cars while the female participants either walk, or get a lift with a friend, or use a taxi. The traffic does not seem to be a problem for the participants.

According to the feedback from these East Asian participants, they got assistance from the Office for International Affairs, but there were some complaints about the accessibility of staff members. One participant received assistance from his faculty, and they mentioned that they got support from their individual lecturers too.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I analysed the interviews with six East Asian participants. The purpose was to gain an understanding of the challenges East Asian students face at the UFS. The challenges that they mentioned do not differ from challenges of foreign students in other countries. They also seemed to make limited use of the support units available on campus. The conclusion in this regard is that they do not seem to need assistance in terms of their finances, accommodation, or transportation from the institution.

In the next chapter, I discuss the interviews I conducted with different support units available to the students at the UFS in order to better understand the supportive role they could play to overcome the barriers mentioned by East Asians students.

# CHAPTER 5: STRUCTURES OF SUPPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE THAT CAN BE USED BY ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I discussed the one-on-one interviews I had with East Asian students who studied at the UFS. From these interviews, I could learn their opinions regarding their learning experiences and different barriers such as language, different assessment methods, cultural and social issues, financial issues, accommodation, and transport for international students at the UFS. Some also mentioned the support that they received. The UFS, like other universities, has a number of support units, and thus in this chapter, I analyse and discuss the one-on-one interviews with the staff members from some of these units to understand the different services that they provide to assist students. To provide contextual background, I also share information that I obtained from the WebPages of the different units.

## 5.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

I firstly give an overview on the different units of support available at UFS to East Asian students.

### *5.2.1 OVERVIEW OF UNITS THAT SUPPORT STUDENTS*

At the UFS, there are different units to provide different services to help the students. For example, the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) aims to help students enhance their academic performance. The Office for International Affairs (OIA) provides services to help international students, such as support in obtaining visas, and with social integration. The Postgraduate Research Unit (PRU) at the library assists postgraduate students in finding academic articles appropriate to their needs, provides assistance regarding plagiarism, citations and other research-related tasks. The Postgraduate School (PGS) provides the specific specialised services for postgraduate students. The following sections will be devoted to discussing the various services they render, based on the information that could be found on the website, as well as the data from the interviews.

### 5.2.1.1 CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

On the website of the Centre for Teaching and Learning<sup>2</sup> it shows that it was established in 2012 to work with the different faculties, staff and students to “advance excellence in the core function of teaching and learning”.

On its webpage it stated the following strategic objectives:

- *To become a leading research centre in the area of teaching and learning, focusing on scholarship of teaching and learning, and student engagement.*
- *To provide contextualised professional development for current and next generation academics and academic leaders.*
- *To facilitate and promote curriculum delivery, innovation, and assessment.*
- *To research, plan, implement, and evaluate high-impact teaching and learning practices to improve student engagement and success.*
- *To further access with success by leading innovation and support in language development.*
- *To advocate the importance of teaching and learning and develop faculty specific approaches to teaching and learning.*
- *To further an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning that promotes transformation and success for students and staff.*

Based on the information on the website, and in particular the idea of improving engagement with students I assumed that this unit could potentially assist foreign students to be more successful. One of the staff members from CTL whom I interviewed, indeed claimed that they provided academic advice to the students throughout their studies, and explained “academic advice” as follows:

*Academic advising is a service that connects students with the institution from entry, through the educational career, to graduation and beyond.*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ufs.ac.za/ctl> [Accessed on 14 August 2018]

She elaborated on what assistance could be given:

*They can assist students with: General academic inquiries, Degree changes, Study skills, Goal setting, Time management, Career advice, Setting up an educational plan, Referring students to UFS support services, Credit checks, Choosing majors, Planning their curriculum.*

These services could be used by EFL students to overcome some barriers related to the issues mentioned.

### 5.2.1.2 OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

On the website of the Office for International Affairs<sup>3</sup> the unit expresses its focus to “ensure a hassle-free study experience for students from abroad”. It claims that the staff members working at the unit help international students, visitors and faculty members gain maximally from their stay at the UFS.

In the interview with the staff member of this office, he (#OIA) confirmed that they offered a number of services to the international students:

*We offer specialised services for international students. They include visa support, accommodation support, social integration, etc. Please check the website of the Office for International Affairs for full details.*

Upon reading the detail on the webpage, I noted that the OIA assist students with a number of administrative issues:

*The OIA serves as a central hub for international students, providing support across a large platform, which includes:*

- *assisting prospective students with questions regarding admission, academic affairs, visas, study permits and accommodation;*
- *compiling and administering budgets for sponsored students; and*
- *providing on-going practical and emotional support to students far removed from their familiar support structures.*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/international-affairs-home> [Accessed on 18 August 2018]

*Additional services provided by the OIA comprise:*

- *assistance with exchange opportunities and the coordination thereof;*
- *liaising with foreign embassies in South Africa;*
- *working with the Department of Home Affairs regarding the renewal of study permits;*
- *negotiating, facilitating and managing international inter-institutional agreements and partnerships;*
- *facilitating academic visits; and*
- *promoting the UFS at international conferences/workshops.*

On the “Tips” subpage extensive information is shared aimed at prospective international students, including information about the language used at the university, the weather, transport (including the telephone numbers of various taxis), and detail about electricity. Information about accommodation as well as medical insurance is shared on two other subpages. The “Language Proficiency” subpage indicates that a student “must have demonstrated a certain level of proficiency in English or Afrikaans by taking the IELTS test” and minimum performance levels are stated that students have to acquire in order to be allowed. The “International Student Fees” page explains that the Department of Home Affairs requires of the UFS to charge international students the full (and inflated) fee upfront. Furthermore, it indicates that no financial aid is available to the international students. Still the website does provide links to external bodies that provide scholarships to foreign students (listed per region).

### 5.2.1.3 THE LIBRARY

The library website<sup>4</sup>, in addition to providing information about resources, offers particular services to the students. These include guidelines and tutorials on various topics related to

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ufs.ac.za/library> [Accessed on 20 October 2018]

the use of the library. There is a specific research information sheet, and on the webpage<sup>5</sup> it is stated that

*The Postgraduate Research Unit is located on level 6 in the UFS Sasol Library, creating an environment conducive to studying/research for postgraduate students. This section of the library is for the use of postgraduate students only. Two dedicated Research Librarians are available to assist Masters and Doctoral students with literature searches.*

The facilities available are elucidated as follows:

- *30 computer workstations for use by students.*
- *We have 69 workstations for laptops. University wi-fi is available in the Unit.*
- *6 discussion rooms are available for short discussions.*
- *Cold and hot water are available for use by students.*

One of the librarians (#PRU) who worked at this unit explained that they “assist post-graduate students with literature searches, and general assistance with regarding [sic] to referencing, citation, plagiarism detection, etc.”

#### 5.2.1.4 POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

In addition to the postgraduate unit in the library, the institution also has a Postgraduate School. On the website of the Postgraduate School<sup>6</sup> it is indicated that:

*The Postgraduate School offers workshops on a range of topics including planning a research project, research paradigms, advanced research methodology (quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods), research ethics and intellectual property considerations in technology transfer. A strong focus of the researcher capacity development programme is on the development of academic writing skills of emerging researchers. Academic writing activities presented by the*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://ufs.libguides.com/researchunit> [Accessed on 20 October 2018]

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ufs.ac.za/postgraduate/postgraduate-school-home> [Accessed on 22 October 2018]

*Postgraduate School include workshops on proposal writing, writing a literature review, funding proposals, article writing and monthly writing retreats for emerging researchers.*

The website also states that it shares “information regarding postgraduate funding opportunities”, and has links to guidelines, including application documents, maps, and other sets of information.

A staff member (#PGS) of the Postgraduate School provided similar information in describing the School’s role in support for postgraduate students as follows:

*We offer some services: Research Capacity Development Programme (research methodology workshop, ethics software for postgraduate student studies), Administrating funding for postgraduate students to study without cost (tuition) in the prescribed time, Graduate Research Management electronically track progress of postgraduate students, Academic Writing support for postgraduates.*

The above citations suggest that the Postgraduate School uses a number of ways to support postgraduate students to be successful.

#### 5.2.1.5 CUADS

On the website of CUADS (Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support)<sup>7</sup> it is stated that the mission of the unit is to:

*Develop and implement co-curricular programmes, activities, and services that provide truly humanising daily lived experiences which are essential for student academic success, social behaviour, student engagement, and an inclusive institutional culture.*

The website furthermore indicates that the unit has two sponsored vehicles for students with disabilities “to be transported mainly between Bloemfontein campus and South campus” and

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/student-affairs-home/bloemfonteincampus/center-for-universal-access-and-disability-support-\(cuads\)/overview-home](https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/student-affairs-home/bloemfonteincampus/center-for-universal-access-and-disability-support-(cuads)/overview-home) [Accessed on 2 November 2018]

that it also assists with issues such as doctor's appointments, "Sign Language or lip-speaking interpreting" and other matters<sup>8</sup>.

In agreement with the above, a staff member (#CUADS) of the unit described its services for students with disabilities in detail:

*Firstly, we render support services to students with disabilities, including visually impaired (blind, partially sighted), hearing impaired (hard of hearing, deaf), mobility impaired (amputees, wheelchair users, cerebral palsy), learning difficulties (ADHD, ADD, dyslexia), psychosocial conditions. Support provided [includes] Disability support programme, [includes] financial aid assistance, identifying academic needs and student life participation. [Also] communication access - South African Sign Language interpretation (interpreter service) and assistive technology (hearing aids).*

To summarise, based on this overview of services available at the UFS, it is clear that most units provide specific services for students in terms of their study, lifestyle and so on. However, the respondents did not refer to the specific services to help EFL students. Apart from the Office of International Affairs, these support structures treated East Asian students as the same as the local students. In the following section, I thus explored the specific services for East Asian students.

### 5.2.2 SPECIFIC SUPPORT FOR EAST ASIAN STUDENTS

During the interviews with the different staff members, it was clear that many services, although not designed specifically for East Asian students or even EFL students, were offered that could benefit and assist East Asian students. CUADS, for instance, would support students with limited English proficiency to have extra time allowed for exams, and possibly be allowed to use their electronic dictionaries to overcome language barriers:

*Not specifically – but we can facilitate or coordinate assistance to accommodate needs, for example, if extra-time is needed, or use of assistive technology – i.e. electronic or printed dictionaries, and [we have] facilities to accommodate [them with extra-time].*

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/student-affairs-home/bloemfontein-campus/center-for-universal-access-and-disability-support-\(cuads\)/overview-home/about-the-usd/did-you-know-](https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/student-affairs-home/bloemfontein-campus/center-for-universal-access-and-disability-support-(cuads)/overview-home/about-the-usd/did-you-know-) [Accessed on 10 November 2018]

Participant #PRU expressed the situation of the Postgraduate Research Unit regarding East Asian students as follows: *"No [not specific services for East Asian students], but we try to explain and assist them in "easier" English, especially with regard to forms, web-pages, etc")*. #CTL stated that the staff members *"do read up on theory and educate advisors on the needs of international students", and that they "connect with the international office, and other student support services to make sure students get the assistance they need"*.

#OIA admitted that their unit *"unfortunately have [sic] no central university support for those [East Asian] students"* but that *"[t]he University may consider this in the future"*. The staff from #PGS also stated they currently have *"no English support for postgraduates"* but that the *"new language policy [is] in development which will look at students whose first language is not English"*.

I can thus conclude that while the different units do not provide specific services for East Asian students, they still did their best to help them.

### 5.2.3 SUPPORT TO IMPROVE ENGLISH

While it is clear from the information above, that the units of the institution merely provide generic support to all students, the staff members seem to have empathy with the language barriers of East Asian students. #OIA contends that *"some staff have [sic] indicated to me that they are very fond of students from Asia and adapt their delivery to accommodate the needs of Asian students, e.g. by speaking clearly and slowly."*

Furthermore, staff members of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) stated that they already offered some language modules for non-English speaking students: *"In CTL, the WriteSite [assists students with formulation]."* #CUADS also was aware of the services rendered by CTL (*"The Unit for Language Development within the Centre for Teaching and Learning, also there is the WriteSite within CTL"*). CTL is also coordinating specific modules that could help EFL students (*"Students get assisted in the supplementary language modules such as EALH 1508, and EALH 2508, which are also coordinated from CTL" [#CTL]*). Along the same lines, the Postgraduate School provides workshops for postgraduate students aimed at students whose first language is not English. respondent #PGS indicated that the PGS arranged *"article writing workshops for postgraduate students whose first language is not English. These workshops are presented quarterly"*.

Therefore, from the side of the support units, it became clear that some of the units provided specific assistance for the non-English speaking students to learn English at the University of the Free State.

#### 5.2.4 SUPPORT TOWARDS SOCIALISATION IN AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The importance of getting involved was stressed by #CTL, who indicated that "*students need to get connected to learning communities on campus. Examples would be in residences, student associations, tutorial groups, etc.*". #PGS shared the opinion that her unit helped postgraduate students to socialise through "*coffee mornings where postgraduate students meet their peers (national and international students)*". #OIA indicated the importance of socialisation as follows:

*Social integration of international students is a high priority for our office; however, our present staffing level only allows for limited interventions. As from 2018, we plan an international student Wingman programme, which is essentially a buddy programme. Later, we hope to roll it out to all international students.*

Participant #OIA also referred to the importance of making the lecturers aware of the challenges that international students face. He suggested:

*It will in my view also be necessary to sensitise teaching staff to the need to facilitate integration of non-South African students. For example, classroom interventions may include group work with internationally mixed groups.*

From the above feedback, I concluded that some units did either make suggestions or planned to help students. They tried to help these students to get involved in the class activities.

#### 5.2.5 ADAPT TO THE NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Responding to my question on how East Asian students can adapt better to their learning environment, participant #CTL responded:

*Academic advisors at CTL can help them plan their studies and look at learning new study strategies. Furthermore, the Kovsie Advice gets released to all students quarterly on the Kovsie life page. This magazine is also loaded with tips and advice on how to approach your studies in order to be successful in your academics. Students will also find loads of resources on the Student Success Portal on Blackboard.*

#OIA indicated that *"it would be desirable to develop specialised teaching support programmes for international students, which would assist them in adapting to the SA academic style"*. Such a function, however, would fall within the scope of the work of CTL (*"Such programmes could for example be structured by CTL"* [#OIA]).

Another conclusion I arrived at, based on interview data, was that while some assistance already was in place, specialised teaching support programmes for international students would be helpful.

### 5.2.6 ASSISTING EAST ASIAN STUDENTS TO FIND THEIR WAY WITH TRANSPORT AND ACCOMMODATION

The staff member from the OIA indicated that *"[a]t the moment, we orientate all international students on and off campus. Any student experiencing challenges of this nature (transport or accommodation) is welcome to contact the OIA"*. #PGS reflected that *"a hub could be formed for postgraduate students to inform them of accommodation, transport and even other relevant issues such as safety and financial avenues."*

Staff participant #CTL suggested that the Student Affairs Accommodation Office should assist students to find proper accommodation (*"Student Affairs Accommodation Office can assist with accommodation on and off-campus"*). This was confirmed by #PGS who explained that *"[s]tudent academic services have a component called Residences / Student accommodation (on campus and accredited accommodation)."*

The matter of transport seemed to be more complicated. #CTL complained that: *"As for the transport, that is a difficult one"*. While some information about transport might be shared in residences (*"SRC Information on public transport will be relayed within residence"* [#PGS]), #PSG indicated that this would not be useful for most postgraduate students.

It thus became obvious although the East Asian participants did not have any specific complaints about their transportation and accommodation specific support units were prepared to provide assistance in that regard, if needed.

### 5.2.7 ASSISTING EAST ASIAN STUDENTS TO PROTECT THEIR PERSONAL BELONGINGS

One of the staff member participants from CTL highlighted that foreign students should be aware of the risks on campus:

*Protection services form part of the Gateway<sup>9</sup> programme. Otherwise, there is a BSafe campaign on the UFS Facebook page with snippets on making sure you are safe. Furthermore, there are panic buttons on red poles across the campus, as well as an emergency number on the UFS student card. Students can also visit protection services for more guidance.*

*#OIA also mentioned risks but explained that "this is within the ambit of the orientation. However, all we can do is to sensitise international students. All South African cities are unfortunately challenged by crime".*

Although the student participants did not complain about theft during their interviews, some staff participants from the support units expressed the opinion that it was important to make to foreign students aware of the possibility of criminal incidents on campus (and off campus).

## 5.3 DISCUSSION

In this chapter I discussed the one-on-one interviews I had with staff members who employed worked in support units at the UFS. The presentation of the findings showed that most of units provided some or other kind of support for students; for example, the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) claimed that it could assist all students to improve their academic performance. The Office for International Affairs (OIA) helps all international students to apply for new visas. While the Postgraduate Research Unit (PRU) at the library is geared to help postgraduate students to find appropriate academic articles, the Postgraduate School (PGS) provides various specialised services to all postgraduate students.

These staff members (study participants), however, made it clear that they did not offer special services specifically for East Asian students, or even EFL students, but in their support efforts to all students they hoped to benefit and assist East Asian students too. CUADS, for

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<sup>9</sup> Orientation programme for first-year students

example, gained permission for them to use their electronic dictionaries, which helped them in translating English into Mandarin when they wrote exams.

The students' feedback made it clear that they experienced difficulties to understand English, but a staff member (participant) from CTL stated that they offered classes for non-English speaking students. Meanwhile, they also found it cumbersome to get involved in the class activities. Some of participants from the units, such as CTL, PGS and OIA, provided suggestions or plans to assist students to get involved in the class activities.

To help students adapt to the new learning environment, two of the support units, namely CTL and OIA, already had in place support programmes to assist them, especially concerning teaching. Therefore, it became obvious that although the units reported useful support available for the students, the students did not mention these in their interviews. Thus, it seems that not a lack of services, but rather a lack of communication between the support units and the East Asian students should be addressed.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reported on the analysed data collected from the staff member participants during interviews. Based on their feedback, I concluded that the structures of support at the UFS can be used by East Asian students and might prove useful. However, in the student participants' feedback they did not mention these supports and support units. It might be that they do not know about the support structures of the institution that could assist them in studying at the University of the Free State.

In the next chapter, I reflect on the study, and provide conclusions to the main research questions. Furthermore, I juxtapose the findings of chapter 4 and 5 with the literature as presented in chapter 2. Finally, I make recommendation to institutions of higher learner on how they can support students from East-Asia, based on my literature review, and my empirical findings. Although I collected data at only one institution, I believe the recommendations would be useful beyond the specific case, and thus I present it as such.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to review how East Asian students can be supported when enrolled in English-medium universities in South Africa. In the last chapter, I summarise all the previous chapters, after which I respond to my main research question. This leads to some recommendations. I also reflect on the limitations in my study and give suggestions for further research.

## 6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In Chapter 1, I provided the context of the study, first by explaining why East Asian students often study at foreign universities. One of the main reasons why parents send their children overseas to study is so that they may get a globally competitive education (cf. 1.1). However, literature confirms my personal experience, namely that it is no easy task to simply attend a foreign higher education institution as there are many challenges (cf. 1.3). In my initial reading of the literature, I was unable to find any study in the South African context that could shed light on how East Asian students could be supported, and all of this gave rise to the focus of my dissertation, namely to study and critique how East Asian students are supported when enrolled in English-medium universities in order to improve their learning experiences. This study thus specifically focused on the experiences of East Asian students studying at the UFS as a case study. Each objective that I stated, led to a specific chapter, culminating in this final chapter.

In Chapter 2, I explored the existing literature on different challenges East Asian students face at international English medium universities in order to understand the support that is needed. Challenges identified in literature include challenges *inter alia* related to the following aspects: academic work (cf. 2.2.1), social life (cf. 2.3.1), financial aspects (cf. 2.4.1), accommodation (cf. 2.4.2), and transport (cf. 2.4.3). In terms of academic challenges, these challenges include different classroom behaviour (cf. 2.2.1.1), different teaching approaches (cf. 2.2.1.2), and language barriers (cf. 2.2.1.3). A limited number of studies revealed that some universities have academic support systems to help international students to adapt and overcome the academic challenges (cf. 2.2.2). Social challenges that were discussed in the literature included experiencing a culture shock and racial discrimination (cf. 2.3.1.1), and social isolation (cf.

2.3.1.2). In order to help the students some international universities arrange activities to help them to adapt to the host country (cf. 2.3.2). In addition, East Asian student might also face financial, transport and accommodation challenges (cf. 2.4). From the literature, it is evident that East Asian students face many challenges at international universities. Limited information could be found on the support that is provided at South African universities.

In Chapter 3 I discussed the research design, including the research paradigm, research approach, research methods and integrity of the study in more detail than in Chapter one, and thus paved the way for the empirical work that followed. In this study I adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on the case of one English-medium university in South Africa. I interviewed East Asian students and staff members working at different institutional support units.

Chapter 4 reported on the data that I collected from East Asian students themselves. The interviews confirmed the findings of the literature study maintaining that language formed a major barrier for East Asian students. Apart from having difficulty to understand the language, East Asian students reported that they struggle with different accents amongst South African English speakers, and a fast speaking pace in the classrooms (cf. 4.2.1.1). The students furthermore shared that they experience the assessment methods specifically difficult (cf. 4.2.1.2). Engaging in the class discussions was a particularly challenging aspect of the teaching methodology employed in South African higher education (cf. 4.2.1.3). Although the East Asian participants reported a considerable number of issues that they experienced as hampering their adjustment and academic performance, they mostly admitted that after a few years they were fairly well adapted in the new environment (cf. 4.2.1.4).

Societal issues did not seem to affect them unduly. Most East Asian participants responded that they did not experience financial stress (cf. 4.2.2.1), and they indicated that they were generally satisfied with their living conditions and environments (cf. 4.2.2.2). Some of them possessed cars and were able to drive wherever they needed to go (cf. 4.2.2.3), while some had to rely on their friends or taxis for transport. Although these East Asian student participants in the study reported a considerable number of issues which they found difficult to cope with, they made limited use of the assistance of the support units available on campus (cf. 4.2.3). From their feedback, it became clear that apart from having to cope with cultural differences and language stumbling blocks, East Asian students faced numerous academic challenges when studying at an English-medium university.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the support that is made available by the different units at the institution. These units provide a variety of services, including assistance with language difficulties, study methods, assessment procedures, and more (cf. 5.2). From the responses of the staff participating in the study it was evident that the different units are geared to providing specialised support, including assistance to students to improve their academic performance (cf. 5.2.1.1).; to assist with literature searches, and to provide general assistance with regard to referencing, citation, and plagiarism detection (cf. 5.2.1.3), as well as specialised services for students with disabilities (cf. 5.2.1.5). Apart from academically oriented assistance, student can receive help with practical matters such as the renewal of their visas, as well as more personal matters such as social integration (cf. 5.2.1.2). While the services and assistance are not aimed specifically at East Asian students, but are available to all students, most of these services might benefit and assist East Asian students. Most staff members of the units related that the students concerned very seldom approached them, and they expressed their willingness to expand the current services if specific needs should arise (cf. 5.2.2).

Based on the findings reported, suggestions will now be made that may foster and enhance East Asian students' adjustment to and academic progress at English-medium universities. Although I focus specifically on one university in South Africa, namely the University of the Free State, I believe that insight beyond this context is gained.

### **6.3 HOW EAST ASIAN STUDENTS CAN BE SUPPORTED AT ENGLISHMEDIUM UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

My study showed that East Asian students indeed have difficulties adapting to the new environment which is in an English-medium university in different countries. They gave a number of reasons for their studies being negatively affected, such as language barriers, previous learning experiences, different teaching methods, cultural values, learning methods, and clashing or differing confused

Under the different themes, I will briefly discuss the challenges, and then make suggestions about how universities, in South Africa and beyond, can support students to overcome these barriers.

### 6.3.1 LANGUAGE ISSUES

Many East Asian students face language barriers when they study at English-medium universities (cf. 1.2.2; 2.2.1.3), even though they had to study English from primary school until university (cf. 1.2.2). According to several student participants' feedback, most of them complained that despite receiving English education prior to their current studies, they could not express their viewpoints in the South African classroom (cf. 4.2.1.3), and they had difficulty to understand what their lecturers and fellow students talked about (4.2.1.1[a]). This corresponds with findings of other studies (cf. 2.2.1.3). In my study, student participants also pointed out that they experienced problems to understand the different accents used by some South African lecturers and students (cf. 4.2.1.1[b]).

*To overcome this barrier*, some units at universities do provide services and courses to capacitate and support foreign English speakers (cf. 2.2.2; 5.2.3). Such services include grammar classes or workshops at undergraduate and postgraduate level (cf. 2.2.2.1; 5.2.3), or formal English courses in which students can enrol (cf. 5.2.3).

### 6.3.2 ACADEMIC PRACTICES

Besides language barriers, East Asian students also face other challenges related to their academic work, and institutions need to find ways to support them.

#### 6.3.2.1 CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR

In the literature review, it was shown that many lecturers at international universities observe that East Asian students are very quiet in the classroom. One reason could be that East Asian students are influenced by Confucianism (cf. 2.2.1.1). The values of Confucianism pay attention to the meaning of accord over quarrel, and of collective rather than individual expressiveness, which may cause East Asian students to be quiet in groups/class and rather ask questions or express themselves in private in a one-on-one situation.

Additionally, most East Asian students cannot speak fluent English fluently; therefore, they feel embarrassed to express their ideas and are afraid to be embarrassed in front of the fellow students and to expose their weaknesses (cf. 2.2.1.3). This may have serious consequences for students, not merely regarding their studies, but also in terms of their mental health (cf. 2.3.1). East Asian students thus find it difficult to approach, socialise and interact with local students

and subsequently feel isolated in the classroom, and do not take part in class activities (cf. 4.2.1.3), particularly at the start of a module or a course, and in their early years of study.

*To overcome this barrier*, students may be supported by lecturers and institutions to interact, as such interaction is vital for students, particularly during class activities (cf. 5.2.4). Support can be provided in various ways, including the following:

- Formally organised social events, for instance coffee mornings (cf. 5.2.4), weekend events (cf. 2.3.2), or even on-campus holiday breaks (cf. 2.3.2)
- A buddy system (cf. 5.2.4).

Foreign students should be advised by institutions not to associate in class only with students from their own region (cf. 4.2.1.3), but also take initiative to get to know some local students in the class (cf. 2.3.2). Teaching staff should also be sensitised to the need to facilitate integration of non-South African students (cf. 5.2.4); for instance, classroom interventions may include group work with internationally mixed groups.

### 6.3.2.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the literature, it is shown that in most East Asian countries, rote learning is emphasised in teaching. However, in most Western countries and their former colonies, different teaching and learning methodologies are applied. Therefore, East Asian students need to adapt to these different teaching methods (cf. 2.2.1.2). In the interviews, the student participants proclaimed that differences also occur in the manner and methods of assessment. From the interviews, it became evident that in East Asia the focus usually is on final exams. However, in South African evaluation systems, continuous assessment is usually used, which includes group assignments, presentations, class tests, and so forth. Therefore, most student participants had to change their study pace and learning methods to meet these expectations, and it was not easy for them (cf. 4.2.1.1[c]; 4.2.1.2).

Because of the different education systems in East Asia and South Africa, students seem to need support to help them adjust to the learning environment. *To overcome this issue*, some institutions provide assistance to help them; for instance, some universities assist international students by providing them with writing skills services, which can support them to succeed in written academic assignments (cf. 2.2.2.1). Students may also be assisted in terms of planning for their studies, how to approach their studies, study strategies and other

resources (cf. 2.2.2.1; 5.2.5). Students should be made aware that they will need to study longer hours than local students as this bears fruit (cf. 4.2.1.1[c]).

It is important that students must be made aware of where they can find such assistance and resources (cf. 5.2.5). Institutions also should find ways to assist the students to overcome language barriers in written assignments, and could possibly have a centre where students could go to get help with the assignment writing process, and to have their work edited (cf. 2.2.2.1).

### 6.3.3 SOCIAL ISSUES

Literature suggests that East Asian students experience several cultural challenges, and experience what is called a culture shock when studying in a foreign country (cf. 2.3.1.1). This is as a result of different values and norms, and differences in how situations are interpreted. Local students may act in ways that offend East Asian students and vice versa (cf. 2.3.1.1; 2.3.1.2). East Asian students, for instance, feel uncomfortable to observe certain aspects of social life such as extensive alcohol usage and physical contact such as hugging (cf. 2.3.1.2). Literature further suggest that foreigners often experience racism and xenophobia (cf. 2.3.1.1), and this even result in verbal attacks and physical assaults (cf. 2.3.1.2). However, such experiences were not confirmed by the participants in my study, who only indicated that they felt isolated (cf. 4.2.1.3). Still, it seems like some of the East Asian students rather stay with and befriend other East Asian students than local students (cf. 4.2.2.2).

*To overcome these issues*, higher education institutions might organise activities to empower East Asian students in order to deal with cultural differences. These might include social activities over weekends or during holiday breaks, where they can interact with other students, and get encouragement to mingle with other students (cf. 2.3.2; 5.2.4), particularly at the start of their studies. I also suggests that it would be helpful if specific staff members with cultural knowledge of East Asia, and also more senior students who have spent some time on campus, could advise East Asian students upon arrival on what to expect, and how to respond culturally appropriately in certain situations. In my own case, I found it helpful to have had a co-supervisor who has spent years in South Korea, and thus understood the context from which I came.

#### *6.3.4 DEDICATED UNIT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

It seems to be advantageous to have a dedicated unit at higher education institutions that assists international students, especially with academic and administrative matters. The East Asian students in my study all made use of the UFS's Office of International Affairs. Other institutions may follow suit if they do not have an office for international affairs yet and offer support on academic matters such as registration and subject choice, and non-academic matters such as accommodation and visa applications (cf. 2.4.2; 4.2.7; 5.2.1). As emotional support often is lacking (cf. 2.3.2; 4.2.7), particularly as family and friends are not present or even close, providing emotional support too should receive attention.

#### *6.3.5 FINANCIAL ISSUES AND SUPPORT*

During the literature review it was found that financial issues seem to be a barrier for most international students (cf. 2.4.1). In most situations, international students have to pay higher tuition fees than the local students. Meanwhile, compared to local students, international students seldom are granted the privilege to apply for bursaries. Because of financial issues, some of my Chinese classmates had to leave South Africa (cf. 2.4.1). Yet, during the interviews it became clear that the participants in my study did not really experience financial difficulties and were supported mostly by their parents. Another reason why students studying in South Africa experience fewer financial problems, is that compared to European countries, living costs and study fees in South Africa are more affordable for East Asian foreigners (cf. 4.2.2.1).

From the literature I learnt that some institutions do provide some financial support for students, albeit not as common practice (cf. 2.4.1). Institutions may consider providing scholarships for foreign students, or advise them on where to apply for funding (cf. 5.2.1.2; 5.2.1.4).

#### *6.3.6 ACCOMMODATION*

According to the literature, international students might find it challenging to find appropriate accommodation, particularly when on-campus facilities are limited. Because of their vulnerability, foreign students might get exploited by landlords (cf. 2.4.2). However, none of the participants in my study had such complaints. While they did not get assistance from the

institution itself, they were able to successfully navigate their way to find accommodation with which they were satisfied (cf. 4.2.2.2).

Literature shows that some institutions do support international students by providing them with books or other information resources on accommodation and share information such as housing and tenants' rights and responsibilities (cf. 2.4.2). In most cases though, it seems that while housing and residence facilities are available albeit limited, no special programmes are in place for international students (cf. 2.4.2; 4.2.2.2; 5.2.6).

### *6.3.7 TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND SUPPORT*

My literature study revealed that international students might face challenges with regard to transportation, including high costs and non-reliability of public transport (cf. 2.4.3). However, my empirical data suggested the opposite. Participants were able to deal with the situation with ease, without support from the institution (cf. 4.2.2.3). I need to note, however, that Bloemfontein is a fairly small city, and students at other South African universities might experience more challenges in this regard.

Literature showed that some institutions do provide some assistance in terms of transport, including picking up students from the airport, providing students with information about public transport, and guidance on safe rides (cf. 2.4.3; 5.2.6). In some countries, students are able to use public transport for free, as a result of partnerships with local public transportation systems (cf. 2.4.3).

### *6.3.8 CONCLUSION*

From the above, it is evident that East Asian students experience many challenges. Higher education institutions need to find ways to prepare the students for the challenges they will face and find ways to support the students. From what I learnt from the study, it seems that the most important aspects that need to be addressed are learning to use the language and adapting to a different culture.

## **6.4 REFLECTION**

Now, at the end of the study, I want to reflect on the journey it has taken me. As a non-English speaker, I still have a limited ability to write academic English. In the beginning of the period,

I could not write a complete English sentence. I had to read and re-read the academic articles a number of times to try to understand them and found it very difficult to write sentences. I relied heavily on two different language editors for assistance. I found it difficult to sometimes understand the comments from my supervisors on my work and had to meet with them often to explain and re-explain the comments. At times I felt like giving up, and that I did not understand what was expected of me. My two supervisors often had to explain issues to me in simple English, and I was never without my dictionary. However, looking back now I believe I did learn how to write a proper dissertation. For me, the journey made me strong, and taught me never to give up.

I believe that my study will make a contribution, although there are limitations, and I hope that others will build on what I have done.

#### *6.4.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY*

My study covered an area that has not been researched in the South African context, and thus I believe it makes a unique contribution. Even internationally, little research was published on the topic. Not only was I able to confirm some of the findings of other studies, I also identified particular challenges, for instance, students' struggle to understand accents of different lecturers whose mother tongue is not English. Some of my findings contradict what was found elsewhere, such as that East Asian students are quite capable of sorting out their own accommodation and transport.

#### *6.4.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY*

Although I am proud of the contribution that I made, I have to admit that the study has certain limitations. Firstly, I only focused on one university in South Africa, and my findings might have been different if I had included another two or three universities. My sample of participants was relatively small. I could have tried to find some other students, and also some other units that provide support, also within the UFS.

As a culture insider, I understand that some of participants did not share all their issues with me during the interviews. I was aware, for example, that some of them were victims of theft, as their food, clothes, money, and more, were stolen on various occasions by their neighbours and/or fellow students. I felt that I had failed to get them to disclose such challenges, but at

the same time I thought probing too much would lead to biased information. My inexperience in terms of interviews needs to be noted, and I believe that I learnt from it. Doing interviews may not have been the most appropriate choice, and other qualitative methods that put the participant more at ease to share such as journal writing and different visual methods might have rendered richer information.

In terms of the interview with my Chinese participants, it might have been better if I had a qualified translator to help me translate their interviews from Mandarin to English, as my own limited English could have influenced how I translated it.

The most limiting factor remains my own limited ability to write and speak English. I believe this was a challenge for myself, and also for my supervisors. Numerous times I misunderstood guidance and instructions, and often I had to grapple to find ways to express myself. Still, with perseverance on my side, as well as from the side of my two supervisors, I was able to complete the dissertation.

### *6.4.3 SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH*

I suggest that this study be repeated at other universities in South Africa, and also other countries where the lingua franca is English. The alternative qualitative research methods that I suggested in the previous section should be considered.

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

East Asian countries over the past few decades have become global competitors in the world economy, and China, in particular, as one of the five BRICS countries, has strong links with South Africa. It is thus not surprising that parents send their children to study abroad, in order to advance their ability to become global citizens. It is undoubtedly a challenge to study in a country where the citizens not only speak a foreign language, and use a different alphabet to write, but also have significantly different cultures. Still, many students take the opportunity if it comes their way, and universities who accept these students, have the responsibility to provide them with reasonable support.

For me, the most significant observation was that while the East Asian students were struggling, the university seemed to have numerous support structures in place that could help

them to overcome these challenges. However, the students seemed to be unaware of the services that they could make use of. It became clear to me that it is vitally important that universities find a way to continuously make EFL students aware of the services that could assist them.

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# ADDENDA

## ADDENDUM A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



Faculty of Education

20-Nov-2017

Dear Mr Tao Xie

Ethics Clearance: **Supporting East Asian students enrolled at a South African university**

Principal Investigator: **Mr Tao Xie**

Department: **School of Higher Education Studies (Bloemfontein Campus)**

### APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2017/1384**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours faithfully

Prof. MM Mokhele  
Chairperson: Ethics Committee

Education Ethics Committee  
Office of the Dean: Education  
T: +27 (0)51 401 9683 | F: +27 (0)86 546 1113 | E: NkoaneMM@ufs.ac.za  
Winkie Direko Building | P.O. Box/Posbus 339 | Bloemfontein 9300 | South Africa  
www.ufs.ac.za



## ADDENDUM B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### QUESTIONS TO STUDENTS

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself; how it came about that you are studying in South Africa?
2. How was the experience so far?
3. How do you find the lectures? Was it easy for you to be part of the class, to understand what was going on, to ask questions and to take part in the activities?
4. How do you experience the teaching during lectures? Are you able to understand what is going on? Does it help you to learn the work? Is it similar to what you experiences back home?
5. How is your study going?
6. How do you find the assessment tasks and tests?
7. So, how do you survive? /How do you succeed? [Depending on their response]
8. What is your mother tongue? And how do you deal with the English medium that is offered here?
9. How is your social life on and off campus? How do you get along with other students? Do you find it easy to make local friends? [Look out for xenophobia/racial/cultural prejudices]
10. Do you get any financial support and is it adequate to study in South Africa?
11. Where do you stay? Are you satisfied with your accommodation; is it safe? How did you find the accommodation?
12. How do you get about, moving between your residence, the campus, the mall etc?
13. When you got to South Africa, and to the campus, did you get sufficient assistance from the institution? What could they have done better? [initial assistance to apply and register, to get about, and continuous assistance]

## 采访学生的问题

请介绍一下您自己的个人情况，以及您为什么选择来南非学习？

1. 您目前的学习状况如何？
2. 您怎么看你现在的学习状况？ 您是否很容易融入课堂，理解课堂所讲，理解老师的问题，同时能参加一些课堂活动？
3. 在学习过程中，您经历着怎样的教学？您能不能理解发生了什么？怎么帮您去学习？ 它的教学经历和您的过去的教学相似？
4. 您现在学习情况如何？
5. 您怎么看您的考试或者你的任务评估？
6. 您是怎么克服困难或者你是怎么取得学业成功的？
7. 您的母语是什么？您如何应对这样一个英语的环境？
8. 您在校园内，外的社交生活是怎么样的？您与其他同学相处的如何？您有没有发现很容易和当地人做朋友？
9. 您有没有什么经济来源，同时它能否让你在这里安心学习？
10. 您住在哪里？ 您对你的住宿是否满意，它安全吗？您怎么找到它的？
11. 如果您想回家，去大学，逛商场，您怎么解决？
12. 您什么时候到的南非，及什么时间在大学读书，您有没有得到什么帮助从一些相关机构？他们怎么才能做的更好一些？

## **QUESTIONS TO THE UNITS**

1. What services do you offer to support students in general?
2. Do you have any way to support non-English speaking students? Do you have specific assistance of East Asian students, such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean?
3. Are you aware of any facility in your unit or on campus where non-English speaking students can improve their command of English?
4. Many of the students that I interviewed felt isolated in classes, and they feel that they are not part of the other students. How and where do you think these students can be assisted to interact easier in the classes?
5. Another issue that came up from the interviews is the difficulty the students experience to manage all the assessment tasks, particularly those that are not tests. Assessments here are very different from how it is done in China. Do you think there is any way that students can be assisted to overcome this challenge?
6. Students could find it difficult to navigate their way around with regard to public transport and accommodation. Where could such a student go for assistance?
7. Some students might have experiences with theft, not only money and food, but also clothes. Do the university offer guidance to international students who are not streetwise when they arrive in South Africa?

## ADDENDUM C: LETTER TO STUDENTS

26 Van Zyl Street  
Universitas  
Bloemfontein  
South Africa  
+27(0)613499231

### INFORMED CONSENT

Dear student

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on how East Asian students can possibly be supported at universities in South Africa. The title of my dissertation is thus:

*Supporting East Asian students enrolled at a South African university*

As an East Asian student, at the University of the Free State, I believe your contribution will be valuable, and thus I highly appreciate your participation.

What I will be expecting from you is participate in a one-on-one interview. The questions will be related to how you are experiencing your studies and also the support that could possible enhance your learning experience. The interview should take between 30 and 45 minutes. One-on-one interviews will be held in the UFS library (level 6) and will be recorded. I want to make it clear that your identity will be protected at all times, as I will not include any personal details about the participants in my study. I will give you the questions beforehand to ensure that you are comfortable with the questions. Should you feel like not responding to some of the questions, I will respect that.

I believe that you will not be taking any risks but nevertheless have taken following steps to protect your privacy:

- 1) Your identity will not be made known, and I will ensure that you could not be identified in the report.
- 2) The data will be kept safe at all times, as documents will be protected with a password.

While I greatly appreciate your participation in this important study and the valuable contribution you can make, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you do choose to participate, and an issue arises which makes you uncomfortable, you may at any time stop your participation, with no further repercussions. You are also welcome to contact any of my supervisors if you need further clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Tao Xie ([taoxie19830606@gmail.com](mailto:taoxie19830606@gmail.com))

Supervisor: Dr Lynette Jacobs ([JacobsL@ufs.ac.za](mailto:JacobsL@ufs.ac.za))

Co-supervisor: Dr Marguerite Müller ([MullerM@ufs.ac.za](mailto:MullerM@ufs.ac.za))

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference.

Study: ***Supporting East Asian students enrolled at a South African university***

Researcher: **Tao Xie**

Participant Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

- I give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I understand what the study is all about and what the possible risks are
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribe, but that my name will be excluded from the dissertation.
- I allow the researcher to use the information gathered, but in accordance with the specifications indicated in the letter above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# 知情同意信

尊敬的同学您好：

我是南非自由州大学教育系的研究员—解弢。我想诚挚的邀请您加入我的学术研究—“如何支持东亚学生在南非大学的学习”。作为一名在自由州大学读书的学生，我坚信我的学术论文或许能帮助其他的东亚留学生更好，更快的适应在南非大学的学习。因此，对我而言您的贡献将意义非凡。在这里，我也衷心的表达我的感谢。

我所期待对您的加入形式是一对一的访谈。这个访谈将会涉及到您在自由州大学的学习经验以及相关部门对您的支持。此次访谈的地点将设在大学图书馆 6 楼，时间定为 30 到 45 分钟。为了此次访谈的顺利，我将会对我们的访谈进行语音记录，对此我希望您表示理解。在此我想声明的是，您的个人信息将会完全保密，同时我也保证在我的课题研究中不会出现任何关于您的个人信息。在采访前，我会让您了解到我的采访问题，对于涉及到一些您不愿回答的敏感问题，我会表示完全的尊重和理解。我坚信您不必担心个人信息的泄漏，我们将采用相关的步骤来保护您的信息

1. 您的信息将不会被告知给任何人，同时也不会在我的论文中出现
2. 您的信息将会设置密码被一直保存

我在此将再一次感谢您的参与和奉献。对于整个的采访，您的参与将是自愿的。因此在整个采访过程中，如果您感觉到采访的问题让您感到有所冒犯，您有权利在任何时间终止此次的采访。如果您还有什么相关的问题，也欢迎您发送邮件咨询我的两位导师，最后我将再一次对您此次的奉献表示感谢。

导师: Dr Lynette Jacobs ([JacobsL@ufs.ac.za](mailto:JacobsL@ufs.ac.za))

副导师: Dr Marguerite Müller ([MullerM@ufs.ac.za](mailto:MullerM@ufs.ac.za))

此致  
敬礼

研究课题:如何支持东亚学生在南非大学的学习

研究员: 解弢

采访者姓名:

年龄:

性别:

联系方式:

我作为采访者将自愿加入此次的受访研究

在此次受访过程中, 我明白自己所面对的风险

在此次受访过程中, 我将允许研究员录音我们的访谈内容, 并允许将其转换成其他的形式, 但我的名字将不会出现在研究员的论文中。

我允许研究员使用所有搜集的信息, 但是要求必须和上文的要求一致。

签名: \_\_\_\_\_

日期: \_\_\_\_\_

## ADDENDUM D: EXAMPLE OF LETTER TO UNITS

26 Van Zyl Street  
Universitas  
Bloemfontein  
South Africa  
+27(0)613499231  
Student number: 2014163360

Mr/Ms XXXXX

Director: XXXXX

University of the Free State

Date: 13/09/2017

Dear Mr/Ms XXXX

### **Permission to conduct research**

I am a student at the University of the Free State, doing research for my MA (HES) degree on how East Asian students can possibly be supported at universities. The title of my dissertation is:

*Supporting East Asian students enrolled at a South African university*

First I want to give you some background to this study.

Over the last three decades, China has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and this has helped many Chinese people to rise from poverty. With the increase in international trade and the global economy, China has become an important economic role player internationally. This requires Chinese people to become global citizens, and communicate and interact with ease in the so-called global village. Chinese parents thus think that an overseas education will have several advantages for their children such as learning other languages and cultures, getting a better education, learning from western countries' different sets of values and so on. They treat studying overseas as a long-term investment as it will build better skills for future competition in the job market.

When young people from China and other East Asian countries go to other countries to study, they often find it very difficult to adjust to the new environment. Compared to the local

students, Chinese students may face different barriers, such as social, financial, academic and legal barriers. I am convinced that if Chinese students are to be successful, a way must be found to assist and support them towards the realisation of their dreams. This support could include in language support, social support, academic support and so on, and my study focuses on exactly such possible support.

The aim of my dissertation is therefore to explore and describe the challenges of East Asian students studying at a South African English medium university in order to possibly improving the support provided by the higher education institution.

As part of my studies, I will interview UFS staff members at support structures to understand the services they are currently provided to such international students. I therefore request your permission to participate in an interview. I will take ethical issues into account.

I believe that the outcome of the study will be to the benefit of the institution, as more support will enable more East Asian students to be successful in their studies here.

Your permission to undertake this study will be highly appreciated.

Regards

*Xie Tao*  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tao Xie

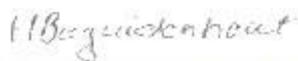
## ADDENDUM E: LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### DECLARATION

7 January 2019

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I herewith declare that I did the language editing of the master's dissertation on *Supporting East Asian students enrolled at a South African university* by Tao Xie, but without viewing the final version. The track changes function was used and the author was responsible for accepting/rejecting the changes and recommendations, and for finalising the document.



**Dr MJ Bezuidenhout** PhD (HPE); BA (Languages)

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