A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HOW BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AN ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION CONTEXT

by

Arthur Atwater Kent Cason Jr.

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experience of cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context for Black university students in South Africa. Data were collected from 10 Black South African university students representing a cross-section of South African society. In-depth individual interviews were used as the primary data collection method complemented by a focus group interview and self-reflection letters written to a hypothetical new student in which the participant recalls his or her experience with cultural identity. Data analysis followed Moustakas’ methodology involving bracketing biases, horizontalization, organizing and classifying significant statements into themes, writing the textural and structural descriptions of participants’ experiences, then integrating the textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon. The findings from this study demonstrate that English as a foreign language student’s cultural identity negotiation is influenced by a complex and intense interaction of multiple cultures. The participants expressed a tension between the received traditions of his or her tribal communities and the call to national identity. In the social context of the university, the participants were further presented with English as the dominant culture embodied in the language of instruction. Significantly, the participants’ experience of cultural conflict with the dominant culture was regulated by his or her level of English-language proficiency and involvement in a social support group.

Keywords: English-medium instruction, cultural identity, social identity, self-efficacy, Africa, university students, phenomenology
Dedication

With thanks and deepest appreciation, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my loving and patient wife, Sarah, who encouraged and supported me through this process. You believed in me when I did not. I would not have been able to do this without you. This is our accomplishment.
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Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21, ESV)

To God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, be all the praise for equipping and sustaining me.

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To Dr. Morgan “Dr. Bum” Phenix. Thank you for encouraging me to tell the story.
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List of Abbreviations

African Union (AU)

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)

Christelik-Nasionale Onderwy (Christian National Education, CNE)

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory (CINT)

Cultural Identity Theory (CIT)

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

English-medium Instruction (EMI)

Institute of International Education (IIE)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

South African Development Community (SADC)

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

University of South Africa (UNISA)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

English as a foreign language (EFL) university students who receive English-medium instruction (EMI) encounter numerous academic, social, and cultural challenges. In addition to the practical challenges of English language acquisition and literacy, learning in a non-primary language also means encountering a culture that challenges the student to assess his or her avowed cultural identity and internally negotiate new identity beliefs (Collier & Thomas, 1988). While education typically involves students learning from the perspective of his or her own culture, this is not the case when learning in the language of another culture group that incorporates the social identity of the dominant language. While learning in the student’s non-primary language, the student is faced with the task of learning new information and acquiring the symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community. The student is presented with a choice to either accept the new identity, reject the new identity, or incorporate the new identity beliefs into an expanded belief system (Collier & Powell, 1990).

Research of the influence of EMI on cultural identity and academic self-efficacy has been incomplete with disparate results that were most often unique to the region and people group being studied (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). This qualitative study intended to broaden the understanding of the influence of EMI on cultural identity negotiation and academic self-efficacy by exploring the lived experience of Black South African university students. The following sections highlight significant background information about the study, my motivation for conducting this study, the problem, purpose, and significance of the study, research questions, and definitions of terms pertinent to this study.
Background

As globalization and the prominence of English as the *lingua franca* of international commerce increases, EMI at the university level has responded to demands from businesses and governments to remain competitive (Adamchik et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Blattès, 2018; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018). An examination of the context for EMI in the South African university system underpins the need for additional qualitative research voicing the experiences of the university students.

Historical

Africa’s language policy in education has been greatly influenced by its response to colonialism. In South Africa, the apartheid government implemented measures limiting educational opportunity for the marginalized majority. Apartheid, literally apartness in Afrikaans, is an ideology that was formalized as a system of government in South Africa and Namibia from 1948 until the democratic elections of 1994 (Amodio & Chiovelli, 2018). Segregation and discrimination were achieved through the apportionment of land with strictly enforced mobility laws, and the restriction of education and employment opportunities for the majority non-White population. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 directed the segregation of all educational facilities according to ethnic lines (Bonner et al., 2012; Mekoa, 2018). Some of the more offensive and disputed provisions included: (a) the transfer of control over African education from the provinces and church missions to the central government, (b) registration of all African schools with the government, (c) staffing by Government-trained teachers, (d) adoption of an official syllabi that had a strong ethnic bias, (e) requirement in primary schools of learning both official languages (Afrikaans and English), and (f) use of the official languages as the medium of instruction (Bonner et al., 2012). Indigenous South African languages were
considered as mother-tongues or vernaculars, and as such they were deemed unacceptable for teaching and learning in educational institutions (Kola, 2018). Isaac Bongani Tabata of the Non-European Unity Movement described Bantu Education as education for barbarism because it was not intended to be intellectual, but was deliberately invented as industrial (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 dictated that all non-White South African schools would use Afrikaans and English in equal measure as the language of instruction, restricting autochthonous languages to religious instruction, music, and physical education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). The Soweto uprising of 1976, launching the formal resistance to apartheid, was a direct response by the African Teachers Association of South Africa to the implementation of the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 (Bonner et al., 2012).

South African universities arose out of the European tradition. Higher education institutions (HEIs) of South Africa were established earlier than the rest of Africa, in large part due to the perception of South Africa as a “little Europe” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p. 58). South Africa’s first university was established in 1829 as the South African College. In 1918, it officially became the University of Cape Town. The mission of the college was to prepare White students in South Africa for degree examinations at the University of London (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Black Africans were not admitted into the university. The first university to accept Black Africans was known as the South African Native College of Fort Hare, established in 1916. The effects of these exclusionary policies have become evident in the increased time it takes for students to complete graduate degrees (Motseke, 2016). The efforts by the South African government and local universities to improve access to higher education have led to an increase in the numbers of African students studying at universities. However, there has not been implemented a support system that takes into consideration the deficiencies of the apartheid
education that has become manifest in the academic writing skills of South African students. Citing a lack of researching and analytical skills, Motseke (2016) submitted that deficiencies in the student’s writing is never neutral, but it is always influenced by factors such as background, culture, exposure, and experiences, which may be contradictory to scientific writing.

During the apartheid era, many academics and HEIs maintained that academic freedom included the freedom to develop and safeguard a group’s language and culture, which provided Afrikaners a platform to defend the government policy of ethnic separation (le Roux, 2018). The dominant political ideology of the Afrikaner government, known as Christelik-Nasionale Onderwy (Christian National Education, CNE), emphasized obedience to authority and the religious, racial, and ethnic dimensions of Afrikaner identity (Dirk & Gelderblom, 2017). Academics at Afrikaans-language universities developed a philosophy of education derived from CNE, called Fundamental Pedagogics that institutionalized and perpetuated the apartheid ideology. The government control of academic dissent at South Africa’s HEIs through the implementation and enforcement of the Suppression of Terrorism Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, and the Defence Act, which could be used to ban people who were seen to provoke or incite political action (le Roux, 2018).

The generation of South Africans born since the fall of apartheid in 1994 have been called the Born Free generation (Kusá, 2018; Maseti, 2018). The Born Frees have grown up in a qualitatively different environment from that of his or her parents and grandparents who were part of the struggle against apartheid (Maseti, 2018). The phrase was coined to describe the generation marked by the transition from the apartheid system of governance to that of a democratic egalitarian government who would reap the benefits of the struggle (Maseti, 2018). However, the term seems to be more aspirational and ideological than real. South African Born
Frees consistently identify transgenerational poverty, unemployment, and access to education as the most serious problems facing South Africans 18 to 35 years of age (Kusá, 2018; Southall, 2020). With the lack of economic progress, the tensions of the historical eras of colonialism and apartheid has been reinvigorated as recently as 2015 with the #RhodesMustFall movement in South Africa’s HEIs (Kusá, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Southall, 2019). The outward symbol of the movement was the removal of a statue of John Cecil Rhodes, seen as an icon of British imperialism, from the campus of the University of Cape Town. However, the movement sought to address deeper challenges than the removal of a statue, including widening socioeconomic inequalities, the expansion of access to higher education, throughput and retention of students, and increased relevance of what is taught in universities and alignment with labor market demands (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Southall, 2019). The students’ call for decolonization of the South African university system is a call for Africanization that involves curriculum change, an epistemological paradigm shift from Eurocentric knowledge to Africa-centered knowledge, and a change of university cultures and systems that are alienating toward the marginalized majority (Methula, 2017).

The post-apartheid constitution declared South Africa a multicultural multilingual society (Constitutional Assembly, 1996). The issue of multilingual education is complex in South Africa where there are 11 official languages. Neighboring African countries such as Zimbabwe and Malawi have an easier choice where the language of instruction is spoken by 90% or more of the country’s population (Mzangwa & Dede, 2019). In Zimbabwe, Shona is the official language of instruction, and in Malawi, Kiswahili is the chosen language for instruction. In contrast, 42% of South Africans speak Nguni languages, including isiXhosa, isiZulu, isiNdebele, siSwati, and several non-official languages, as his or her primary language (Mzangwa & Dede, 2019). The
South African Department of Higher Education and Training (2020a) issued a directive to the nation’s public universities reasserting its recognition that “language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions” (p. 11). In response, higher education institutions were directed to develop, by January 2022, strategies, policies, and implementation plans for promoting multilingualism that include at least two official languages, other than the medium of instruction or language of teaching and learning, for development for scholarly discourse as well as official communication. The policy recognizes the de facto status of English as the language of learning and teaching, but encourages the universities to provide a flexible approach in its implementation and to provide necessary support to students for whom English is not his or her primary language. Further, the universities must demonstrate the investment they have made or will make in the development of official languages into languages of teaching and learning, scholarship, and research (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020a). While HEIs have been at liberty to apply their own language of instruction policies, African languages have been used minimally, exemplified by the fact that no subject other than an African language course is taught in the local languages. In response to the challenge of multilingual education at the tertiary level, South African HEIs have implemented English as the primary or sole language of instruction, with Afrikaans as the alternative (Mzangwa & Dede, 2019). For example, while HEIs such as the University of South Africa have articulated multilingualism in instruction as a core value, all university courses exclusive of African language courses are taught in English (Coyne, 2015; University of South Africa, 2016). Critics argue that this policy prejudices the education system toward Whites who benefited from apartheid as opposed to the previously disadvantaged Black majority for whom Afrikaans or English may be a third language (Mzangwa & Dede, 2019).
As South Africa seeks to expand access to quality education and promote economic growth, language of instruction has been a key subject of deliberation (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper, 2018; Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016). When examining the effects of apartheid-era language policies on South African students, the findings indicate that EMI negatively affected cultural identity and academic self-efficacy (Kaiper, 2018; Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016). While these results are significant, they reflect the perspectives of students who attended school during a political era that ended in 1994 (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper, 2018; Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016). Collier and Bornman (1999) observed that core symbols among Afrikaner, British, Black, Coloured, and Asian focus groups, and perceived that norm violations between groups were influenced by apartheid-era issues of socioeconomic power and control, creating distinct ingroup and outgroup identifiers. Most students now working toward their undergraduate degrees have grown up entirely under the new South African constitution with a new socioeconomic and political structure.

**Social**

In South Africa, English has historically been viewed as the language of anti-apartheid protest (Kaiper, 2018). However, it is still associated with British rule and colonization, as well as an obstruction of Bantu traditions and languages, complicating its presence in South African education (Kaiper, 2018; Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016). Kaiper (2018) suggested that because language is linked to identity, ideology, and power, the use of a language other than the learner’s own language can lead to cultural alienation, economic exclusion, and disempowerment. Although language is intimately connected to the student’s cultural identity, and both have been influenced by the events of South Africa’s history, there has been a shift in balance between the core value of cultural autonomy and the desire for economic opportunity.
Europeans, arriving in South Africa during the 16th and 17th centuries, described the indigenous people as less than human (Beyers, 2017). The idea was borne out of an Enlightenment-era notion that all non-Europeans were uncivilized, as well as mentally, physically, and spiritually inferior. The concept was neither new nor unique, being itself derived from Aristotle’s juxtaposition of the *ethnos* and the *polis*, the primitive and the civilized. It was from this mindset that the apartheid laws ultimately were formed (Beyers, 2017). From this vantage point, the early Christian missionaries found a spiritual belief system in South Africa that was difficult for them to comprehend or describe. When the first Wesleyan missionary, William Shaw, arrived in South Africa in 1823, he planned to build a series of mission stations from Salem, near Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape province to present-day Durban in Kwa Zulu Natal province (Sundkler, 2018). Since that time, the growth of the Christian church in South Africa has placed Christianity in conflict with traditional South African religion on several points. Chidester (2012) goes so far as to suggest that the concept of religion did not exist in pre-colonial South Africa. Rather, it was created and recreated as a response to the Christian missionary who declared the African belief system as superstition. South African traditional religion has no historical founders, no ultimate religious authority, few permanent structures of worship, and no sacred scriptures (Grillo et al., 2019). In general, there is more concern for the reality of the spiritual in this world than the Christian ideal of an afterlife. Traditional religion provides ethical guidance, but the greatest goals are “health and long life; prosperity and proper social standing; fertility and offspring” (Grillo et al., 2019, p. 19).

Traditional religion in South Africa recognizes anonymous ancestors as the founders and keepers of moral order (Grillo et al., 2019; Sundkler, 2018). In response, ancestor worship in South Africa extends beyond remembering or honoring the deceased. It is the belief that the
ancestors continue to be active members of the community. The dead maintain a spiritual connection to living family members and are active in the world of the living. Among the Xhosa, the home is considered a sacred space built upon social relations and through ongoing ritual relations with ancestors (Chidester, 2012). The ancestors perform the vital functions of guiding, protecting, and chastising their descendants; reinforcing the authority of elders; and representing a spiritual reality beyond death. Sacrificial offerings are a common way to honor the ancestors and seek their influence in the world of the living (Chidester, 2012; Grillo et al., 2019; Sundkler, 2018). The *sangoma*, diviners who are alleged to mediate for the living with the ancestors, are often sought to intercede on the behalf of living. The *inyanga*, the traditional healer, may be sought when sick. The presence of the *sangoma* and *inyanga* provide for a great social necessity, creating social cohesion and continuity, connection with the spiritual world, and meeting the temporal needs of the individual in this world. Today, however, the position of the diviner and traditional healer is complicated under post-apartheid constitutional guidelines. As an example, there is an ancient and persistent belief in witches and witchcraft, the protection against which has traditionally been the purview of the *sangoma* and *inyanga*. After a series of killings that were perpetrated in the name of protection against witchcraft, an investigation conducted by a commission formed in the Mpumalanga province concluded that many of these killings were rather for political or personal benefit (Burchardt, 2017). The report concluded that the adjudication of witchcraft by the *sangoma* and *inyanga* cannot be reconciled with legal standards of evidence and proof in South African law. From that report, legislation has been proposed to regulate traditional healers, including prohibiting the use of *muthi* to harm others. *Muthi* is typically an herbal medicine, but may also include animals or animal-derived materials or, in extreme cases, human-derived materials (Nieman, Leslie, & Wilkinson, 2019). At the same time,
the proposed legislation directed the criminalizing of witchcraft, which is the traditional mandate of the sangomas and inyangas that would be banned from pursuing it, and of which the courts have no standard to authoritatively identify (Burchardt, 2017).

The traditional religious practices of South Africa guide every aspect of community life and form a powerful connection to one’s heritage cultural identity. While the religious practices vary from tribe to tribe and sometimes from family to family, the rites and rituals of traditional South African religion are essential to the social structure of the people. Rituals of initiation for men (ulwaluko in isiXhosa) and women (intonjane in isiXhosa) are part of African traditional religion. It should be noted that, while the male ceremony includes a ritual circumcision, there is no similar requirement for the women. However, it is reported that female genital mutilation in the form of genital stretching rather than cutting is practiced among the Venda (Dionisio & Viviani, 2013). There are rituals of negotiation and celebration surrounding engagements and weddings (Grillo et al., 2019). The engagement process and the payment of the lobola (bridewealth) is a highly ritualized three-day ceremony involving, in some tribes, a formal request for marriage and presentation of the lobola, usually represented by some number of cows, even if paid in money. This is followed by slaughtering a cow for feasting, and concluded by the bride and groom smearing one another with cow bile to seal the union. The ritual is intended to promote kinship between the families and strengthen the social bonds (Grillo et al., 2019).

Like South African traditional religion, the concept of ubuntu is focused on the present world. The concept of ubuntu, derived from the Zulu phrase, “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” means a person is a person because of other people (Davids, 2019). Tutu (1999) wrote of ubuntu that “It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is
inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion” (p. 31). *Ubuntu* is rooted in African humanism which extols the belief and way of life that everything is related to human beings, not to other things or to a transcendent deity (Radebe & Phooko, 2017). Radebe and Phooko (2017) asserted that African humanism, as distinct from scientific humanism, does not eschew the religious element of *ubuntu*. Instead, religion is its foundation, inasmuch as that religion is anthropocentric and not theocentric. Morality, as outlined by the community, is used as a measure of acceptable human ethical conduct and the community is the central arbiter and dispenser of justice (Radebe & Phooko, 2017).

In practical application, *ubuntu* embraces every element of African life, representing the best elements of being human. It can be made as personal as the Golden Rule, or fashioned into a corporate statement, or political mandate as it has in South Africa (Radebe & Phooko, 2017). Waghid (2020) suggested that *ubuntu* contains at least three meanings which constitute one’s humanity: sharing, belonging and participation. In a qualitative study, Davids (2019) explored the response of 40 learners to a lesson on apartheid and forced removals literature. In subsequent discussion, 40% of the participants used the word *ubuntu* when describing his or her aspirations for social cohesion. Very closely related to *ubuntu* were the expressions of respect and equality. Davids (2019) concluded that the students inclined toward *ubuntu* as a part of his or her sense of being or identity. In a study on the problem of xenophobia in South Africa, Barbara Nussbaum, as quoted by Koenane (2018), described ubuntu as “the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community” (p. 1). Continuing with a list of *ubuntu* attributes that could easily have been written by the Apostle Paul of godly love, Koenane (2018) wrote:
A person with Ubuntu is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, and willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, are willing to be vulnerable, are affirming of others and do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed and diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of Ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them. (p. 2)

Equating the practice of ubuntu with the biblical instruction to care for strangers, as epitomized in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Koenane (2018) made the case that ubuntu and Christianity are compatible in their response to xenophobia. Koenane (2018) concluded that South African xenophobia and its Afrophobic manifestations of violence against African foreign nationals is a learned trait. The conclusion implies that something that is learned can also be unlearned and the fundamental attitude can be altered.

Theoretical

Collier and Thomas (1988) defined cultural identity as the communicative processes used by individuals to construct and negotiate their cultural group identities in particular contexts. Cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to, a group based on cultural or subcultural categories including nationality, ethnicity, race, language, age, gender, or religion (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Collier (2005) posited that cultural identities are negotiated within a social context and that the individual’s cultural identity may be affected by historical events, political conditions, by others, and the situation or site of interaction. How individuals perceive themselves and how they believe they are perceived by others influences the individual’s sense
of belonging that can create tension between the ingroup and outgroup. For South African university students, this could mean an unwillingness to participate in the language of instruction when it is other than their primary language.

Student achievement in an EMI context is partially dependent on the student’s command of the non-primary language and the individual’s willingness to participate in that language (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2019; Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016). A key variable suggested to influence English willingness to communicate is self-efficacy (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016; Chang, 2015; Kim et al., 2015). Self-efficacy theory presents the concept that belief in one’s ability can and will influence events that affect one’s life and enable the individual to exert control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (2008) explained that the degree to which someone believes in his or her own self-efficacy influences his or her cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional functioning.

This study was built upon the cultural identity theory of Collier and Thomas (1988) with respect to how South African university students negotiate their identity in an English-medium context. Tajfel’s (1982) social identity theory provided a framework for understanding the influence of group membership and how historical and present power relations between native-English and EFL groups influence the self-esteem of the EFL students. Additionally, this study integrated the self-efficacy theory of Bandura (1977) with respect to the student’s cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional functionality.

**Situation of Self**

The seed for this study was planted from my experience as an instructor at a HEI in South Africa teaching students in English whose primary language was not English. Some of the students struggled with language skills and understanding concepts, and against the requirement
of being taught in English. I felt it was important to understand the influence of EMI on the individual student at a core-belief level. I do not have any relationship with the research site or the participants, which minimizes potential biases in the research.

I selected a phenomenological study because the purpose was to explore the lived experiences of individuals who have shared a common experience (e.g., learning in an English-medium context in post-apartheid South Africa). Patton (2015) wrote that in a phenomenological study there is the assumption that a shared experience produces an essence or essences. Husserl believed that phenomenology encompassed the discovery of essences in knowledge; it is the experience that gives substance (Moustakas, 1994). The only way for the truth of the South African university students’ shared experience to be known and understood was for the stories to be related firsthand. This study intended to investigate common themes through the lived experience of the participants. To the end of discovering the essence of the participants’ stories, personal interviews were conducted with former and current university students to provide a rich description of the students’ attitudes and perceptions toward EMI, and perceptions of his or her academic self-efficacy.

I assumed a naturalistic research paradigm which emphasizes that phenomena should be studied in context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of naturalistic research is to develop context-specific statements about the multiple, constructed realities of the participants. My ontological assumption was that the ultimate nature of reality is objective (Moreland & Craig, 2017). That is, there is reality that exists independent of a conscious entity to observe it. However, an individual’s perception of reality is influenced by contextual factors, including histories, socioeconomic status, and personal worldview and are, therefore, constructed subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially,
expressed through the language of the observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My epistemological assumption was that knowledge is gained through the subjective experiences of people and, therefore, research must be conducted in the context in which the participants live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My axiological assumption was that inquiry is value-bound, and those values are grounded in the value systems of the researcher and participants, expressed in the selection and framing of the research problem, the paradigm and theories that guide the research, and the context in which the research is being conducted. These values must be acknowledged while measures are taken to mitigate against bias and protect the credibility of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Problem Statement

In addition to the common challenges of higher education, research indicates that students instructed in languages other than their primary language encounter additional difficulties, including hindered ability to explore abstract concepts (Airey et al., 2017; Cankaya, 2017; Chun et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018), lack of academic self-efficacy and motivation (Cankaya, 2017; Chun et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2017), culture loss (Cankaya, 2017), and conflict with national or cultural identity (Dearden, 2016; Sung, 2016; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). While the South African constitution declares a multicultural multilingual society (Constitutional Assembly, 1996), all university courses apart from language studies are taught in English (Coyne, 2015; University of South Africa, 2016). However, as South Africa seeks to expand access to quality education and promote economic growth, language of instruction continues to be a key subject of deliberation (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper, 2018; Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016; Mzangwa & Dede, 2019). Non-cognitive factors related to language of instruction including academic self-efficacy, motivation, and cultural identity are
cited as significant predictors of academic performance and retention in university students (Bandura, 1977; Chang, 2015; Farruggia et al., 2018; Whannel & Whannel, 2015). Researchers from Europe and Asia have concluded that the influence of EMI on cultural identity and academic self-efficacy are complex and context-dependent in nature and cannot be generalized globally, but need to be studied independently within a region or people group (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015).

The problem that needed investigation was how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context. Comparable research has examined the perception of EMI by higher education teachers, administrators, and students in general terms. However, the implications on cultural identity have not been thoroughly considered (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016). Research results considering the experiences of students regarding EMI and cultural identity indicate that results in one region cannot be generalized to other regions of the world (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context. For this study, English-medium instruction was defined as a system or program of education that employs English as the primary medium of instruction in settings where English is not the primary language of the student (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Kim et al., 2017) Formatting... please wait. There were three theories guiding this study. Collier and Thomas’ (1988) cultural identity theory provided a basis for understanding how EFL students form identity within their primary culture group and internally negotiate the choices and
challenges raised by learning in a foreign language relative to their core beliefs. Tajfel’s (1982) social identity theory provided a framework for understanding how historical and present power relations between native-English and EFL groups influence the self-esteem and pride of the EFL students. Finally, Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory described how the internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation.

**Significance of Study**

The question of how learning in a language other than one’s primary language influences cultural identity formation and negotiation in higher education students, and how that influences academic achievement is a subject that has received insufficient attention and little research (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016; Sa’d, 2017). Comparable research has examined the perception of EMI by higher education teachers, administrators, and students in general terms, but the growth of EMI has been so rapid that the implications on cultural identity have not been thoroughly considered (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016). Where the influence of EMI on cultural identity has been considered, research results indicate that the influence of EMI on cultural identity is a regional product with limited transferability, recommending additional research in this area (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). This research sought to fill the gap with data relevant to understanding the lived experience of Black South African university students with respect to the influence EMI has on cultural identity, and whether that may have some influence on academic performance and retention.

Non-cognitive factors, including academic self-efficacy and cultural identity, are significant predictors of academic performance and retention in university students (Bandura,
Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to influence events that affect one’s life and exert control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1977). The degree to which someone believes in his or her own self-efficacy influences his or her functioning in four categories: cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional (Bandura, 2008). Cultural identity is an individual’s identification with a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings, and a set of norms for conduct within that group (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The student’s ability to construct and negotiate his or her cultural group identities in particular contexts that produce tensions that must be resolved when the individual’s chosen identities are at odds with the ones enforced and imposed by others (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Theoretically, this study is significant because it builds upon and demonstrates the implications of Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory and Collier’s and Thomas’ (1988) cultural identity theory in the context of a South African university.

This study is practically significant because it provides insight into the experiences of Black South African university students as they negotiate their cultural identity in an EMI context. The Bologna Process, developed by volunteer European countries to adapt the higher education system to a post-industrial knowledge society and economy, has influenced the shape of higher education in southern Africa. The South African Development Community (SADC) adapted aspects from the Bologna experience in terms of credit transfer, a higher education qualification framework, and quality assurance systems (Alemu, 2019). In the higher education setting, gatekeepers such as university policy makers, administrators, and instructors determine and enforce the language of instruction (Dirk & Gelderblom, 2017; Garska & O'Brien, 2019). Advocates for an EMI policy point toward the growing need to be competitive in a global market
(Adamchik et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Sah & Li, 2018). At the same time, deep-rooted socioeconomic, cultural, and political complications challenge the implementation of educational reform in Africa. As educational leaders look at the lived experience of Black South African university students, a deepened understanding of how these students negotiate their cultural identity in an EMI context would provide knowledge of the challenges linguistically minoritized students may encounter in their educational experiences and help to broaden perspectives on those students’ practices in relation to language competence and academic self-efficacy. This research provides guidance for teaching and assessment practice, recruitment practice and policy for EFL students, and student support services.

**Research Questions**

For this study, the following questions established the research agenda and guide the enquiry and analysis.

**Central Research Question:** How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context?

Cultural identities are negotiated within a social context that may be affected variously by historical events, political conditions, by others, or the situation or site of interaction (Collier, 2005, 2009). Cultural identity is identifiable in three distinct yet inter-present layers (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The individual identity of the student is reflective of how the individual interprets his or her cultural identity in the context of personal experiences, including the individual’s understanding of the multiple degrees of differences and similarities among group members (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Relational identity is constructed through relational communication, individuals interacting with one another exhibited through adherence to socially
appropriate norms of behavior. Communal identity is the use of communication in the creation, affirmation, and negotiation of shared identity (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The introduction of English as the medium instruction necessarily requires that the student reinterpret his or her cultural identity with respect to the social context and related factors in which learning occurs. The resulting reconception of cultural identity arrives at the intersection of the student’s cultural positioning and identification as historical, contextual, and relational constructions (Chen & Collier, 2012; Collier, 2005; Thompson & Collier, 2006). This central research question explores how students experience reconceptualized cultural identity in the context of English as the language of instruction. The following support questions add clarity and depth to the central question.

**Support Question One:** How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe their social relation to those outside their self-identified ingroup?

Social identity theory focuses on intergroup and intragroup relationships (Guan & So, 2016) characterized by a process of categorization wherein the individual seeks to understand his or her social context (Tajfel, 1982). Social identification occurs when the status of the group, and similarity to other members of that group become foremost (Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Group membership becomes an important source of pride and self-esteem that leads to social categorization, dividing individuals into those who are part of the ingroup and those who are part of the outgroup (Turner, 1982). Intergroup comparisons may lead to negative comparison outcomes resulting in the perception of ingroup inferiority (Bochatay et al., 2019). English as the language of instruction can afford the English language a measure of symbolic power (Lu, S. & Ares, 2015). The suppression of one’s primary language and culture to adapt to
the dominant language and culture can create an imbalanced power relation between social
groups, adversely impacting the student’s identity (Nguyen & Hamid, 2017). As the student’s
social identity formation is interleaved with his or her cultural identity, this research support
question seeks to clarify the student’s experience and provide meaning for his or her negotiated
identity as the relationship to other groups in the university context is considered.

**Support Question Two:** How do Black South African university students who have
received English-medium instruction perceive their academic self-efficacy?

Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s personal agency with respect to events that affect one’s
life and the ability to exert control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1977).
Efficacy beliefs influence the way in which individuals think and those thoughts influence what
actions they choose to pursue, their goals and commitments, and how much effort they are
willing to put forth (Bandura, 2008). The degree to which the student holds his or her sense of
academic self-efficacy influences his or her functioning, expressed in four categories: cognitive,
motivational, emotional, and decisional (Bandura, 2008). Intrinsic factors, such as stress
management and coping skills, and extrinsic factors, including the social aspects of self,
relationships, and communication with others combine to influence the individual’s self-efficacy
(Guan & So, 2016). One’s social identity with a social group is indicative of one’s perceived
social support from that group (Ahn et al., 2017; Guan & So, 2016). In turn, the perceived
support from that social group provides self-efficacy information to the individual in the form of
vicarious experience and social persuasion. Since the student has no control over the language of
instruction, this research support question explores the student’s perception of academic self-
efficacy considering English as the medium of instruction, the ways in which social support has
contributed to that perception, and how the student’s sense of academic self-efficacy has contributed to the student’s social, and thereby cultural identity.

Support Question Three: What are the challenges experienced by Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction?

EMI presupposes that the learner is sufficiently skilled in English to participate in the education process. English language literacy skills in multilingual countries are one of the concerns surrounding EMI (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016; Morrison & Evans, 2018; Ramiro & Perez, 2015). Some research suggests that academic achievement is being negatively influenced because learners do not have an acceptable language proficiency or lack conceptual understanding of English (Chang et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2016). An increase in the use of language learning strategies has been shown to have a correlative relationship with the student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and English-language proficiency (Kim et al., 2015). This support question seeks to discover the student’s language proficiency self-perception considering the rigorous demand of higher education and thereby provide additional depth about how the student experiences his or her cultural identity.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided to clarify the meaning of key terms used throughout this research.

1. Academic self-efficacy – Academic self-efficacy is defined as “personal judgments of one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated types of educational performances” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 203).

2. Apartheid - Apartheid, literally apartness in Afrikaans, is an ideology that was formalized as a system of government in South Africa and Namibia from 1948 until
the democratic elections of 1994 (Amodio & Chiovelli, 2018). Segregation and discrimination were achieved through the apportionment of land with strictly enforced mobility laws, and the restriction of education and employment opportunities for the majority non-White population. While the principles of segregation and Afrikaner protectionism were practiced in South Africa prior to 1948, for the purposes of this study, apartheid and apartheid-era refer to the formalized system of government and period in which it was in power.

3. Cultural identity (CI) – Cultural identity is an individual’s identification with a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings, and a set of norms for conduct within that group (Collier & Thomas, 1988).

4. Cultural socialization – Cultural socialization is the purposeful transmission and preservation of heritage cultural content (Vietze et al., 2019).

5. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – English as a foreign language denotes the teaching or speaking of English in a non-English-speaking region (Chang et al., 2017).

6. English-medium instruction (EMI) – English-medium instruction is a method of teaching whereby content is presented through the medium of English in a region where English is not the primary spoken language (Briggs & Smith, 2017).

7. Power relation – The concept of language and power relations focuses on ways in which norms of discourse are shaped, with authority and hierarchy identified as two important influencers within this discussion (Bourdieu, 1991).
8. *Reciprocal determinism* – Bandura’s (1978) concept of reciprocal determinism states that a person’s behavior influences and is influenced by personal and environment factors.

9. *Self-efficacy* – Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to influence events that affect one’s life and exert control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1977).

10. *Social context* – Social context is the social setting in which something happens or develops, including the individual’s cultural background, historical events, political conditions, and the site of interaction. Collier (2005) posited that cultural identities are negotiated within a social context that may influence the individual’s cultural identity.

11. *Social identity* – Tajfel (1978) described social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 68).

12. *Ubuntu* – Ubuntu is a South African ideological, theological, or political concept for which there is no universally agreed upon definition. Waghid (2020) suggests that, based on a description given by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, it contains at least three meanings, which constitute one’s humanity: sharing, belonging and participation.

**Summary**

As enrollment of EFL students in HEIs and programs where English is the language of instruction rises, it is important to understand the academic, social, and cultural challenges that the student must confront. The body of literature is extensive with respect to EMI in Europe and
Asia-Pacific, but fails to substantially address the historical and cultural context of the African continent, and South Africa in particular. This transcendental phenomenological study is intended to broaden the understanding of the influence of EMI on cultural identity and academic self-efficacy by exploring the lived experience of Black South African university students.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

English-medium instruction (EMI) has had a presence in non-English Europe since World War II, but has increased dramatically since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Kushir, 2016). The Bologna Process is a collection of agreements whereby member nations have consented to a framework for comparability in higher education standards, policies, and methodologies. The Bologna Declaration established six primary objectives: (a) adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; (b) adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate; (c) establishment of a standard system of credits; (d) promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with regard to access to study and training opportunities and to related services for students, and recognition of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training for teachers, researchers and administrative staff; (e) promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies; and (f) promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, interinstitutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 1999). While implementing the principles and guidelines of the Bologna Process, English-medium undergraduate degree programs in Europe have increased from 55 in 2009 to 2,900 in 2017 (Sandstrom & Neghina, 2017). Similarly, combined European undergraduate and graduate degree programs taught in English have increased from 725 programs in 2001 to 8,089 in 2014 (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). The Asia-Pacific region has taken a less unified approach to EMI, employing a more country-specific method where each university has examined its language
policy in higher education and determined whether English-medium degree programs are practical, profitable, and desirable (Chun et al., 2017; Dearden, 2016; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Sung, 2016; Wang et al., 2018).

Africa’s history regarding higher education may be divided into three major phases or periods: precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial (Alemu, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Precolonial higher education developed from an amalgamation of autochthonous and Muslim intellectual traditions centered in the Nile Valley Egyptian-Nubian-Ethiopian civilization as well as the Mali-Songhai-Ghana Timbuktu intellectual tradition (Alemu, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Higher education in the colonial era was advocated for by Africans, but was greatly influenced philosophically and methodologically by Great Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. While educators and politicians, such as Edward W. Blyden of Liberia, James Africanus Beale Horton of Sierra Leone, and J.E. Casely Hayford of Ghana fought for the establishment of the “African university” rooted in African culture and language, the colonial powers imposed the “university in Africa” modeled after European universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p. 55). Post-colonial higher education started to appear in the 1960s as African nations began to decolonize (Alemu, 2019). At its core, the goal of decolonizing the university in Africa was to formulate “a new philosophy of higher education informed by African histories, cultures, ideas and aspirations as well as a fundamental redefinition of the role of the university” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p. 61) . The Bologna Process was introduced into Africa through the decisions of the African Union (AU), sub-regional organizations, conference discussions, individual Bologna member states, and international organizations (Alemu, 2019; Woldegiyorgis, 2018). The European Bologna Process has influenced African nations to varying degrees and in different ways. In southern Africa, the
SADC adapted aspects from the Bologna Process in terms of credit transfer, a higher education qualification framework, and quality assurance systems (Alemu, 2019). The Bologna Process was conceived and developed by European countries as a response to the challenges and societal shifts from industrial stage to post-industrial knowledge society and economy, but has influenced the shape of higher education in southern Africa which has not attained a similar level of growth (Alemu, 2019). At the same time, deep-rooted socioeconomic, cultural, and political complications challenge the implementation of educational reform in Africa.

This literature review examined the theoretical framework pertinent to students’ experience negotiating their cultural identity within an English-medium context and the potential implications for the students’ sense of academic self-efficacy. Further, this literature review looked at the rationale supporting the growth of EMI, the relationship between language and identity including the connection between language and power relations in society, and the known implications relative to learning in English for EFL students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Identity is the state of both being and becoming, a product and a process. It concerns how people see themselves, how they relate to others and identify with others around them, and how social interaction shapes an individual’s perception of his- or herself (Adams et al., 2016; Sa’d, 2017; Sung, 2016). In the dynamic sense of social interaction, people define themselves through similarities to and differences from other people and social groups within a given context (Adams et al., 2016; Sa’d, 2017; Sung, 2016). Culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, and language are group characteristics with which the individual identifies and creates a sense of membership. A foundational theorist in anthropological linguistics, Sapir (1921, 1963) observed that the world and worldview of a society are fundamentally built upon the language habits of that society.
According to Sapir (1963), each distinctive language is representative of equally distinctive realities implying that people who speak in a different language must also perceive the world differently. Sapir (1963) asserted that “language is a guide to social reality” (p. 162), declaring that people are at the mercy of the language that has become the medium of expression for their society. Some researchers emphasize that the acquisition of a new language is necessarily conjoined with the adoption of specific ways of thinking, styles and norms of behavior, and manners of expression (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Sa'd, 2017). Consequently, the acquisition of a second language involves inclusion into the second culture, rather than simply the assimilation of a linguistic code. New words, new grammar, and new pronunciations are characteristics of another ethnolinguistic community. The student is not being required to learn about them, but to acquire them and to make them part of his or her own language. This involves imposing elements of another culture into one's own identity. Viewed in this context, students who learn another language must adopt or adapt to the ways of thinking, styles and norms of behavior, and manners of expression contained within the non-primary language. To further understand the process by which individuals negotiate cultural identity in the presence of a system that enforces the use a language other than their primary language, the theoretical foundation for this present study rests upon the interpretive cultural approaches of Collier and Thomas’ (1988) cultural identity theory (CIT), Tajfel’s (1982) social identity theory, and Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory.

Cultural Identity Theory and Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory

The study of identity has been associated with the question of whether identity is formed inside an individual’s consciousness or a societal construct. Identity theory traces its beginnings to the writings of George Herbert Mead who asserted that the self is a social process wherein the
“Me” is the internalized response to one’s social context and the “I” is the response to the “Me” (Mead & Morris, 1934). In other words, the “Me” is how the individual responds to the attitudes and ascriptions of the community. Whereas the “I” is how the individual responds to those expectations. Later theorists proposed that identity development progressed in a linear process of interaction with society through clearly demarked stages until the individual achieved a stable identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Developmental process models have drawn significantly on the groundwork of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966), emphasizing exploration and belonging as two key factors affecting cultural identity development. Exploration involves active behavioral and cognitive attempts to secure information about the cultural groups to which one belongs. In contrast, belonging denotes the establishment of an attachment to one’s cultural group (Meca et al., 2018).

Examining the social context of one’s culture as a key factor of one’s identity formation, Collier and colleagues asserted that cultural identity is best described as an emergent, contextual process in which there is a system of shared symbols, norms, and meanings in a particular context (Collier & Powell, 1990; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Collier and Thomas (1988) described cultural identity as a negotiated “identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct” (p. 113). In this sense, cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to, a group based on cultural or subcultural categories including nationality, ethnicity, race, language, age, gender, or religion (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Cultural identity theory was first forwarded by Collier and Thomas (Collier & Thomas, 1988) to advance understanding of the communicative processes used by individuals to construct and negotiate cultural group identities in particular contexts. Collier (2005, 2009) posited that cultural identities are negotiated within a social context and that
the individual’s cultural identity may be affected variously by historical events, political conditions, by others, and the situation or site of interaction. Subsequent critiques of Collier’s research called for the recognition of the influence of ascriptions and representations found in public texts and the role of structures such as institutional policies and ideologies on identity politics and negotiation (Collier, 2009). In response, Collier and colleagues updated the conception of cultural identity, which they renamed to cultural identity negotiation theory (CINT), as intersecting cultural positioning and identifications that are “historical, contextual, and relational constructions” (Chen & Collier, 2012; Collier, 1998, p.131; Thompson & Collier, 2006). Cultural identity negotiation theory calls for attention to the material and social consequences of cultural identity negotiation focusing on ascriptions that subjugate certain groups of people (Collier, 2009).

Collier and Thomas (1988) posited that there are different properties associated with cultural identity enactment and negotiation, including (a) avowal and ascription, (b) scope, (c) salience or prominence, and (d) intensity. Avowal is the personal articulation of how the individual views his or her own group identity, and ascription refers to how the individual is perceived by others. In this sense, identity construction is a reaction to past ascriptions and ongoing avowal of identity (Collier, 2005, 2009). Cultural identities differ in scope in terms of the number of people or frequency with which a certain identity such as nationality or class applies (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Collier and Thomas (1988) further proposed that some cultural identities differ in the degree of importance relative to other potential identities depending on the situational context, suggesting that some cultural identities might be temporarily sublimated in favor of others. Given that one’s cultural identity is a significant, but not the only identity influencing one’s behavior, one aspect of identity predominates in a
situation as a function of the specific relationships of the participants and the context of their interaction. The degree to which the individual expresses investment in cultural identity as a central element of one’s identity domain is a measure of intensity (Collier & Thomas, 1988).

Cultural identities have both content and relational aspects including (a) modes of expression, (b) enduring and changing aspects of identity, and (c) individual, relational, and communal identity. The use of core symbols are expressions of a group’s cultural beliefs and theories about the world around them (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Names, labels, values, goals, and norms are modes of expression that a cultural community share and follow to create a sense of belonging within a cultural group, affirming shared identity. Collier and Thomas (1988) suggested that some aspects of culture are more robust while others are more tenuous and susceptible to change. Changeable features tend to be those that have become irrelevant to the group or that are necessary for the group to adapt due to social, political, economic, and contextual factors. Two psychological processes have been identified as key mechanisms in cultural identity dynamism (Ferguson et al., 2017). Alternation theory posits that individuals in a multicultural context accentuate or de-emphasize different aspects of their group membership through changes in personal behaviors such as language or appearance. Additionally, ethnic identity salience, which is directly affected by social context, is indicative of the awareness or importance of a single ethnic identity (Ferguson et al., 2017).

Cultural identity can be subdivided into three inter-present layers (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Individual identity refers to how an individual understands his cultural identity based on distinct personal experiences, including the individual’s understanding of the multiple degrees of differences and similarities among group members. Relational identity is constructed through relational communication, individuals interacting with one another as exhibited through
adherence to socially appropriate norms of behavior. Communal identity is the use of communication in the creation, affirmation, and negotiation of shared identity. Actions and interactions of the group through rituals, rites and holiday celebrations reflect the communal identity of the group.

The degree to which the individual’s cultural identity negotiation is impacted by dissimilar cultural expectations is, in part, influenced by the intensity and salience of the individual’s belief in his or her heritage culture (Meca et al., 2018). Within a community, there are social, cultural, and political dissimilarities between social groups leading to substantial social inequalities drawn on the distinction between linguistic or cultural behavior (Aristova, 2016). The distinctions between two or more coexisting cultures may be relatively minor. However, they are vital factors in negotiating one’s cultural identity, as the degree of convergence to the existing cultural or linguistic norms within a community affects the person’s degree of sameness. Lundgren and Scheckle (2019) observed that Born Free youth in South Africa partially draw on local cultural traditions as they negotiate identity formation. However, there is a tension between the received traditions of their families and the call to national identity creating an in-between space. Strong family connections, highlighted by the positive influence of the youth’s grannies, along with reverence for the traditions, language, and clothes of their cultural group were positive indicators of individual identity formation (Lundgren & Scheckle, 2019). Sharing a common language is a central component of cultural identity formation and negotiation as it connects people within the history, values, and beliefs of the community (Aristova, 2016).

For the university student, identity negotiation is a dialog between achieving interactional goals and satisfying identity-related goals (Adegbola et al., 2018). Students engage in the dual
acts of authenticating their self-concepts and adjusting their self-concepts to accommodate others because of the inherent need for interaction. In the context of the university student, the need for interaction is further motivated by social and economic advantage (Aristova, 2016). Therefore, when people have choices about identifying cultural identities, they must internally negotiate their cultural identities relative to their core beliefs (Collier & Thomas, 1988). This internal negotiation process prompted by adaptation to a culturally heterogenous environment produces tensions between incompatible or conflicting cultural positions within the self that must be resolved when the individual’s chosen identities are at odds with the ones enforced or imposed by others (Ozer et al., 2017). Within the EMI context, the student is presented with the challenge of learning in other than his or her primary language as a requirement to participate in the learning process. What learning in English represents to the student includes the ascribed beliefs, traits, and values that the language embodies. The secondary culture is reinforced when English language materials, emphasizing Western literature and culture, are preferred, emphasizing the dominance of Western culture and ideology by linking them with English as the language of instruction (Haidar & Fang, 2019). The acquisition of and learning in a non-primary language challenges the student to assess his or her avowed cultural identity beliefs relative to the identity beliefs associated with learning in English and internally negotiate new identity beliefs. The student is presented with a choice to either accept the new identity, reject the new identity, or incorporate the new identity beliefs into an expanded worldview (Collier & Powell, 1990). When weighing the relative salience of his or her heritage cultural identity, or specific characteristics within his or her heritage cultural identity, against the receiving cultural identity stream represented in the university context, four strategies are available to the student (Ozer et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2018). Integration or biculturalism is a strategy wherein the student maintains
his or her heritage cultural identity while becoming a participant in the receiving culture. Integration is characterized by identifying and unifying multiple cultural identities together within the self. Additionally, the individual may identify with a superordinate identity that includes different cultural identities, creating a bridge between the heritage culture and multiple cultural identities. The result becomes a hybrid cultural identity that is unique to that individual. Assimilation occurs when the student minimizes or abandons his or her heritage cultural identity in favor of the receiving cultural identity. Assimilation is characterized by the assumption of the values, behaviors, and beliefs of the dominant culture. In contrast, separation is marked by the student’s maintenance of his or her heritage cultural identity while rejecting the receiving culture. Finally, marginalization, although less frequently encountered, occurs when the student participates in neither his nor her heritage cultural identity nor the receiving cultural identity. In this sense, negotiation of cultural identity through the practice of selectivity is a voluntary process (Ozer et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2018).

The present research study afforded the researcher and participants with a framework to identify, articulate, and examine three key individual properties of cultural identity: (a) avowal and ascription, (b) salience, and (c) intensity. The questions contained in the interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection writing exercise encouraged participants to explore and give expression to their cultural identity perception (avowal) and how they believe they are perceived by others (ascription), the importance of their cultural identity relative to other potential identities (salience) in an EMI classroom, and the degree to which the student is invested in his or her cultural identity (intensity). In the setting of this study, university students have come from differing cultural and lingual backgrounds. However, as stated, cultural identity is an emergent, contextual process (Collier & Powell, 1990; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Therefore, as
students have engaged in the university culture, each has been challenged to reconceptualize their cultural identity in the context of English-medium instruction where the language of instruction represents and communicates a culture other than their own. The participant’s narrative provided insight into the ways in which historical events, political conditions, the influence of others, and the situation interplay with English-medium instruction to form how the participant experiences cultural identity.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel (1978) described social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 68). Social identity theory is a social psychological theory that asserts that one’s positive or negative social identity conception is based principally on intergroup social comparisons (Tajfel, 1982). Tajfel (1982) described identity as the experience, enactment, and negotiation of dynamic social identifications by group members within a specific context. The central tenet of the theory entails exploring intergroup and intragroup dimensions and specifying socio-cognitive generative details of identity dynamics (Hogg et al., 1995). Social identity theory is rooted in the concept that individuals gain a sense of importance and relevance through the groups to which they belong by emphasizing aspects that are similar in their own group and aspects that are different between groups (Bochatay et al., 2019; Turner, 1982). Social identity is a product of communicative behavior wherein the individual expresses his or her belonging to various groups and assesses group image and reputation (Guan & So, 2016). Thus, social identity theory involves two socio-cognitive processes: categorization and self-enhancement (Hogg et al., 1995; Turner, 1982). As individuals identify with multiple groups, they tend to experience multiple identities at once. An individual
may perceive him- or herself simultaneously as a member of global, national, and familial communities depending on the context, without conflict.

The mental process of social identity theory: (a) social categorization, (b) social identification, and (c) social comparison, is not an artificial process, but intrinsic (Turner, 1982). The application of social identity theory involves a process whereby the individual categorizes people in order to understand his or her social context (Tajfel, 1982). A social category prescribes the groups’ attributes that affiliates an individual to an ingroup. The social group attributes are described in terms of normative perceptions of an ingroup against an outgroup. Self-enhancement is derived from the idea that people have a basic need to see themselves in a positive light in comparison with others and guides the social identity categorization process (Hogg et al., 1995; Turner, 1975, 1982). The individual adopts the identity of the group one perceives him- or herself as belonging to, which therefore, encourages positive ingroup responses (Turner, 1982). Social identification can refer to the process of locating oneself, or another person, within a system of social categorization, the process whereby an individual internalizes some form of social categorization so that it becomes a component of the self-concept, or to any social categorization used by a person to define him- or herself and others (Turner, 1982).

Group membership becomes an important source of pride and self-esteem that leads to social categorization, dividing individuals into those who are part of the ingroup and those who are part of the outgroup (Turner, 1975, 1982). Once categorization and identification are accomplished, the individual compares his or her group to other groups. In early experimentation, Tajfel divided participants into two groups and asked each to give credit points to the other participants in the experiment (Ehala, 2018). Tajfel observed that the participants
favored members of their ingroup, even though no one knew each other before the experiment, and everybody was assigned to the two groups randomly by the toss of a coin. Because the group members had nothing in common except the fact that they were assigned to the same group, Tajfel inferred that the bias to favor ingroup members must be a basic psychosocial tendency hardwired into the human brain (Ehala, 2018). The degree to which the individual is conscious of the beliefs, values, norms, and stereotypes associated with his or her group identity (identity salience), they will likely interact with other people in context so as to enact these values (Tajfel, 1978).

Tajfel (1982) postulated that in the process of identifying ingroup and outgroup membership, social groups tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and the similarities within one’s own group, creating stereotypes. Identity-based conflict is grounded in group membership and the individual’s assigned or assumed roles within the group (Barsky, 2017). As people identify more closely with their own group, they highlight the positive in their own group and develop stronger antipathies toward other groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Intergroup comparisons may also lead to negative comparison outcomes resulting in the perception of ingroup inferiority (Bochatay et al., 2019). Weber et al. (2018) suggested that negative stereotypes may pose a psychological burden on minority group members, that systematically undermine their performance regardless of the actual level of prejudice in a particular educational setting. Some minority group members fear being judged based on negative stereotypes, but, more significantly, fear that they will confirm negative expectations. The resulting negative thoughts and emotions initiate self-regulation mechanisms and a physiological stress response that consumes the executive resources necessary to perform
demanding social or cognitive tasks. While individual vulnerability differs, individuals who identify strongly with either the receiving or heritage culture tend to be more resilient against the detrimental influence of stereotype threat. Conversely, individuals who identify as independently marginalized or part of a marginalized group are more susceptible to decreased academic performance, lower career aspirations, performance-based achievement orientation, diminished motivation, and lessened sense of belonging (Weber et al., 2018).

Outgroup-directed anger may be particularly persistent when an individual is unable to cope with social identity threat. Limited information or misinformation about outgroups promote stereotype-based comparisons (Tajfel, 1982). However, this comparison does not necessarily result in stereotype-based antagonistic comparison, but may manifest as a preference of one’s ingroup over an outgroup that is also positively perceived (Bochatay et al., 2019). Schotte’s et al. (2018) research involving 3894 students (M\_age = 16.24) with immigrant backgrounds concluded that while identification with the receiving culture is crucial for sociocultural adaptation and academic success, students’ identification with their heritage culture was less significant. At the same time, students who were able to identify with both the receiving and heritage cultures exhibited higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem. Further, more adaptive students fostered more supportive networks, which reinforced psychological adaptation. Schotte et al. (2018) argued that strong cultural identification protects the student’s psychological well-being by buffering identity threat resulting from perceived ethnic discrimination.

As social identity becomes stronger, it becomes necessary to accurately identify members of the outgroup in order that the ingroup is not contaminated and the rights of the ingroup are protected (Bochatay et al., 2019). The drivers of intranational conflict are diversely viewed by researchers in terms of political corruption and manipulation, scarcity and distribution of
resources, and perceived threat to one’s values and identity (Amodio & Chiovelli, 2018; Farrés-Fernández, 2019; Southall, 2019; Stein, 2017; Venkatasawmy, 2015). According to the 2011 South Africa census figures for the five official ethnic categories, the demographics are currently Black African at 76.4%, White at 9.1%, Coloured at 8.9%, Asian at 2.5%, and Other/Unspecified at 0.5% (Statistics South Africa, n.d.). However, South Africa was named as the country with the world’s worst income inequality with 47% of Black African households registering as impoverished compared to 23% of Coloured, slightly more than 1% of Asians, and less than 1% of Whites (The World Bank, 2018). Although the political fortunes of the majority and minority ethnic groups have reversed in South Africa, social stratification remains an enduring presence based chiefly on an inherently imbalanced division of resources (Southall, 2019). When social stratification is based upon an unequal division of resources such as power, prestige, or wealth, there is a real conflict of interests between social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

The perpetuation of animosity between ethnic groups has given rise to an emerging culture of aggression against different social identifications (Myburgh et al., 2015). Since identity salience is context driven, students in a university where instruction is in other than the student’s primary language negotiate their discernment of that non-primary language in terms of whether it is seen as a social identity threat creating a perception of ingroup inferiority and determining what response is warranted toward that threat. In this situation, the student’s awareness of the beliefs, values, and norms of the individual’s cultural heritage are weighed in contrast with the beliefs, values, and norms implicitly represented in the language of instruction coupled with the history associated with English being one of the governmentally imposed languages of instruction.
It is the individual desire for a sense of importance and relevance that makes social identity theory significant for this study as students negotiate their identity in the context of English-medium instruction. As the individual identifies with a group, the relationship to that group typically supports positive ingroup responses while encouraging stronger antagonism toward the outgroup which infers that the degree to which the student identifies with his or her tribal or language groups should be a factor in how the student experiences EMI (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Turner, 1982). In South Africa, there is a historical foundation of ethnic and cultural tension. However, this study explored whether university students, having been immersed in a multicultural, multilingual educational context have retained the historical and political lessons of social stratification and isolation, and whether those messages remain dominant in the student’s experience of the individual’s cultural identity. Specifically, to what degree, if at all, do the historical and past political realities continue to influence the student’s cultural identification and comparison to cultural outgroups? Applying the assumptions of social identity theory to the student’s perception of ingroup-outgroup relationships provided insight into the essential factors (noesis) that account for what is being experienced regarding the student’s cultural identity (Moustakas, 1994).

**Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to influence events that affect one’s life and exert control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) proposed that efficacy expectation, as distinct from outcome expectation, is the individual’s expectation that one is able to exert control of the proposed actions or events in order to attain an expected outcome. One might believe that a certain action would produce a corresponding outcome, but in the same instance might also believe that one does not possess the ability to
perform the necessary action or have control over the circumstances surrounding the execution of that action. Bandura’s (1978) concept of reciprocal determinism suggests that the way in which individuals interpret the results of their performance informs and alters their environments and self-beliefs, which in turn informs and alters future performance. Reciprocal determinism argues against the behaviorist doctrine of determinism, that all events or actions are ultimately determined by outside forces, stating that the individual has the ability to influence his or her own behavior through cognitive processes and environmental factors including the attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of those surrounding the individual. Pajeres (1996) elaborated on the concept of reciprocal determinism adding that individuals possess a self system comprised of one’s cognitive and affective structures, including the ability to symbolize, learn from others, plan alternative strategies, regulate one’s own behavior, and engage in self-reflection. This self system provides a set of subfunctions for perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behavior that result from interplay between the self system and external environmental sources of influence (Pajares, 1996). Therefore, the self system serves as a self-regulatory manager by providing individuals with the capability to alter their environments and influence their own actions. However, the self system does not operate independently. A key determinant of whether individuals employ self-regulatory strategies rests in the beliefs that they hold the capability to do so (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Therefore, individuals must also possess the belief that they can use these strategies effectively. Bandura (2008) explained that endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities, and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised combine to create personal agency.

The degree to which individuals hold their sense of self-efficacy influences their functioning, expressed in four categories: cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional
In the cognitive realm, Bandura (2008) observed that efficacy beliefs influence the way in which people think and those thoughts influence what actions they choose to pursue, their goals and commitments, and how much effort they are willing to put forth. Thinking in self-enhancing (optimistic) or self-debilitating (pessimistic) ways influence functioning. The individual’s awareness of opportunities and obstacles affect motivation. If one sees obstacles as permanent, then one is inclined to give up. On the other hand, if one sees obstacles as challenges to be overcome or opportunities to be embraced, then one is inclined to seek out and employ the necessary skills to meet the challenge. At the emotional level, a strong sense of self-efficacy does not mean that one would never get discouraged, but that in the face of setbacks there is the underlying belief in one’s ability to rebound. Finally, self-efficacy implies that one has a choice in how a situation is experienced. The individual executes personal agency in the environments he or she chooses and the approach to situations (Bandura, 2008).

Bandura (1977) outlined four factors that contribute to a positive sense of self-efficacy: (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experience, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional arousal. Bandura (1977) concluded that self-efficacy is strengthened when one has a personal mastery experience of performing a given behavior, has observed others similar to oneself successfully performing the behavior, has been persuaded to believe that one possesses necessary capabilities to perform the behavior, or has low stress reactions and is in a positive state of mind. Mastery experiences are the principal vehicle of change. Corrective and enabling mastery experiences are decidedly the most effective means in altering faulty beliefs and dysfunctional styles of thinking and behaving. Vicarious experience, or social modeling, influences the student’s academic self-efficacy as the student observes others performing the same or related tasks and makes a social comparison, discerning the ways in which the student is
similar or different from the other. The degree to which the student perceives him- or herself to be similar to the vicarious experience of the other positively influences the student’s belief in his or her own ability inasmuch as it is not contradicted by direct experience (Bandura, 2006). In a study of the influence of self-perceived social identity on academic self-efficacy and performance, Wang et al. (2019) concluded that the stigma of negative group stereotypes associated with the social identity of migrant students strongly influenced the students’ negative academic self-efficacy and academic performance. The social modeling of student peers, combined with the negative reinforcement of teachers and the community, reinforced the negative group stereotypes, affecting the students’ academic performance.

Intrinsic factors, such as stress management and coping skills, and extrinsic factors, including the social aspects of self, relationships, and communication with others, combine to influence the individual’s self-efficacy (Guan & So, 2016). In the context of an EMI classroom, students with a strong sense of ethnic or cultural identity may experience cultural conflict with the dominant culture arising from a perceived lack of fit between a student’s values and beliefs and those of the receiving culture (Chee et al., 2019). Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory describes how the internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation. Such cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. Chee et al. (2019) noted that students experiencing cultural conflict often adopt cultural masks in an effort to cope with their sense of alienation and stress.

Extant research supports the conclusion that one’s identity with a social group is indicative of one’s perceived social support from that group (Ahn et al., 2017, Guan & So, 2016). In turn, the support from that social group provides self-efficacy information to the
individual in the form of vicarious experience and social persuasion. The potential loss of social support systems, which are central to the sense of identity, or implicit pressure to alter the student’s own cultural worldview to fit the receiving culture, often result in heightened stress, lowered self-esteem, and increased tendencies toward depression (Adegbola et al., 2018).

Self-efficacy has been demonstrated to be positively connected to students’ academic achievement within the educational setting by influencing the student’s motivation to learn, affective response to these efforts, and ultimate academic attainment (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016; Guan & So, 2016; Marashi & Dakhili, 2015; Mills et al., 2007; Pajares, 1996; Usher & Pajares, 2008; Zimmerman, 1995). Self-efficacy is situationally dependent in that a student may have a high sense of academic self-efficacy with respect to mathematics, yet have a low sense of academic self-efficacy regarding public speaking. In more specific terms, academic self-efficacy is defined as “personal judgments of one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated types of educational performances” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 203). In the context of this study, academic self-efficacy reflects the participant’s perception of his or her ability to understand and communicate in English, directly influencing the student’s ability to fulfill given task demands in an academic environment. In this situation, success in an EMI context is partially dependent on the student’s command of the non-primary language and willingness to participate in that language (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2019; Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016).

At the same time, the student’s capability self-perception is influenced by cultural background (Oettingen, 1995). There are four key dimensions in which culture influences self-efficacy: (a) individualism/collectivism, (b) power distance, (c) uncertainty avoidance, and (d) masculinity/femininity (Oettingen, 1995). Most African cultures tend toward collectivism,
promoting the view that people belong to ingroups that promote lifelong loyalty to the group’s interests and goals (Venkatasawmy, 2015). In contrast, individualist cultures promote the view that people look primarily after their own welfare and their immediate family’s interests and goals. Power distance refers to the culture’s acceptance of power inequalities (Oettingen, 1995). People in cultures with large disparity in power are expected to accept inequality. Whereas people in cultures with small power distance tend to value a more equal distribution of power. For people in cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, foreign influences are experienced as a source of high threat and stress, while familiarity and predictability are calming (Oettingen, 1995). Masculinity/femininity considers the degree with which a culture differentiates the roles of men and women (Oettingen, 1995). Masculine cultures strive for a maximal distinction between men and women. In higher education, as an example, masculine cultures tend to be more prescriptive of the kinds of pursuits that are proper for men and women.

While little research has been done on the relationship between English-medium instruction and academic self-efficacy, there has been some relatable research regarding immigrants and international students. Titzmann and Jugert (2017) examined language use as an acculturation-specific predictor for self-efficacy because it required not only linguistic competence in the majority language, but also sociocultural competence in using language effectively with others. Titzmann and Jugert (2017) concluded that there is a high positive correlation between language mastery and academic self-efficacy. Students immersed in a learning environment in which the language of instruction was not their primary language experienced a period of cultural disorientation resulting in an initial decrease in their perceived self-efficacy. However, positive self-efficacy beliefs were reinforced as language mastery improved and the students gained sociocultural knowledge. Similarly, Wang et al. (2018) noted
that international students with lower levels of English language skills tend to exhibit higher levels of feelings of discrimination, higher levels of homesickness, and higher levels of anxiety. Additionally, English-language proficiency strongly contributed to international students’ social and academic adjustment. The students’ adjustment level then influenced their level of academic self-efficacy. Moreover, Wang et al. (2018) noted considerable difference between using English in social and communicative settings and using English to learn and perform academically. Self-efficacy theory provides a framework for describing the challenges of Black South African university students enrolled in English-medium degree programs.

**Related Literature**

Since the purpose of this study was to explore student’s experience of learning in an English-medium context, it was necessary to review the literature pertaining to English-medium instruction and the relationship between language and identity. The current body of literature regarding EMI reflects the bases for universities selecting English as the preferred language of instruction as well as the challenges for implementation at the university level and use at the student level. Also significant was the literature regarding the inherent connection between language and identity formation and negotiation. Finally, the literature review examined the interrelationship between language and power.

**English-medium Instruction**

To understand English-medium instruction (EMI) in Africa, it is first necessary to understand EMI in a global perspective, establishing the reasons for the use of English as a dominant language in economics, politics, and academia. English-medium instruction is a system of education that employs English as the primary medium of instruction in settings where English is not the primary language of the student (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Kim et al.,
Often negatively associated with colonialism, education in a non-indigenous language is not unique to the English language, nor is it always intentionally coupled with cultural assimilation (Chun et al., 2017). Language economics examines the ways in which linguistic and economic variables influence one another (Adamchik et al., 2019; Lee, 2019; Sah & Li, 2018). Within this context, language is viewed as a product to which the market assigns a value. The value of the language product is determined by the buying power, social mobility, and prestige of the language. The greater a language is valued, the greater the demand for the acquisition of language skills (Sah & Li, 2018). In this sense, English has become a highly desirable linguistic capital as it produces the cultural capital by which an individual is empowered to achieve a higher social status (Sah & Li, 2018). As globalization, transnational communication, and the prominence of English as the lingua franca of commerce increases, EMI at the university level has responded to demands from businesses and governments to remain competitive (Adamchik et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Blattès, 2018; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; Lee, 2019; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Sah & Li, 2018). To an increasing extent, developing countries are orienting their language of education policies toward EMI to equip their citizens with the language of development, innovation, and technology to integrate into the global economy (Sah & Li, 2018). Although EMI has proven expedient, if not necessary, it is not without challenges in both acceptance and implementation.

The global growth of English-medium degree programs is rapidly increasing (Briggs & Smith, 2017; Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016; Huang, 2018; Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018). English-medium undergraduate degree programs in Europe have increased from 55 in 2009 to 2,900 in 2017 (Sandstrom & Neghina, 2017). A similar study examining the growth of all
English-taught degree programs in Europe indicated an increase from 725 undergraduate and graduate degree programs in 2001 to 8,089 in 2014 (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014).

In general, perceptions in the countries associated with the Bologna Process in Europe and the countries of Asia that have implemented EMI are favorable (Dearden, 2016). Prominent themes that have arisen to support EMI implementation include: (a) increasing English language skills (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Huang, 2018; Kuchah, 2016), (b) improved job possibilities (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Huang, 2018; Kuchah, 2016), (c) globalization (Blattès, 2018; Chun et al., 2017; Dearden, 2016), (d) facilitation of ideas with the worldwide academic community (Blattès, 2018; Chun et al., 2017; Dearden, 2016), and (e) attracting international students (Blattès, 2018; Briggs & Smith, 2017; Dearden, 2016). There is, however, a concern among researchers that growth has been so rapid that the implications of EMI have not been thoroughly considered (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016; Fernandez-Costales, 2017).

Nearly 62% (N = 55) of respondents to an international survey reported that the country they represented had experienced EMI policy changes over the past ten years (Dearden, 2016). Some countries embraced EMI while others rejected or limited EMI for political reasons, to protect a national identity, to protect a home language, or to encourage study in a home language (Dearden, 2016). The question of how learning in a language other than their primary language influences cultural identity formation and negotiation in university students and how that affects academic achievement is an area that is under-researched (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016; Sa'd, 2017). Results from research in Europe and Asia indicated that the influence of EMI on cultural identity is a regionally significant concern with inconsistent results, recommending additional research in this area (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015).
EMI presupposes that the learner is sufficiently skilled in English to participate in the education process. However, research in the field increasingly contradicts this supposition, suggesting that school achievement is negatively influenced because learners do not have an acceptable understanding of English (Chang et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2016; Nishioka & Durrani, 2019). A South Korean study that directly compared the learning effects of the same courses delivered in both English and Korean found that EMI courses did not put South Korean students at a disadvantage, but the study targeted students with English majors or medical students who had a high level of language proficiency (Chang et al., 2017). In Rwanda, it was observed that students face considerable cognitive and linguistic challenges in acquiring conceptual understanding while learning in English (Milligan et al., 2016). Likewise, while English-language learning has been considered to be a liberating tool for the Dalits and the poor in India, these marginalized groups have received such inadequate instruction in English skills that it has failed to provide the desired economic mobility (Sah & Li, 2018). However, these results are not universal. A study conducted in Spain on the effects of EMI on academic achievement for accounting students found that there was no difference in academic achievement between EMI students and their non-EMI counterparts (Dafouz & Camacho-Miñana, 2016). In Qatar, a ten-year implementation of EMI in the national primary and secondary system of education failed to produce the promised increase in academic achievement in the disciplines of mathematics, sciences, and technology (Mustafawi & Shaaban, 2019). Three major issues were cited for the program’s failure: (a) the centralized manner in which the program was conceived and implemented, (b) the lack of advancement of students’ performance, and (c) the perceived threat to the Qatari Arab cultural and linguistic identity.
Some international universities require students to demonstrate a certain level of English-language proficiency to screen out students who are not sufficiently prepared for EMI courses (Chang et al., 2017). Nevertheless, those who tested sufficiently proficient still experienced language difficulties in EMI lectures. One possible reason is that the testing process fails to make a distinction between conversational proficiency and academic language proficiency (Chang et al., 2017). Cummins (2017) posited that there is an important functional difference between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which is the degree of language competence necessary in a social context, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is the learner’s ability to read, write, and communicate on a level effective enough to excel in their academic pursuits. While both skills are involved and necessary for academic success, a student may demonstrate proficiency in BICS, yet struggle with the language requirements necessary to understand written and oral instruction, participate in class discussions, ask and respond to questions, and complete oral and written assignments. The language policy and practice of many EMI programs is that of subtractive bilingualism in which the dominant school language is used at the expense of the student’s primary language. The post-apartheid language of instruction policy embraced by the South African government in 1997 explicitly endorsed an additive multilingualism goal in which schools were encouraged to support students’ primary language development while they were learning the dominant language. However, because English is perceived by educators and parents as the language of economic success, South African primary and secondary schools have engaged in a subtractive language policy (Cummins, 2017). The literature further suggested that universities should provide separate courses for English or additional language support as a means to increase students’ language preparation for EMI courses (Chang et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2016). However, designing curricula with language
and content objectives would place an undue burden on teaching staff and likely exceed the budget of most universities (Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018). Chang et al. (2017) tested a series of workshops and tutoring sessions to explore possible support mechanisms for students in EMI programs. While the feedback from students provided guidelines for improvement, the reception of the sessions was positive. The Rwandan study researchers recommended modifying textbook design to assist students in bridging the gap between primary and non-primary languages (Milligan et al., 2016). In a related study, Macaro et al. (2018) observed that most instructors in an EMI class used the students’ primary language for interpersonal interaction and as a tool to clarify aspects of the academic content, but otherwise the course was conducted in English.

In other studies of student perceptions of EMI in China, EFL students noted that language difficulties were more often a product of the instructor’s inability to communicate in English (He & Chiang, 2016; Huang, 2018). He and Chiang (2016) reported that participants claimed that they found it hard to understand their Chinese teachers’ English, but it may be equally hard for Chinese instructors to understand EFL students’ English. The challenge for EMI programs is to employ instructors who are proficient enough with the English language to be able to engage the students in a meaningful learning experience. Hahl et al. (2016) produced a study of educator and student teacher perspectives on EMI at a Finnish university. In this context, it was noted that it was not uncommon for students to have a stronger command of English than the instructors. Students were required to pass an entrance exam where their English skill was assessed. However, since there was no language proficiency evaluation for university teachers, it was not known to what extent the instructor was able to demonstrate high-quality language usage. Hahl et al. (2016) noted that teachers who were not fluent, or not confident in English used teaching devices such as well-prepared slides to compensate for their low proficiency. Both educators and
students stated that, at times, the teacher was difficult to follow or lacked the necessary vocabulary to answer a student’s question. In some instances, a Finnish speaking student might be able to assist the instructor with the correct vocabulary. In other cases where the teacher is unable to adequately convey course content, the curriculum is at risk of not being fully implemented (Hahl et al., 2016).

English language literacy skills in multilingual countries are one of the concerns about EMI (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016; Morrison & Evans, 2018; Ramiro & Perez, 2015). Sometimes these difficulties are not so much a product of the student’s inability to write in a non-primary language as it is a lack of literacy in their primary language (Ramiro & Perez, 2015). Research supports the hypothesis that language competence development in EMI settings is more evident in receptive communicative skills than in production skills due to a lower importance ascribed to the latter (Ramiro & Perez, 2015). Where the problem is related to the student’s language skills, instructors responsible for content learning may defer the responsibility to the language department or a support center (Morrison & Evans, 2018; Ramiro & Perez, 2015). Universities with EMI programs often provide one or more of the following to assist EFL students in developing their literacy skills: language courses, self-access, online learning materials, and workshops (Morrison & Evans, 2018). In addition, Morrison and Evans (2018) recommended that universities should task language teachers to work collaboratively with content subject faculty to help ensure that students are provided with language enhancement support that is relevant to, and integrated into, their content studies.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief concerning how well that person will do in an impending task (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacious students tend to be more motivated and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when encountered with difficulties (Bandura, 2008).
Research supports the conclusion that self-efficacy is predictive of academic performance and provides a foundation for motivation and accomplishment (Bandura, 2008). Studies examining the relationships of self-efficacy to achievement outcome focusing primarily on school grades and test scores have demonstrated that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of achievement-related outcomes (Chang, 2015). Additional studies suggest that perceived responsibility is highly correlated with self-efficacy beliefs and acts in a mediating role between self-efficacy and academic GPA (Kim et al., 2015). In separate studies, researchers of Botswanan and Norwegian university students noted that an increase in self efficacy beliefs was associated with an increase in the use of language learning strategies and an increase in their English proficiency (Kim et al., 2015). The literature highlighted that lack of efficacious beliefs are more noticeable when students must perform a task before an audience or peer group, as in an oral presentation (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016). The challenge is compounded when the presenting student is speaking in a language other than their primary language. One indicator of academic self-efficacy is the student’s perception of the importance of speaking English to academic success and his or her ability or willingness to speak it in an academic setting (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2019). To improve self-efficacy, the researchers recommend teachers help students acquire new skills and cognitive strategies that increase the likelihood of success (Amirian & Tavakoli, 2016; Chang, 2015; Kim et al., 2015).

**Language and Identity**

Cultural socialization is the purposeful transmission and preservation of heritage cultural content (Vietze et al., 2019). Parent heritage socialization, the parental communication of the heritage culture and group membership, strongly influences the intensity with which the youth commit to the values and traditions of the heritage culture. The literature indicates that family is
among the most significant proximal social contexts that guide identity formation (Mesinas & Perez, 2016). Family members’ contributions to the socialization process include facilitating the internalization of values, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the group that lead to feelings of belonging (Mesinas & Perez, 2016; Vietze et al., 2019). A strong sense of cultural belonging correlates positively to a variety of constructive individual developments, such as protection against feelings of confusion, fear, or threat caused by discrimination experiences (Vietze et al., 2019). As the child grows, those from homes where the families are part of a monoethnic and monocultural orientation values, traditions, religion, art, and language tend to create and maintain more permanent identity choices (Makarova, 2017).

Literature strongly supports the proposition that knowledge and use of primary language is closely associated with one’s cultural orientation and ethnic identity (Amiot et al., 2018; Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016; Slatinská & Pecníková, 2017). Immigrant children, or those from ethnic minorities, of parents who identified as indigenous and encouraged primary language use were more likely to also identify as indigenous and speak their primary language (Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016). At a time when governments are tending toward globalization, one notable study set in Ireland examined the government’s efforts to support the development and preservation of the Irish language within the education system to promote the cultural and national identity of the Irish. Summarizing the significance of the decision, one respondent observed, “language is not a material object. Language is much more. It is part of our spiritual heritage we must look after” (Slatinská & Pecníková, 2017, p. 327).

A Czech proverb says, “Learn a new language and get a new soul.” Identity development involves successive sequences of self-exploration, change, and consolidation resulting in the construction of social roles, cultural affiliations, beliefs, values, and behavioral practices
Individuals moving from one cultural context to another are challenged to accommodate information from within the receiving cultural context, reconstructing their identity (Amiot et al., 2018). Some of the ways in which immigrants or those in non-dominant cultures remain connected to the customs and traditions of their primary ethnocultural orientation is through religion, language, art, cultural expressions and events, and storytelling (Amiot et al., 2018; Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016). At the same time, those born in a more multicultural society tended to retain the core values of their primary culture, but assimilated the other cultures more freely and were more tolerant toward religion and traditions of the neighboring ethnic groups (Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016). The principal source of conflict between groups occurs when one group feels that their cultural groups and identities are socially unequal (Amiot et al., 2018). Social isolation, disapproval, rejection, and discrimination has been found to generate stress, decrease identification with the mainstream national group, and block the integration of multiple identities (Amiot et al., 2018).

**Language and Power Relations**

Bourdieu (1991) considered language competence to be equivalent to linguistic capital, a form of cultural capital representing certain dominant cultural values that is acquired through the family and legitimized through the education system. Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory suggested that students from higher socioeconomic classes perform better than those from lower classes because of the cultural capital passed down to them from their parents that gives them an advantage over others (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). As a result, when the family linguistic practices are in accord with the linguistic requirements of the school, the child would be seen as more intelligent and easily educated, creating a potentially inequitable learning environment for students with less linguistic competence (Bourdieu, 1991). Individuals
competent in the dominant language are able to respond to the demands of education while marginalizing the least favored classes to “the negative sanctions of the scholastic market, i.e., exclusion or early self-exclusion induced by lack of success” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 62). Gu et al. (2017) observed that the three dominant languages of Hong Kong – Cantonese, English, and Putonghua – were afforded superior status while the heritage languages of ethnic minority groups were marginalized. Ethnic minority students’ competency in English was described as accented and not socially acceptable. In academics, ethnic minority students in Hong Kong are often perceived as uncivilized and under-educated, which caused concern among the participants that they would be deprived of rights and opportunities within Hong Kong society.

Bourdieu (1991) stated that the value of linguistic capital reflects power relations between languages, defined in relation to the worth of language in particular linguistic markets and the symbolic power associated with it. Linguistic exchanges are always produced in specific fields that grant languages a certain value. Linguistic markets are categorized into formal and informal markets, where dominant languages are valued in formal markets, and local languages tend to be used in local community markets (Bourdieu, 1991). Competence in the dominant language represents high-valued linguistic capital within the formal linguistic markets in the country. In this sense, language embodies the power and hierarchical social position of the possessor of that language within society; in other words, language reflects power relations within society (Bourdieu, 1991).

Bourdieu (1991) argued that language has symbolic power, which is deployed often imperceptibly in everyday social interaction. The symbolic power associated with a dominant language forces the subjected to recognize the legitimacy of that language and the hierarchical
power relations in which they are embedded. The symbolic power of language requires that those who are exposed to it believe in the legitimacy of that language (Bourdieu, 1991).

In application, power relations have a long history in language usage and policy from the conquest and subjugation of people to office policies designed to globalize a workplace (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dirk & Gelderblom, 2017; Kaiper, 2018; Nishioka & Durrani, 2019). Organizations and individuals use language as both a means to construct their power and to regulate identity. The concept of language and power relations focuses on ways in which norms of discourse are shaped, with authority and hierarchy identified as two important influencers within this discussion (Bourdieu, 1991). Those who have power are generally the ones to establish and uphold linguistic norms and conventions. Students who are less proficient in the dominant language tend to be perceived and perceive themselves to be deficient in some capacity. When a university in France required that academics publish in English, they created an environment in which the French language was considered to be of lesser value than the English language, thus producing the feeling among academics at that university that those who are less proficient in English are less qualified as an academic (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017). In Malawi, the language of instruction from 1891 to 1964 was English (Nishioka & Durrani, 2019). During the ensuing dictatorship of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the Chinyanja (later renamed Chichewa) language was added as an official national language in an attempt to engender national unity and distance the nation from its colonial heritage. However, the language of instruction from Standard 5 through 8 remained English, and English was taught as a mandatory subject from Standard 1 through 8. Nishioska and Durrani (2019) concluded that households that were proficient in both Chichewa and English had linguistic capital and higher academic outcomes than those less proficient in either language. In the United States, language policy
favors the use of English-only as the mode of instruction that has marginalized immigrants and impeded academic achievement (Lu, J. & Catalano, 2015). Nguyen and Hamid (2017) observed that minority students’ identity related to language, culture, and social relationship is adversely impacted in a subtractive environment in which they must suppress their home language and culture to adapt to the dominant language and culture. In China, English language usage and education afford the English language a measure of symbolic power in the global marketplace (Lu & Ares, 2015). Lu and Ares (2015) noted that symbolic power in linguistic exchanges represents an invisible and misrecognized power, and thus is recognized as legitimate. Research supports the suggestion that seemingly benign language policies in the workplace or classroom can be turned into a form of oppression (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Lu & Ares, 2015). In the higher education setting, gatekeepers such as university policy makers, administrators, and instructors determine and enforce the language of instruction, and in the case of English as the medium of instruction, which of the varieties of English is to be promoted as dominant and normative (Dirk & Gelderblom, 2017; Garska & O’Brien, 2019).

The word choices of some research literature reflected a significant hostility toward English language education and usage. Phrases such as “invasion of sociocultural territory” (Nguyen & Hamid, 2017, p. 1), the “global Englishization that began during the British colonial era and currently constitutes a key pillar of American imperialism” (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017, p. 23), and “Western TESOL pedagogies could be a new form of oppression or even colonization” (Lu & Ares, 2015, p. 122) evoke images of subjugation through language. Nevertheless, individual expressions of feeling that their home language and culture have been devalued are valid (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Li, 2017; Lu & Catalano, 2015; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017).
Africa is a linguistically diverse continent. By some estimates there are more than 2,000 languages spoken, although many have very few speakers (Coyne, 2015). With the partitioning of Africa in the late nineteenth century, European languages were introduced to administer colonial states and were used in educational systems built along European models (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper, 2018). The French and Portuguese enforced assimilation, associating teaching their language to a “civilizing mission” (Coyne, 2015, p. 620) and the conversion of autochthonous populations to Christianity. At the same time, the British and the Belgians were inclined to teach in the African languages in the primary grades while teaching European languages as a subject before switching over to a European medium of instruction at the secondary level (Coyne, 2015). For example, from independence in 1957 until 2002, the school system in Ghana generally focused on local African languages as the medium of instruction in the first several grades before transitioning to English (Coyne, 2015). In South Africa, English was historically viewed as the language of anti-apartheid protest. However, it was still associated with British rule and colonization, as well as an obstruction of Bantu traditions and languages, complicating its presence in South African education (Kaiper, 2018). For example, Kaiper (2018) noted that because language is linked to identity, ideology and power, the use of a language other than the learner’s own language can lead to cultural alienation, economic exclusion, and disempowerment.

Coyne (2015) reported that with data on over 9,000 primary schools in South Africa, students who are taught in African languages at the primary level tend to score better on standardized tests in later grades. However, those who are unable or lack opportunity to master English have limited chances for success in higher education and are less likely to find gainful employment as colonial languages tend to dominate sectors of the economy associated with
higher prestige and income (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper, 2018). In Kaiper’s (2018) case study, the interviewee responded that while she was educated in isiZulu, prospective employers would not even entertain a CV that was not in English. Because the individual lacks English literacy skills and due to the history of English in South Africa, as well as the symbolic power that the knowledge of English seems to hold in the post-apartheid social context, the respondent felt as though she had spent her life as an uneducated person (Kaiper, 2018). Still, there is a great disparity between schools. In South Africa, the lowest-quality schools lack basic resources such as textbooks and have teachers with little to no qualifications (Coyne, 2015; Hunter, 2015). Students from lower socioeconomic groups who are likely to attend lower-quality schools are also likely to have trouble learning in English, impeding school completion (Coyne, 2015; Hunter, 2015).

Summary

The body of literature exploring the academic and cultural identity challenges to EFL university students presented conflicting perspectives on the value and validity of EMI. Detractors generally pointed to issues of literacy, poor academic achievement, and cultural preservation (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Bukve, 2018; Chun et al., 2017; Fernandez-Costales, 2017). Advocates for an EMI policy pointed toward the growing need to be competitive in a global market, while presenting evidence showing little or no negative impact on literacy and academic achievement (Adamchik et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Sah & Li, 2018). The body of literature was extensive with respect to EMI in Europe and Asia-Pacific, but failed to substantially address the historical and cultural distinctions of the African continent, and South Africa in particular. With the dissolution of apartheid in 1994, the
present undergraduate students are the first to grow up outside the apartheid education policies.

The goal of this transcendental phenomenological study was to fill this research gap and provide a current and relevant perspective on student’s attitudes toward EMI and its influence on their academic achievement and economic opportunity, which will inform EMI researchers, educators, policy makers, and other students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in a setting where English is the medium instruction. A total of 10 participants were selected to represent the perspectives of a cross-section of Black South African society. Data analysis produced a structural and textural description as well as a structural-textural synthesis for each participant. The final step in the research process was creating a textural-structural synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter provides a description of the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the methods of data collection, the process of analysis, means of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

I conducted a qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological design. Qualitative research illuminates meaning by interpreting the data of qualitative inquiry to discover patterns and themes from the experience of the participants (Patton, 2015). Qualitative inquiry contributes to the knowledge base as participants tell their stories, expressing their individual and collective perspectives on their experience, interpreted within the context of those experiences (Patton, 2015). Significant to exploring the central question in this study was the concept that social groups are typically defined by individuals who are drawn together based on shared meaning in a particular context (Patton, 2015; Sapir, 1963). In this study, the social group of interest was distinguished by the individual’s cultural identity within the context of an English-medium instruction context. As students who share closely related cultural histories and traits, plus a common experiential context, the participants in this study related how they
experience cultural identity and derived meaning from their learning experience. Discovering shared meaning and the process of meaning making among the participants of this study was a vital element in my decision to pursue a qualitative research study.

Phenomenology, as a philosophic discipline, was introduced by Edmund Husserl (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl built upon Franz Brentano’s reintroduction of intentionality as a characteristic of consciousness that is critical for understanding mental phenomena in psychology (Janoušek, 2017; Textor, 2017). Brentano distinguished between genetic and descriptive psychology. The former explained as a study of psychology from a third-person empirical point of view and the latter as a method by which one unearths the essence or structure of mental phenomena from a first-person point of view. Brentano’s emphasis of intentionality and the concept of descriptive psychology served to influence Husserl to develop what would become phenomenology. Aligned with Brentano’s bifurcation of the study of psychology, Husserl’s phenomenology was set against the positivist philosophy that scientific knowledge is based on the experience of senses and can only be obtained by observation and experimentation (Giorgi et al., 2017; Patton, 2015). Phenomenology takes a more comprehensive epistemological approach in that phenomenology acknowledges certain non-sensorial realities, such as ideals entities and irreal objects, that empiricism ignores (Giorgi et al., 2017). Further, phenomenology assumes a naturalistic paradigm in which the researcher focuses on how people behave when engaged in genuine life experience in natural settings (Patton, 2015).

Phenomenology is the process of discovering knowledge through the exploration of individual life experience (Moustakas, 1994), focusing on how people make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness (Patton, 2015). The purpose of phenomenological research is to derive the essence of a lived experience as described by persons who have had the
experience (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The phrase “lived experience” is derived from the German *erlebnis*, meaning “to live to see” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). Lived experience connotes that which one personally and immediately experiences for oneself apart from conjecture and rationalizations. Lived experience, *erlebnis*, is that which is preserved out of (prefix *er*-) the experience of living (*lebnis*) that forms the foundation for one’s knowledge. However, as Husserl (2012) pointed out, these experiences can only be fully apprehended as one reflects upon the experience retrospectively. Therefore, phenomenological research explores the lived experience of the participants regarding a specific shared experience or phenomenon. In phenomenological research, the “act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related” (Patton, 2015, p. 574). The participants and phenomenon are interconnected as the participants transform empirical experience into essential insights (Moustakas, 1994). Essence is the quality of meaning without which a thing would not be what it is (Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

Black South African university students studying in an English-medium setting share a common experience, but each student has his or her own intentionality toward the experience, thus giving fuller understanding of the reality of the phenomenon. Contextual factors including the students’ ages, tribal affiliations, languages, family histories, socioeconomic statuses, and worldviews contribute to the students’ diverse insights into the phenomenon. Phenomenology was selected because the story of how Black South African university students experience cultural identity while studying in a non-primary language presents a unique context for their shared experience that may most effectively be captured through individual first-hand narratives and could be strengthened by examining conjoint and recurring themes from multiple individuals.

Although Husserl laid out the foundations of the phenomenological movement, nearly every philosopher who followed deviated from Husserl in some manner (Giorgi et al., 2017).
Most significant was Husserl’s near contemporary Martin Heidegger. The relationship between Husserl and Heidegger was both profitable and contentious. Their differences were summarized by Husserl’s assistant Edmund Fink when he compared their argument to that of two men accusing the other of “putting the bridle on the wrong end of the horse” (Bruzina, 2013, p. 131).

Transcendental or Husserlian phenomenology is distinctive from Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology in two equally important and interdependent aspects. Husserl (2012) contended that the descriptions of lived experiences were sufficient to produce knowledge and that the essence of the phenomenon could best be understood as the researcher is able to set aside all preconceived ideas and knowledge through epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology, the noema, the “perceived as such” (Husserl, 2012, p. 186) or “that which is experienced” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69) is the object as it is experienced by the individual. The noetic is that which gives sense to the object of consciousness through one’s internal perspective (Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). As an individual describes the experience, universal meanings or essences can be drawn. Equally important is the epoche process in which the researcher engages to remove biases and assumptions under investigation (Patton, 2015). Husserl (2012) maintained that the epoche process or bracketing deliberately makes no use of existing knowledge and experience in determining the meaning of the experience. In contrast, van Manen (2016) argued that the researcher cannot effectively bracket his or her biases, assumptions, and previous knowledge, but must acknowledge them as factors in the interpretive process. For this study, I have no direct relationship to the study participants. My background, history, and culture are vastly different from the individuals whose voices this study intended to hear. If meaning is to be a derived from the lived experience of Black South African university students, then it was important that their voice not be interpreted through the
discordant voice of the researcher. For this reason, transcendental phenomenology was chosen over hermeneutic due to the former’s emphasis of description rather than interpretation.

For this study, maximum variation sampling was employed based on age and primary language group in order to produce a diversity of perspectives, providing an understanding of the essence of the experience. Transcriptions of the participants’ descriptions of their lived experience provided the data elements from which relevant quotes were identified to the lived experience (horizontalization) and then the horizon statements were clustered into common themes (Moustakas, 1994).

**Research Questions**

For this study, the following questions established the research agenda and guided the enquiry and analysis:

**Central Question:** How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction learning context?

The support questions are:

**Support Question One:** How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe their social relation to those outside their self-identified ingroup?

**Support Question Two:** How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction perceive their academic self-efficacy?

**Support Question Three:** What are the challenges experienced by Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction?
Setting

To maximize the diversity of participants and the range of information, the setting for this study was South African HEIs. The study focused on students from HEIs that have had at least one English-medium degree program spanning the previous four years. Ten participants representing eight different disciplines were selected from eight universities, seven public and one private: Boston City Campus, Stellenbosch University, University of Free State, University of Johannesburg, University of Mpumalanga, University of Pretoria, University of South Africa, and University of Venda.

The South African public university system is composed of 26 universities made up of nine technical universities, six comprehensive universities, and 11 traditional universities, all of which use English as the primary or secondary language of instruction (Council on Higher Education, 2018). Enrollment as of 2016 was 975,837 combined residential and distance learning students. Of these, 93% come from South Africa, 5% come from SADC member states, 1% from other African nations, and less than 1% from non-African countries. Enrollment by gender and ethnicity is distributed as 42% men, and 58% women; 72% are Black African, 16% are White, 5% are Asian, and 6% are of mixed (Coloured) ethnicity (Council on Higher Education, 2018).

There are 284 registered private colleges and 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges in South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020b). Only degree-granting public institutions may call themselves universities, while other accredited private degree-granting institutions tend to refer to themselves as colleges or institutes (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020b). The highest level offered by the overwhelming majority of private HEIs is a National Diploma or National Certificate (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020b; South African Qualifications Authority,
Private institutions that offer degree programs tend to focus on specialized training which do not require a high investment in infrastructure, allowing for lower costs and higher profit margins (Tamrat, 2018). Private HEIs serve the public interest by offering specialized training and alternatives to the public and enabling access for students who could not obtain a place in public HEIs (Tamrat, 2018). On the other hand, the quality of education, language of instruction, cost of education, and the level of national certification varies by institution (Tamrat, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 had a significant impact on the participant solicitation and data collection setting of this study. South Africa was placed on a scaled lockdown from March 2020 through completion of the data collection, forcing universities to either close or transition to a virtual classroom. Consequently, solicitation and data collection were conducted in a virtual setting. Eligibility questionnaires were submitted using Google Classroom. Individual interviews were completed using current video conferencing technologies (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts). For the focus group interview, participants were asked to log into a discussion board hosted on YoTeach, and the self-reflection writing was completed via email.

Participants

A phenomenological framework requires participants who have experience with the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Purposeful sampling based on group characteristics provides an information-rich group capable of revealing significant group patterns in the narratives of the participants (Patton, 2015). Maximum variation sampling is an effective strategy for providing high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case within a heterogenous sample, while underscoring central themes and common patterns that cut across variables (Patton, 2015).

Through this study, the experiences of Black South African university students of different tribal
and language backgrounds who share the common experience of learning in an English-medium instruction context were described.

I used a maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015). Data were collected from 10 Black South African university students representing a cross-section of Black South African society. Participants were South African citizens between 20 and 30 years of age, identified with one of the nine constitutionally recognized tribal language groups, and enrolled in or graduated from a South African university in which English is the primary language of instruction. Since tribal language groups cross political borders, and since this study reflected on the common history of South Africa, participants had to be South African citizens. Additionally, this study focused on the lived experiences of South African students who were born since the fall of apartheid in 1994, which has commonly been called the Born Free generation (Kusá, 2018; Maseti, 2018). This generation has grown up in a different political and economic environment from their elders, providing a unique context for this study in contrast to previous cultural identity studies involving South Africans. Therefore, participants were selected whose age was within 20 to 30 years old.

There are nine tribal language groups recognized by the South African constitution. While all participants shared the common experience of cultural identity in an English-medium context, their perspectives were unique, relative to their sociocultural background. Therefore, a sampling strategy was utilized in which each tribal language group had opportunity to be represented providing an information-rich group.

Educational qualifications in South Africa are benchmarked on a National Qualifications Framework from Levels 1 through 10, with Levels 1 through 4 designating the primary and secondary education levels (SAQA, 2012). Vocational programs leading toward a National
Certificate or National Diploma are benchmarked at Levels 5 and 6. A Bachelor of Arts, Science, or Commerce is typically a three-year program benchmarked at Level 7. However, a Bachelor of Technology is typically a four-year program benchmarked at Level 8. Masters and doctorate degrees are benchmarked at Levels 9 and 10, respectively. Therefore, university students are referred to by the year of study (e.g., Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4) rather than class standing (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). Table 1 describes the demographic data for each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Language Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>EMI Degree Program</th>
<th>Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mthobeli</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>isiXhosa</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Public Management and Governance</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvuseselo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>siSwati</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Developmental Studies</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siphosethu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>isiZulu</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Kwa Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malusi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>isiXhosa</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Investment Management</td>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njabulu</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>siSwati</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Media/Public Relations</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumisile</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>siSwati</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabadeli</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>isiZulu</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Computer Engineering</td>
<td>Gauteng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thabisco</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sepedi</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Media/Radio</td>
<td>Limpopo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letago</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sepedi</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Limpopo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phegello</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sepedi</td>
<td>30-30</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potential participants were initially identified through snowball sampling techniques using social media. Respondents were asked to complete an eligibility questionnaire (Appendix C). Respondents were selected for participation based on their match to the research criteria: affiliation with one of the nine tribal language groups in South Africa, between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, and currently enrolled in or recently completed a degree program in which English was the primary language of instruction. Incomplete questionnaires were considered as a
non-response. To reach maximum saturation, the participants were selected from different tribes, genders, schools, grade levels, and disciplines.

**Procedures**

Prior to conducting this study, approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University was received on 19 December 2019 (Appendix A). After obtaining IRB approval, I used social media to invite potential participants. Interested students were requested to respond via email.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 had a significant impact on the procedures of this study. In response to the pandemic, South Africa was placed on a scaled lockdown from March 2020 through completion of the data collection. The implications of the South Africa lockdown were that all universities were either closed or transitioned to a virtual classroom. Businesses were closed, and in-country travel was restricted to that which was deemed essential. International travel was also restricted, eliminating the option for in-person solicitation, interviews, and focus groups. Being remote from the university campus meant that students did not have access to university resources such as scanners, printers, or wi-fi. An IRB Change in Protocol reflecting the necessary changes in the data collection process was approved on 14 April 2020.

An eligibility questionnaire was posted to a Google Classroom and respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire online. Respondents were selected for participation based on their match to the research criteria: affiliation with one of the nine tribal language groups in South Africa, between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, and currently enrolled in or recently completed a degree program in which English was the primary language of instruction. Incomplete questionnaires were considered as a non-response. Similarly, respondents were sent
an email directing them to a Google Classroom where they were asked to electronically sign the informed consent form (Appendix B). In addition to informing the participant of the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, compensation, and confidentiality measures, on the informed consent form, I included an option for the participant to request interpreter services during the data collection process. No participant requested an interpreter. Qualified participants who signed the informed consent form were contacted via email to schedule an initial interview. Interviews were scheduled at the mutual convenience of both the participant and interviewer.

During the initial interview, the informed consent form was reviewed, and the participant was asked to reaffirm his or her understanding of and commitment to the study. The individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D). Interviews were completed during a seven-week time frame using current video conferencing technologies (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed for analysis, and member-checked for accuracy and completeness (Patton, 2015). Seven of the ten participants responded to the member-check, all of whom affirmed the accuracy and completeness of the transcripts. Follow up responses from participants and member-checking coordination were achieved via email. Focus group interviews were completed during a seven-week time frame following the individual interviews in a discussion board format using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix E). In support of the interviews, each participant was asked to compose a self-reflection letter, in the language of their choosing, to a hypothetical new student in which the participant recalls his or her experience with cultural identity throughout his or her studies at the university in order to provide guidance to a prospective student (Appendix F). Neither interpreters nor translators were required in any stage of the data collection.
During the analysis phase, I read transcripts of the in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, and correspondence, memoing to capture significant statements, key concepts, and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed the significant statements for relations, similarities and dissimilarities for categories that were used to develop broader themes. Significant statements were organized and grouped into meaning units and examined for recurrence and relevance to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once all data were analyzed and possible themes identified, participants were asked to member-check the results. Seven of the ten participants responded to the member-check, all of whom affirmed the accuracy and completeness of the results.

The use of three data collection techniques (e.g., individual semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and self-reflection letter) provided for triangulation of data, which ensured the trustworthiness of the results. All data were stored digitally in a password-protected folder.

**The Researcher’s Role**

The researcher was the author of this study, Arthur Atwater Kent Cason Jr. I grew up in a White, middle socioeconomic status family in the midwestern United States. I was a college lecturer in South Africa at a small Bible college in the Mpumalanga province where I spent 12 years. My formal relationship as a teacher is limited to those students who have been a part of the Bible college. Therefore, no former or current student was selected to participate in this study.

While I have no historical, ethnic, or cultural commonality with the participants, working and living among the South African people has given me an empathy toward the African people. Moustakas (1994) recognized empathy as the act of being copresent with, but not one of the
participants in their experience. Transcendental phenomenology maintains that transcendental ego is imperative in the uncovering of meanings and essences, but it also recognizes the importance of transcendental intersubjectivity in connection with self-insights and subjective perceptions of what is real (Bruzina, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In this context, I acknowledge that these empathies are present, but have articulated and bracketed any related biases throughout the data collection and analysis phases and promote the participants as the dominant voice in the research (see Appendix J).

In keeping with the qualitative paradigm, I assumed a naturalistic research paradigm which emphasizes that phenomena should be studied in context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The goal of naturalistic research is to develop context-specific statements about the multiple, constructed realities of the participants. My ontological assumption was that the ultimate nature of reality is objective (Moreland & Craig, 2017). That is, there is reality that exists independent of a conscious entity to observe it. However, an individual’s perception of reality is influenced by contextual factors, including histories, socioeconomic status, and personal worldview and are, therefore, constructed subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially, expressed through the language of the observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My epistemological assumption was that knowledge is gained through the subjective experiences of people and, therefore, research must be conducted in the context in which the participants live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

The purpose of transcendental phenomenological research is to derive the essence of cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context as described by Black South African university students who have experience with the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). As such, the
appropriate and most effective form of data collection is the long interview (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) recommended that the interview be an informal, interactive process using open-ended comments and questions. It was further suggested that a general or topical interview guide should be used to facilitate the interview process. Three data collection methods were used to obtain evidence of the essence of the lived experience of participants. In-depth individual interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide. A focus group interview organized in a discussion board format was conducted to complement the individual interviews and to cross-check for consistency in the data (Patton, 2015). These interviews were supported by a self-reflection letter written to a hypothetical new student in which the participant recalls his or her experience with cultural identity throughout his or her studies at the university in a manner that would provide guidance to a prospective student.

**Interviews**

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that in-depth interviews are the primary means of data collection for phenomenological research. For this study, in-depth individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, and the data were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis (Patton, 2015). A single interview was conducted with each participant covering past and present experience with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpreters were offered to students to encourage students to fully express their lived experience. Interviews were scheduled to be conducted using current video conferencing technologies (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts) at a time convenient to both the participant and researcher. Follow up interviews were conducted via email as required to fill gaps or add depth to the narrative. The questions utilized for the interview were phrased in a manner that allowed the participants to
share their lived experience. The 32 questions were grouped such that each research question was independently probed.

1. What are some of your family’s customs or traditions that are important to you?
2. What is your role within your family?
3. What makes your tribe’s culture unique from other African tribes?
4. Please describe why you chose to study in English.
5. Please describe how you chose your field of study.
6. What does it mean to you to be an African?
7. South Africa is constitutionally multi-cultural and multi-lingual. What does that mean to you?
8. What does it mean to you to be a(n) [tribal name]?
9. How closely do you identify with your African and heritage culture?
10. Describe growing up in a(n) [tribal name] home.
11. How important to you is maintaining the language, customs, and traditions of your parents and ancestors? Please explain.
12. How do you think your experience of cultural identity is different from your parents and ancestors?
13. How do you describe yourself to those outside your national or tribal community?
14. How would you describe your learning experience with respect to your cultural identity?
15. What are some of the challenges in school related to your background?
16. How would you characterize the university’s understanding of your culture?
17. What support or strategies did you use to maintain your connection to your African and heritage culture?

18. Please describe your experience with English-medium instruction.

19. How would you describe the differences between English-medium instruction and learning in your primary language?

20. How did your learning experience affect significant others in your life?

21. Please describe the role of your family during your learning experience.

22. Please describe the role of your university peers during your learning experience.

23. What people or events, connected with your learning experience, stand out for you?

24. How do you feel about English-speaking cultures?

25. Please tell me about the people who are important or influential in your life.

26. What is more important to you: how others value you, or how you value yourself?

27. Why is learning in English important to you?

28. How would you describe your learning experience with respect to how you perceive your ability to succeed?

29. What challenges, if any, did you experience with respect to English-medium instruction at the university?

30. How did you address those challenges?

31. What support or strategies were available to you?

32. What feelings were generated by your experience of learning in English?

33. What thoughts stood out for you?

34. What else related to your learning experience would you like to add?
Questions one through four were icebreaker and general knowledge questions. They were intended to introduce the general purpose of the interview, engage the participant in the research task, and frame the participant as the expert in the conversation on the topic of their lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They provided a base and point of reference for the following questions.

Questions five through 16 explored the central research question, “How do South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context?” Cultural identity intersects cultural positioning and identifications that are historical, contextual, and relational constructions (Chen & Collier, 2012; Collier, 2005; Thompson & Collier, 2006). Cultural identity is negotiated within a social context and is affected variously by historical events, political conditions, by others, and the situation or site of interaction (Collier, 2005). Specifically, family is among the most significant proximal social contexts that guide identity formation (Mesinas & Perez, 2016). How individuals perceive themselves and how they believe they are perceived by others influences the individual’s sense of belonging (Collier, 2005). These questions established how the participants experienced cultural identity in general, whether their identity is socially contingent, and how they have negotiated their cultural identity within the English-medium instruction context.

Questions 17 through 21 explored the first support question, “How do South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe learning in an English-medium program?” African students who are taught in their primary languages at the primary level tend to score better on standardized tests in later grades (Coyne, 2015). However, students who are introduced to English late in their academic progress have limited chances for success in higher education and are less likely to find gainful employment (Coyne, 2015; Kaiper,
These questions allowed the students to describe learning in an English-medium context and how they experienced the influence on their close social relationships.

Questions 22 through 26 explored the second support question, “How do South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe their perception of their academic self-efficacy?” Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to influence events that affect one’s life and exert control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1977). The degree to which someone holds his or her sense self-efficacy influences personal cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional functioning (Bandura, 2008). There are four primary factors that can contribute to a positive sense of self-efficacy: (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experience, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977).

Intrinsic factors, such as stress management and coping skills, and extrinsic factors, including the social aspects of self, relationships, and communication with others combine to influence the individual’s academic self-efficacy (Guan & So, 2016). Influence of EMI on academic self-efficacy is primarily dependent on whether the participant has adopted a monocultural or multicultural orientation (Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016). This group of questions explored the student’s perception of personal agency and the factors that influence perception.

Questions 27 through 29 explored the third support question, “How do South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe the challenges of learning in English?” Students learning in an English-medium context encounter cognitive and non-cognitive challenges including hindered ability to explore abstract concepts (Airey et al., 2017; Cankaya, 2017; Chun et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018), lack of self-efficacy and motivation (Cankaya, 2017; Chun et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2017), culture loss (Cankaya, 2017), and conflict with national or cultural identity (Dearden, 2016; Sung, 2016; Trofimovich &
Turuseva, 2015). Questions 27 through 29 allowed the participants to describe their experience regarding the challenges that have been encountered and what support strategies have been employed as a result.

Finally, questions 30 through 32 closed the interview and provided opportunity for the participant to include additional comments or insights not previously covered (Patton, 2015). The purpose of these questions was to leave the participant feeling empowered and listened to.

**Focus Groups**

A single focus group was conducted in which seven of the 10 participants contributed. The focus group was conducted for the purpose of providing additional depth and to close any gaps from the individual interviews (Patton, 2015). The focus group created an opportunity to cultivate new insights from participants and encourage them to be more expressive regarding their lived experience. Students who were reserved during the individual interviews were encouraged to provide in-depth responses in a setting among their peers. Additionally, the focus group interviews served to cross-check for consistency in the data collected through the interview process (Patton, 2015). Interpreters were offered to encourage students to fully express their lived experience. No interpreters were requested. The 10 questions utilized for the interview were phrased in a manner that allowed the participants to share their lived experience.

1. Please introduce yourself and tell us something about your national and tribal background.
2. How important to you is maintaining the language, customs, and traditions of your community?
3. South Africa is constitutionally multi-cultural and multi-lingual. What does that mean to you?
4. How has cultural recognition and appreciation changed over the past 25 years?

5. When considering which university to attend, what were some of the school qualities and characteristics you considered?

6. How would you describe your learning experience with respect to your cultural identity?

7. When you think about the English language, what do you think of?

8. How would you describe the differences between English-medium instruction and learning in your primary language?

9. Describe how language diversity should be addressed in the university.

10. We have been talking about language and cultural identity. Is there anything you would like to add?

Cultural identity theory (Collier, 2005) describes identity as the experience, enactment, and negotiation of dynamic social identifications by group members within a specific context. An individual may perceive him or herself simultaneously as a member of global, national, and tribal communities depending on the context, without conflict. The individual’s cultural identity may be affected variously by historical events, political conditions, by others, and the situation or site of interaction (Collier, 2005). The focus group questions were intended to elicit the participants’ experience of cultural identity in the context of learning in an English-medium context. Questions one through four focused on the participants’ experience of cultural identity, its relevance, and the degree to which they held their cultural identity to be personally important. Questions three and four specifically examined the participants’ response to the policy versus reality of cultural change in South Africa. In studies set in different social contexts, students tended to seek out English-medium university programs in order to improve language skills and
expand job possibilities (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Huang, 2018; Kuchah, 2016). Questions five through seven examined this in a South African university context, probing the participants’ motivation for selecting an English-medium program and their learning experience after having done so. Questions eight and nine explore the participants’ learning experience in an English-medium context and their assessment of the language policies at their university. Question 10 closed the interview and provided opportunity for the participant to provide additional comments or insights not previously covered (Patton, 2015).

**Self-Reflection Writing**

Participants were asked to consider a hypothetical scenario and write a letter that might be delivered to a prospective student (Appendix F). The hypothetical scenario and self-reflection writing exercise allowed the participant time to think through his or her experience with the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Follow-up interviews based on the self-reflection writing were conducted via email, as required to fill gaps or add depth to the narrative.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis followed Moustakas’ research method (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of transcendental phenomenological research is to derive the essence of a lived experience as described by persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The core processes that facilitate the derivation of essence or meaning from a lived experience are epoche (bracketing), transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis.

**Bracketing**

Transcendental phenomenology is conditioned upon setting aside all preconceived ideas and knowledge through epoche or bracketing, to see phenomena freshly, as it is (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological epoche neither denies absolute reality, nor does it doubt
everything, but it holds in abeyance the biases of everyday knowledge as a foundation for truth and reality (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described this process as bracketing predilections, prejudices, and predispositions to allow the phenomenon to appear as if for the first time. Husserl (2012) clarified the method, noting that the epoche process or bracketing deliberately makes no use of existing knowledge and experience in determining the meaning of the experience. It is not supposed that a perfectly unbiased state can be achieved, but the epoche process enables the researcher to minimize bias in describing the experience from an objective perspective (Moustakas, 1994). The persistence of encroaching bias demands that the epoche be a sustained process from data collection through analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I engaged in an initial reflexive assessment to identify and record known biases, experiences, preconceptions. Secondly, I bracketed any related biases throughout the data collection and analysis phases and promote the participants as the dominant voice in the research noting biases and preconceptions as they arose (see Appendix J).

**Transcendental-phenomenological Reduction**

Transcendental-phenomenological reduction is the process of considering the experience in its singularity and describing the experience (noema) in textural language (Moustakas, 1994). All elements that were not directly within the conscious experience of the participant were eliminated, reducing the data of experiences to its invariant elements, called the meaning units or horizons (Moustakas, 1994). To accomplish this, I read transcripts of the in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection letters, writing memos to capture significant statements (Appendix H), key concepts, and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed the significant statements for relations, similarities and dissimilarities for categories that were used to develop broader themes and subthemes. Data from each of the sources were compared for
areas of agreement and divergence. I looked for repeated or prominent ideas, words, and phrases in sentences and paragraphs. I also examined the transcripts for ideas that spanned multiple participants, and compared these statements against one another to create nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. Data collection continued until unique perspectives of the phenomenon were exhausted or saturated.

**Imaginative Variation**

The objective of imaginative variation is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience exploring the essential factors (noesis) that account for what is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation is not concerned with facts or empirical evidence, but seeks to uncover the essence of the experience. Husserl (2012) asserted that “pure essential truths do not make the slightest assertion concerning facts” (p. 14). Moustakas (1994) stated that imaginative variation enables the researcher to develop structural themes from the textural descriptions obtained through phenomenological reduction. It is in this phase that the researcher examines the possible structures of time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others. I followed Moustakas’ (1994) delineation of the steps of imaginative variation, including: (a) systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meanings; (b) recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon; (c) considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon; and (d) searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon.
Synthesis

Once individual textural and structural descriptions were created, as described above, I developed a composite textural and a composite structural description representing the participants as a collective. As the final step in the research process, I created a textural-structural synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

In phenomenological research, the aim is to develop an understanding of the phenomenon by examining the ways in which participants experience, perceive, and make sense of their lived experience. This research employed a social constructivist framework, stressing the importance of establishing trustworthiness as the strategy for rigorously assessing whether the analysis accurately reflects the lived experience of participants (Guba, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) concluded that trustworthiness in a qualitative research study involves establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility involves establishing the accuracy of the research study’s findings (Patton, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that member-checking was essential for establishing credibility. Member-checking occurs when data, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member-checking provides internal validity to the study, ensuring accuracy and completeness by providing opportunity for participants to reinforce or modify previous reports, or to rectify incorrect interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). To establish internal validity, I collaborated with participants prior to constructing the final draft of the study. Participants
reviewed and responded to the transcribed transcripts, data analysis, and each phase of
development (Cormier, 2018).

Triangulation of sources provides a test for consistency between multiple sources that
increases understanding of the data (Guba, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). To
establish credibility, I triangulated data between individual in-depth interviews and focus group
transcripts, and further compared these with the participant’s self-reflection writing which
provided data from different points in time and from multiple points of view. The comparative
combination of these texts elucidated more facets of the phenomenon and revealed any
discrepancies that were produced by the individual data collection methods (Cormier, 2018).

Prolonged engagement allows the researcher time to learn about the culture,
characteristics of the context and the problem, and to build a relationship of trust (Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, no time was afforded to interact with
the participants in person in the course of this study. However, I have lived in South Africa for
12 years, and actively developed an understanding of the culture and customs of the South
African tribes, as well as an understanding of the historical foundation for the problem being
researched.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability establishes the stability of the research after discounting conscious and
unpredictable changes inherent to emergent research design (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Guba
(1978) suggested overlapping methods as a kind of triangulation process that undergirds claims
of reliability to the extent that the independent methods produce complementary results. In this
study, individual and focus group interviews, as well as the participant’s self-reflection writing,
provided separate data collection methods that produced complementary results. Additionally,
the methodological processes were reported in detail and submitted for an external audit (Guba, 1978). Once completed, I submitted the manuscript to the methodologist and qualitative director for review and feedback on the manuscript, ensuring the research methodology, findings, and conclusion were valid and supported by the data.

Confirmability is the researcher’s concern for objectivity, the extent to which the researcher maintains neutrality (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Multilingual research requires that the researcher recognizes the individual’s linguistic positionality in relationship to the participant, as the dominant language of the researcher may become a form of power over the participant (Cormier, 2018; Oxley et al., 2017). Insider, outsider, or insider-outsider positionality is a reference to the degree to which the researcher is similar to the participant with regard to areas such as ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, or language (Bruskin, 2019; Cormier, 2018). A researcher who is positionally an insider-outsider is one who may share the same language or ethnicity with the participant, but is dissimilar because of education level or socioeconomic status (Bruskin, 2019; Cormier, 2018; Epstein et al., 2015). Linguistic insiders are able to freely converse with the participants, but are often perceived as biased and too close to their participants to ask challenging questions or accurately analyze responses (Cormier, 2018). Outsiders are often perceived as objective or neutral, giving participants more liberty to speak freely about sensitive issues, but are hindered by an inability to speak the participant’s primary language (Cormier, 2018). Guba and Lincoln (1982) submitted that triangulation and “practicing reflexivity” (p. 248) sufficiently address the task of confirmability. Triangulation reduces the effect of researcher bias in that it ensures that the results are the views and experiences of the participants (Guba, 1978). Additionally, involving the participants in member-checking throughout the translation and analysis process was used to share power with the participants.
(Cormier, 2018). I continually highlighted my biases and assumptions relative to this study as part of the bracketing process.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the extent to which the findings may be applied to other situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Sampling that maximizes the variation in the sites and participants, and thus the range of information collected, increases transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Maximum variation sampling was used, and participants selected from multiple sites in South Africa. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed thick description as a way of achieving a type of external validity. Thick description is describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail to impart a vicarious experience of it and to facilitate judgments about the extent to which the phenomenon might be transferable to a second and similar context (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). For this study, I provided background data to establish context of the study and a detailed description of the phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made.

**Ethical Considerations**

The Belmont Report (2018) identified three basic ethical principles with accompanying applications that guide the conduct of biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects. The three principles are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Within respect for persons is the concept that all individuals are autonomous agents and those with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 2018). Undergirding the precept of respect for persons is the premise that each individual is unique and has value. In application, the Basic HHS Policy for Protection of Human Research Subjects (2018) provided specific protection for vulnerable categories of people. In this study, I was guided by principle that each person has
inherent worth as individuals who have been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, English Standard Version). To protect participants from deceptive or harmful practices, the proposal was submitted to the university Institutional Review Board for approval prior to conducting the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An informed consent form with a written statement as to the general purpose of the study and how the data were to be used was provided to the participants prior to the study and reviewed during the interview process. Participants who refused to provide consent or withdrew their consent during the process were immediately removed from the study and their information deleted, except for data collected in the process of the focus group, which were retained, but not included in the study. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in respect of the participants’ privacy. Data, including recordings and transcriptions of interviews, were maintained on a password protected computer, and after three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Finally, I performed due diligence in becoming culturally literate and sensitive to the cultures and norms of the participants in the study.

Summary

The perspectives of Black South African university students regarding cultural identity in an English-medium context presents a unique perspective that is most effectively be captured through individual first-hand narratives, strengthened by examining conjoint and recurring themes from multiple individuals. This chapter provided an overview of the selected methodology and the rationale for why the phenomenological approach was an appropriate research methodology. To examine the lived experience of these university students, 10 participants were purposefully selected to represent a cross-section of tribal affiliation/primary language groups and age. Individual interviews allowed the participant to express his or her own
intentionality towards the experience, giving fuller understanding to his or her cultural identity while learning in a non-primary language. The individual interviews were complemented by a focus group interview and self-reflection writing that cultivated new insights and encouraged participants to be more expressive regarding their lived experience. Data analysis methodology followed Moustakas’ (1994) framework involving the processes of bracketing, reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Trustworthiness was established through processes outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Ethical principles integrally related to scholarly discovery through respect for persons, beneficence, and justice guided my efforts throughout every aspect of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context. A total of 10 participants were selected to represent the perspectives of a cross-section of Black South African society. This chapter presents the findings of this study, beginning with a description of the 10 South African university students who participated in this study.

This chapter introduces results from the study through the research questions, focus groups, and self-reflection writing presenting the emerging themes in the context of the research questions, which were aligned to the theoretical framework used for this study. Summary findings identify both textual and structural descriptions of how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context.

Participants

This study included Black South African university students of different tribal and language backgrounds who share the common experience of learning in an English-medium instruction context. This study consisted of 10 participants who met the research criteria and were willing to participate. The participants all conform to the prescribed eligibility requirements: affiliation with one of the nine tribal language groups in South Africa, were between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, and were currently enrolled in or recently completed a degree program in which English was the primary language of instruction. Participants included seven male and three female participants between the ages of 20 and 30 years old. Three participants were Northern Sotho, three were Swazi, two were Zulu, and two were Xhosa. Three of the languages represented in this study, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and siSwati, are part of the Nguni
family of languages, which is a subgroup of the Bantu language group. Sepedi and its various dialects are in the Sotho-Tswana subgroup of the Bantu language group. These two language groups are the primary language of 90.86% of the Black South African population (Statistics South Africa, n.d.). All participants were South African citizens and were enrolled in a degree program at a public South African university in which English is the medium of instruction at the time of their participation. Participants came from various backgrounds, each with a unique family and socioeconomic history, and worldviews that provide the contextual factors have been formative to the students’ diverse insights into the phenomenon. Participants shared their experiences in the format of personal interviews, a focus group, and a self-reflection writing exercise. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Pseudonyms were selected using a random name generator consistent with the participant’s cultural identity and gender, which were then approved by the participant during a member-check of the individual interview transcripts. Seven of the ten participants responded to the member-check, all of whom affirmed the accuracy and completeness of the transcripts. Participant quotes are taken from the participants’ individual interviews, focus group, and self-reflection writing and are presented verbatim. Quotes include common colloquial phrasing in which people groups and language are used interchangeably. Afrikaners are often referred to by their language, Afrikaans. Likewise, a participant might refer to speaking Swazi, where Swazi is a people group who speak siSwati.

Mthobeli

Mthobeli is a 29-year-old Xhosa male from the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. He is a former theology student who is now studying public management and governance. Mthobeli works as the director of a nonprofit community development foundation in the farming and industrial town where he was born. He aspires to public office as a member of one of the
parties in opposition to the dominant African National Congress (ANC). Mthobeli is highly motivated and confident in his abilities and understanding of the world around him. Describing himself, he said,

Myself, I am more the leader, I’m at the center of everything. When it comes to peacemaking; when it comes to where wisdom is needed; where maybe direction is needed that must be undertaken, or a position that must be taken, so my input is always influential.

Mthobeli grew up in a Christian home, which he credits with influencing his worldview. Expounding on his cultural identity, Mthobeli extoled the accomplishments of the Xhosa people, specifically mentioning Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Steve Biko, and Trevor Noah. However, he clarified, “I identify myself as an African. I do not take much pride in terms of me being Xhosa per se, but I take more pride in terms of being African.” Although he does not identify closely with the customs and traditions of the Xhosa tribe, Mthobeli believes that the Xhosa language and the traditional values should be maintained. For example, Mthobeli rejects the practice of the traditional Xhosa manhood ritual, which he described as young men spending three months in the mountain under the tutelage of the elders culminating in a ritual circumcision. However, he believes firmly that the traditional values of manhood such as respect and honor for elders and women are lacking in South Africa’s young people and need to be reemphasized.

With respect to the Xhosa language, Mthobeli noted that it is important “that we do not get to a point where our children don’t know, they only know English and not their traditional language.” He described English as a “dispensational language” that is essential as a tool for communicating cross culturally. Although comprehension of the learning materials remains the
primary obstacle to learning, Mthobeli acknowledged that having been taught with English as the medium of instruction from preschool onward is significant to his ability to succeed at the university level. He would have preferred that his education had been in isiXhosa.

**Mvuseselo**

Mvuseselo is a 27-year-old Swazi male from the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. Mvuseselo described himself as having grown up in a mostly Christian household that participated in some of the traditional Swazi cultural practices, such as the use of traditional healers (*inyangas*) and herbs. Mvuseselo expanded that, “We believe in herbs. We know about something called *imphepho*.” *Imphepho* is a *muthi*, a sacred herb prescribed by *inyangas* for many remedies. The ritual burning of *imphepho* is believed to invoke the ancestors and to drive away malicious spirits which are regarded as common causes of illness in African traditional medicine. Mvuseselo celebrates the diversity of South African language and culture, but noted that in seeking “greener pastures” Black Africans are giving “birth to children in White setup if I may say and in that way those children know nothing about culture let alone to recognize or appreciate it.”

Mvuseselo is an aspiring singer who is attending college primarily because it is expected of him to do so. He is studying developmental studies in a university that is predominantly Venda that has necessitated him to adapt to the dominant Venda culture. In discussing how he reconciles living in a Venda community while maintaining his Swazi identity, Mvuseselo described it,

Now I have learned to live amongst the Venda people. But, at the same time I need to preserve for the next generation, preserve my language, preserve my culture. . . . No, I’m a Swazi speaking person but I’m incorporating and learning from the others.”
Mvuseselo perceives English as the meeting point where different cultures are able to communicate. In his words, “the whole world I believe, we meet at the point which is English. English is the meeting point for each and every language. So, if I’m learning in English, I’m in a position to communicate with other people.” At the same time, he observed that “it should not be that if you are not excelling in it that you are deemed less intelligent.”

When asked about his motivation with respect to academics, Mvuseselo responded, “I did not believe that only academics can be a way to success. One way or the other I still don’t believe even now. I believe in talent mixed with academics mixed with business.” Asked to expand, Mvuseselo replied,

I’m an average student, if I may put it like that, but I never saw myself failing in life. So, if I approach an assignment, I won’t lie to you, at first, I could not see the value because I thought that the other course is very simple. Being a musician is very simple. I hit some few notes and I get money.

**Siphosethu**

Siphosethu is a Zulu male between 20 and 30 years old who was born and raised in the Kwa Zulu Natal Province of South Africa. Siphosethu grew up without a father, and his mother died when he was very young, so he was raised by his grandmother. These events had a profound impact on Siphosethu’s identity and worldview, specifically regarding how he sees himself as a Zulu male. In describing his home life, Siphosethu observed,

I was grown by my grandmother. So, we didn’t have anything. So, growing in a home without a man, without a father or grandfather is very hard. Not financially, but someone who will teach you how to live; someone who will teach you the basics of life – the disciplines, respect.
Siphosethu is a first-year law student but is still exploring how he wants to use his degree after graduation. Siphosethu is grateful for his grandmother’s support and influence in his life, but he is concerned for her wellbeing and future, commenting that his grandmother is waiting for him to “get a job and to feed her. That’s what she wants and that’s what I’m trying to do.” In describing his learning experience, Siphosethu noted from the outset that he is “very angry” because the majority of his modules are taught by White people and he felt that his “brothers don’t want to go out and go to there and teach us at university.” At the same time, he believes that learning English, if not learning in English, is very important as a tool for global communication.

Malusi

Malusi is a 20-year-old Xhosa male. Malusi’s tribal roots are in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Malusi’s parents were raised in a rural area where the language and customs have not been as strongly affected as in the urban areas. However, Malusi noted that, because it was a better school than one where Xhosa was the medium of instruction, his parents sent him to a “predominantly White school where it was English and Afrikaans.” He was raised in a Christian home and his family did not observe many of the traditional Xhosa customs and traditions. Commenting on his cultural identity, Malusi noted that “My parents did not place much importance on it as I was growing up. I place my identity in God, which has value for me.” Overall, Malusi observed that the culture that was so strongly observed by his ancestors has become diluted. For example, although Malusi’s father went to the mountain, Malusi did not participate in the manhood rite of passage in which the young man goes to the mountain where the elders are “telling stories of the old Xhosa people and everyone’s sitting covered in blankets and face paint and everything.” Further accentuating the dilution of the Xhosa culture, Malusi
recalled that many of the young men that he grew up with looked forward to the tradition, not because of the spiritual, cultural, or social significance of it, but “when I was growing up, it was probably the thing that everyone looked forward to and the whole ceremony, because they really go overboard with the presents. Like, you can expect a car once you come back.” One custom that Malusi underlined as being personally significant was memorizing the clan names. The clan names represent the personal lineage of the individual and connects him to his heritage. As Malusi explained it,

What happens is that people leave the rural area at certain age and most of then move to a different city like Johannesburg or Cape Town as those places are known as the places to make money. They [the elders] explained to me that while you are in that space you aren’t going to be around your culture and people tend to change and get altered by their environment, but they said as long as you remember who you are and where you’re from you’ll be able to keep your identity.

Malusi is studying investment management. A pivotal event that strongly influenced his work ethic happened early in his first year. Malusi decided to change his degree, but because the modules run sequentially, he was not able to begin his new courses until the following school year. Because of this, he developed an attitude of “In June I’m gone, done. There’s no real need to push for exams, there’s no real need to do well because I’m just going to be doing a new degree next year.” However, a mentor spoke to him about his attitude and told him, “don’t do that because it might not seem like it because you might start to develop this where, this act of not finishing things and being lazy might become your character.” Malusi said that the wisdom of that advice motivated him to pay more attention to his studies “to just strengthen my character, just to create that work ethic even though it didn’t count.”
Njabulu

Njabulu is a 21-year-old Swazi female who grew up in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. “Free” is the essential word summarizing Njabulu’s homelife and ultimately her concept of identity. Describing her parents, Njabulu said,

They never forced me to speak a certain language. They never forced me to act a certain way. . . . So, I got to choose which South African culture I wanted to adapt to. With Heritage Day, Africa Day, I get to pick and choose which culture I want to wear on that specific day. I was never really restricted. I was quite free to express who I am, what I believe in, and all that.

Njabulu’s conception of being African or being of a particular tribe is a matter of personal identification. That is, “anybody can be African if you learn the languages, you learn the cultures you can just say I’m an African.” She continued, “I personally believe that knowing your culture does not add to the person you want to become.” To Njabulu, the fact that South Africa is a multilingual, multicultural nation means that “We are basically given an opportunity to pick a tribe we would like to belong to.”

Njabulu is studying media, specializing in public relations. Her initial desire was to pursue a career in television, but the school only had a degree for behind-the-scenes production work. After that she wanted to work radio, but she came to realize that “either you have the talent, or you don’t have the talent to speak to people.” Public relations became her fallback choice. Given the competitive nature of the career she’s chosen, she said, “It’s not an overnight experience. It takes a lot of experiences to build you to where you want and not everything that you plan is going to go according to plan.” Njabulu said that her greatest support comes from her friends.
Dumisile

Dumisile is a 21-year-old Swazi male who was raised in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. Dumisile is studying to be a chartered accountant. He sees himself working in a bank or as a finance director at some point, but his heart’s desire is to start his own investment company. Dumisile’s parents both came from impoverished backgrounds. He described his mother’s childhood home as having no roof, so they had to stand when it rained, and his father as growing up without shoes. Despite their humble beginnings, they worked for 10 years to save enough to attend university. Dumisile emoted with great affection and honor that both parents were university graduates, each with honors degrees. It was from this personal history that his parents strongly encouraged and supported Dumisile to attend university. Dumisile recalled the help they gave, “It was very important to them for me to go to university. . . . They’ve experienced university and have seen what knowledge can do for them and their own lives and what a degree can potentially do for them.”

When discussing his African and Swazi identity, Dumisile emphasized that the “traits and morals or values that have been passed down from generation to generation” are more significant today than the traditional rituals and ceremonies. According to Dumisile, for the Swazi person, these traits include humility, wisdom, respect, and a virtue called ubuntu. Dumisile described ubuntu as “looking out for one another for the greater good of our whole society.” Dumisile pointed out that the “government runs many projects and initiatives to educate people about the various cultures.” However, the general increase in knowledge and technology have exposed “certain traditions or things they have been taught are actually false.” According to Dumisile, this same increase in knowledge and technology has had a detrimental effect on the retention of
tribal language. Dumisile observed, “more and more people are exposed to the English language and often times they lose the ability to speak the language.”

**Gabadeli**

Gabadeli is a 22-year-old Zulu male who was born in Zimbabwe, but raised in South Africa. Gabadeli is studying computer engineering, a decision that is not popular with his family. Both his parents and his grandparents wanted him to study medicine. In explanation, Gabadeli remarked that computer engineering is not a field that is considered a pathway to success in the Black African community. He offered that “in many Black cultures the family has certain expectations of you and for most Black students the expectations from their families are either going into medicine or going into law or something of the sort.” The result of his familial expectation was further highlighted when he started at university and walked into his first class. Gabadeli estimated that the engineering department is about 45% Black and 55% White, but that most of the Black students are in mechanical engineering. By Gabadeli’s reckoning, the computer engineering division is more like 95% White. He recalled that his early experience at the university caused him some hesitation. He said when he walked into the classroom “you see that massive difference the first thing you are confronted with is ‘am I in the wrong place?’ It’s like ‘where did all the Black people go? Did they get a memo that I missed or something?’” When asked about how he maintains his cultural identity amid the diversity of the university and in the degree program he selected, Gabadeli explained the challenge noting that in high school, even though he went to a multiracial multicultural school, at the end of the school day one could go home “where you still have your family who are strong and steadfast in the cultural experience, in their traditions” but university is different,
I have neighbors, the people who live to my left and to my right, are completely different people from who I am. And so, when I step out of university, this multicultural environment, I still go back to my own apartment which is still a multicultural environment. And so, the interaction from university and the place that now become my new home doesn’t have a difference.

Gabadeli said that the university offers social clubs for the various tribal groups, but because of his schedule, he is unable to participate. Instead, Gabadeli said that he tends to associate more with those in his class or in the apartment building who are like him, either because they are Black or because they are Zulu. Gabadeli stated that culture experience, as he understands culture, is not only about the things one is interested in, but also about what is imposed upon the member by the culture. Gabadeli said that it is the things that are imposed, perhaps against his own desires, which become the easiest to be neglected in a multicultural environment.

**Thabisco**

Thabisco is 21-year-old Northern Sotho, also known as Bapedi or Pedi, female. Thabisco was born to Sepedi (Northern Sotho) speaking parents in the Limpopo Province. She declared, “My tribal roots lie in the Limpopo province and totem being an elephant.” Thabisco described her upbringing as strict and overprotective, characteristics with which she is demonstrably discontented and against which she resists through her actions and attitudes. Thabisco voiced frustration when describing how her brothers vetoed a potential engagement to her boyfriend and, again with her mother who maintains a curfew for her daughter even though she is in university. Thabisco described her circle of friends as “very playful and only a few, I can only point to a few that take their studies seriously.” Thabisco described her own attitude toward
studying at the university as “I really don’t think going to school, while it is important, but I don’t think education is the only way you can be successful.” Summarizing the differences in the cultural experience of her parents and ancestors compared to her own, Thabisco stated, “looking at the two generations I honestly cannot see how they lived. . . . It stopped them from living freely. . . . I don’t let my customs and traditions stop me from being me.” At the same time, Thabisco expressed regret that her generation had succumbed to western traditions and lost touch with their own culture.

**Letago**

Letago is a Northern Sotho, also known as Bapedi or Pedi, female between 20 and 30 years old. She is a third-year law student attending a South African university located in an area where the dominant language is Sesotho. Letago commented that,

As a person of the Bapedi tribe, I’m fortunate enough that my university is in an area dominantly occupied by the Basotho tribe which is the sister language and culture to mine. Because of this I am taught in an environment that can accommodate me in both English and vernacular.

Letago went to elementary and secondary school in a Model C school. Letago explained that “Model C” is a holdover term describing schools that were formerly designated by the apartheid government as being for Whites only. These schools have now been required to open to all students. Model C schools are generally considered to be better than township schools, which teach in the local language, but they are English and Afrikaans-medium schools. The tradeoff, Letago observed, is that parents have a choice to either send their children to a lower quality school that teaches in their primary language or to a higher quality school where they will learn exclusively in English and Afrikaans. From her own experience, attending a Model C
school has better prepared her for English-medium instruction, but that same education deprived her of the ability to read and write in her own language. She recalled, “I can only read and write in English whereas I cannot in my own language. I was never taught it. I can only speak it.”

Letago indicated that the disparity in education quality between rural local language schools and the established (Model C) dominant language schools is a hindrance to the advancement of the country, pointing out that,

They have built a hierarchy within education, with those at the top being from previous apartheid White schools and the bottom being rural schools. But what they fail to realize is that if the rural schools were given the same opportunity as the Model C schools, more children born in rural areas would be more prepared for varsity and life from their school experiences.

Currently, all public universities use English and Afrikaans as the medium of instruction even though the country is pledged to produce multilingual and multicultural opportunities. Letago proposed that university students would benefit from a system in which they were taught in the primary language that reflected the dominant heritage language of the area around the university along with English, as it is the most widely spoken language. Letago suggested as an example that, “in a province like Gauteng, students should be given the right to learn in English or Setswana.”

**Phegello**

Phegello is a Northern Sotho, also known as Bapedi or Pedi, male between 20 and 30 years old. Phegello’s journey has been a unique one. Phegello’s father is Zulu and his mother is Bapedi, but Phegello prefers to emphasize the Northern Sotho aspects of his heritage because Sepedi is his first language. When Phegello was young, his parents, “who are mostly modern,”
sent him to live with his grandparents in the village, who are “mostly traditional.” There was a basic conflict in that Phegello’s grandparents believed and practiced the traditional ways of the Northern Sotho people, but his parents are Christians and eschew the traditions that conflict with their beliefs. Living in his grandparent’s home, Phegello observed many of the traditions that he was not allowed to participate in. Further contributing to his feelings of isolation, he did not speak Sepedi, but had to learn in order to adjust to the dominant Bapedi culture. At the age of seven he returned to his parents and was enrolled in an Afrikaans-medium school and then a double-medium English and Afrikaans school. The transition was difficult, and the students were punished by the teachers for speaking their primary language on campus. As Phegello put it, “At that point you feel bad when another kid that’s maybe Afrikaans can talk his language and you can’t. . . . You get to a certain point where you feel attacked.” His early English-Afrikaans education has caused him to lose touch with his Northern Sotho language in that he is unable to write in Sepedi but can only speak it. Phegello feels the same sense of cultural isolation at university with White lecturers who seem reluctant to learn the tribal languages or about Black African cultures. The events of his youth have encouraged Phegello to begin a quest to discover his cultural heritage, which has now spanned for five or six years.

When asked how he maintains his cultural identity, he said that he spends a good amount of time studying his tribal history and reciting his clan names. As Phegello explained it,

Your surname is imparted to your clan name, if you know the history behind it you will know yourself as a person. Basically, it’s just to know your history and to know what makes you a Black person in Africa.
Reciting the clan names becomes a recitation of his genealogical history, with each name carrying an imprint of some characteristic of that history. It provides Phegello with a sense of belonging to his tribe and his ethnic heritage.

Phegello’s academic journey is also distinct in that it is set in the framework of his athletic aspirations. Phegello is part of a rugby union and, as such, the union controls much of his academic life. The union allowed Phegello to select a degree from a list of programs that the union deems “easiest for us to manage.” Phegello has selected business management, but this is not really the area he would like to study. Because the student-athlete has to balance the rigors of the classroom with an equally rigorous training and game schedule, Phegello and the other athletes do not attend classes on campus. The lecturers come to the facilities that the rugby union provides. Phegello’s teammates, his peers, have become his academic support structure. Phegello recalled,

We stay off campus and we stay as a group of boys mainly playing sports. So, we have to help each other whichever way when somebody is doing bad. So, we tend to help each other with work. So, I believe that the collection of us being together and helping each other is very important.

Phegello used the word “adapt” repeatedly in his interview. Describing his parents’ struggle during apartheid he said, “looking at the past with our parents it was adapt or die type of situation. So, it was either adapt to the language or you die.” Describing his own childhood, he recalled, “I had to adapt as quick as possible as a little kid in preschool.” With the many different cultures into which Phegello has been immersed, adapting has become a way of life. He summarized it, “I generally put myself in a box where wherever I am, I have to learn and adapt
as quick as possible. So, I really put myself in that box that I should humble myself and embrace other people’s cultures.”

Results

This study was guided by the central question: How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction learning context? Maximum variation sampling was used to provide high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case within a heterogenous sample while underscoring central themes and common patterns that cut across variables (Patton, 2015). The results of this study are presented through structural analysis following the ideas and processes recommended by Moustakas (1994). The data analysis process included transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of the textual and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). After completing individual interviews, a focus group, and self-reflection writing exercise, five primary themes were developed in line with the theoretical foundations of cultural identity, social identity, and self-efficacy.

Theme Development

Transcendental-phenomenological reduction is the process of considering the experience in its singularity and describing the experience in textural language (Moustakas, 1994). All elements that were not directly within the conscious experience of the participant were eliminated, reducing the data of experiences to its horizons (Moustakas, 1994). To accomplish this, I read transcripts of the in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection writings (Appendix G) to capture significant statements, key concepts, and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed the significant statements for relations, similarities and dissimilarities for categories that were used to develop broader themes (Appendix H). Data was coded into Nvivo
where it was compared for areas of agreement and divergence. I looked for repeated or prominent ideas, words, and phrases in sentences and paragraphs (Appendix I). I also examined the transcripts for ideas that spanned multiple participants, and compared these statements against one another to create nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements.

Individual interviews were conducted via video conferencing using Zoom, Skype, and Google Hangouts. The audio recorded interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, some spanning multiple sessions due to network connectivity issues or the participant’s data limits. The interview followed a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D) with extemporaneous follow-up and probing questions. All 10 participants completed the interviews. Participants were engaged and enthusiastic.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions, a single focus group was conducted using the YoTeach online discussion board application. Each participant was sent a list of the interview questions (see Appendix E) and the questions were entered as prompts within the application. Seven of the 10 participants engaged in the discussion board. The participants’ answers were thorough and well thought out, although there was little conversation between the participants or between the participants and the moderator.

Each participant was asked to complete a self-reflection writing exercise based on a hypothetical scenario (see Appendix F). I received documents from five of the 10 participants. The participants shared their experiences as an EFL student in an EMI learning context and shared their thoughts and strategies for how a new student could succeed academically and culturally in a similar situation.

Transcripts from of the in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, and self-reflection writing exercise were read several times, identifying significant words (see Appendix I) and
statements (see Appendix H) which were coded using Nvivo 12. The coded statements were sorted into categories where they were analyzed for relations, similarities and dissimilarities and filed in categories that were used later to develop broader themes and subthemes. I compared the significant statements from each source for areas of agreement and divergence. There were no areas of divergence but, in some cases, one data collection method provided additional or clarifying information relevant to the participant’s experience. In the single case of questioning the participants on their feelings toward English-speaking cultures, the participants seemed reticent, and the responses were less robust. An additional search of the data was made using search criteria designed to identify descriptors used by participants when talking about English-speakers or Afrikaners. The result of this search produced more informative results than direct questioning of the participants. Ideas that spanned multiple participants were compared to create nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. Significant words identified in the initial coding were later used to develop the core symbols discussed in Theme One: Cultural Identity and Social Context (see Table 3). Data collection and analysis continued until unique perspectives of the phenomenon were exhausted or saturated.

Five primary themes with subthemes were identified within the research (Table 2). The five primary themes include cultural identity negotiation, the university’s understanding and treatment of cultural diversity, social relations between ingroup and outgroups, factors influencing academic self-efficacy, and challenges faced in the learning experience.
Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes for all Data Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity and Social Context</td>
<td>Comparison with previous generations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conflict between multiple cultures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mobility and cultural connection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Knowledge and technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Language as culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>University Understanding and Treatment of Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>University understanding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Academic and social treatment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural socialization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Ingroup characteristics</td>
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<td>Outgroup characteristics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cross-cultural relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Factors influencing self-efficacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stress management and coping skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenges to Academic Success</td>
<td>Language proficiency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family influence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student initiated support strategies</td>
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**Theme One: Cultural Identity and Social Context**

As the participants described how they experienced cultural identity, nine core symbols were identified. Core symbols are expressions of a group’s cultural beliefs and theories about the world around them (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The core symbols depicted how the participants perceive themselves and their culture in relationship to the world around them. These symbols were coded and grouped into subthemes. The core symbols of cultural identity cited by the participants, in descending order of frequency, are: (a) language, (b) pride in culture or tribal accomplishment, (c) family, (d) faith, (e) *ubuntu* or community, (f) race, (g) strength or resiliency, (h) family history, and (i) leadership. Single incidence outliers included individuality,
respect, humility, wisdom, and food. Table 3 summarizes the core symbols articulated by each of the participants.

### Table 3

**Core Symbols of Cultural Identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Pride</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Ubuntu</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Lead</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Mthobeli</td>
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<td>Mvuseselo</td>
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<td>Sipho sethu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malusi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Njabulu</td>
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<td>Dumisile</td>
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<td>Thabisco</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letago</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phegello</td>
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**Cultural Identity Comparison to Previous Generation.** The consensus among the participants in this study was that the era in which this generation lives is essentially different than the ones before, and therefore, the way in which cultural identity is experienced; the cultural categories on which cultural identity is founded, is equally different. Mthobeli was the only participant to specifically refer to his generation as the Born Free generation, but all 10 of the participants acknowledged the change from their parents’ experience of cultural identity and their own. Addressing the changes between his parents’ experience of cultural identity and his own, Gabadeli stated,

> This is something that I’ve noticed quite recently that as time goes on different generations experience life in different ways. There are so many new laws and new rights, new technology, every time that are introduced into the world. And with that, the culture kind of evolves with it. Although there is a resistance from the older generation to change with the times. But it is inevitable. Change has to come.
Njabulu expressed a similar sentiment regarding her experience of cultural identity in contrast with that of her parents, “I think mine is quite different because I’m exposed to a lot of different cultures, a variety of cultures especially because I live here in South Africa.” While many of the participants believed that the changes in cultural identity experience are positive, the opinion was not unanimous. On one side, Thabisco said, “I’ve realized how my parents are deeply rooted into their culture, and language, and, and, looking at the two generations I honestly cannot see how they lived. It’s very different.” On the other hand, Malusi expressed his disagreement and a sense of dismay at the trend away from previous generations. During the focus group discussion he wrote,

I believe it has declined. I notice the lack of importance culture has in my peer group but especially in the younger generation. One of the indicators for me is that most of the South African children today don't know in-depth knowledge about their culture.

The underlying reason given by the participants for not participating in their parents’ traditional norms and practices is rooted in how they perceive themselves and their social context. For Black South African university students, the social context that serves to shape their cultural identity is a temporal continuity of personal experiences, historical and political events, socioeconomic changes, relational constructions, and personal worldview. The participants perceived themselves essentially living in a qualitatively different world from their parents. Phegello observed of his parents, “It’s different because unlike them where they had it first on, I didn’t have it first on. So, I was raised up in different parts of the country, so I dealt with multiple cultures at one time.” Previous generations perceived themselves according to family, clan, and tribe first. Mthobeli, Malusi, Letago, and Phegello each commented that the insular tribal view of the preceding generation contributed to the ills of tribalism. Phegello said that,
“tribalism starts where you can’t really work with another person because you believe you’re better.” Malusi spoke about a war between the Xhosa and Zulu people,

And I think that’s important because, yes, individuality is good and being unique and sticking to your culture is great but if you look at it from an extreme sense if Afrikaans people only chose Afrikaans people and Xhosa people only hung out with Xhosa people and all these different nine language only hung out with their people I think that creates a lot of division which creates a lot of problems that, back in the day, a long time ago there was the big war between the Xhosas and the Zulus. And I think that separation is what allows for such problems to occur whether its racism or anything like that. I think separation more than anything creates that.

While the war between the Xhosas and Zulus is in the past, Malusi concluded that the effects of tribalism remain, “for example like my uncles and elders, they’re not too fond of Zulu people to this day.”

Multiple Coexisting Cultures. The participants of this study described reconceptualizing their cultural identity out of multiple coexisting cultures. On the one hand, the participants professed respect for the mores and values of the tribal culture of their ancestors and agree that the languages of their tribes must be preserved. Reverence for their elders, the historical traditions of past generations, and a strong sense of community pull the students toward their heritage culture. On the other, the participants identified a call toward a broader culture of national identity in which the participant must adapt to a multicultural society. The political and socioeconomical environment that unified their ancestors as a tribal community have drastically changed. The participants understood national and racial identity to be interconnected and a reference to the greater Black African community. Mthobeli said,
I take more pride in terms of being African because my view of Africa is not within our differences in terms of languages and tribes. But my view is a sense of our unified state as a Black nation whether you’re from Zimbabwe, whether you’re a Nigerian, or whether you’re Ghanaian, whether you are from Niger or Chad whatsoever. Whatever country that you are coming from, whatever culture, the very fact that we are Cushites, the very fact of which that we are Black, I take pride in that and I see the next person as my brother. We share the same struggles irregardless of our different history and stuff like that.

While acknowledging their tribal identity, the participants perceived themselves as part of a broader cultural context. Mthobeli voiced the majority opinion, “I identify myself as an African. I do not take much pride in terms of me being Xhosa per se, but I take more pride in terms of being African.” Siphosethu shared a comparable point of view, “To me, I take my place as an African more than I take my place as a Zulu.” Letago echoed a similar perspective, “I’ve never really thought of myself as Sepedi. I don’t identify myself with culture as much as I do with race.” In contrast, Gabadeli identified more closely with his tribal community, “It means pride. If anything, absolutely, it’s a pride thing, you know, ‘I am Zulu.’ That’s not something that you want to hide or something you are ashamed of. It’s pride. Pride in the culture, in the people.” Phegello provided a similar perspective, “Being a Northern Sotho is firstly, it means to be proud of who I am, what I am, my traditions as a certain language bearer culture in the most diverse country that we live in.” Finally, Thabisco presented the only indifferent perspective, “I am not a very cultural person so it’s not something that I put into my head.”

Whether identifying primarily as African or their tribal community, the participants communicated a general sense of heightened self-esteem at being part of their community.
Mthobeli spoke in broad terms, including all Black African students, “whether you’re from Zimbabwe, whether you’re a Nigerian, or whether you’re Ghanaian, whether you are from Niger or Chad whatsoever,” as part of the community, “the very fact of which that we are Black, I take pride in that and I see the next person as my brother.” Mvuseselo spoke in similar terms, “So, if I’m an African and a Swazi speaking African I take pride in being a Swazi speaking African.”

The participants depicted being an African as being part of a community coalesced by a principle called *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* was defined similarly by different participants. Dumisile described it, “*Ubuntu* pretty much means looking out for one another for the greater good of our whole society.” Gabadeli stated, “the main factor that African people identify with is *ubuntu* which is the people in the people, community, relationship.” Mthobeli explained it as, “the principle of *ubuntu*, which means actually putting other first.” The concept is that the community is bonded by a shared belief of personal selflessness and a commitment to the betterment of the whole. Community is an essential force in shaping traditional South African cultural identity. Community is the basis for understanding family, morality, and traditional religious practices.

**Influence of Religion on Cultural Identity.** African traditional religion in South Africa recognizes ancestors as the founders and keepers of moral order (Grillo et al., 2019). Ancestor worship in South Africa extends beyond remembering or honoring the deceased. It is the belief that the ancestors continue to be active members of the community. The dead maintain a spiritual connection to living family members and are active in the world of the living. Sacrificial offerings are a common way to honor the ancestors and seek their influence in the world of the living. The *sangoma*, diviners who are alleged to mediate for the living with the ancestors, may be engaged to intercede on the behalf of living. The *inyanga*, the traditional healer, may be sought when sick. The traditional religious practices of South Africa guide every aspect of
community life. Rituals of initiation for men and women are part of African traditional religion. There are rituals of negotiation and celebration surrounding engagements and weddings (Grillo et al., 2019). Christianity represents a culture that strongly conflicts with the beliefs and practices of indigenous African religions. So, it is significant that, for the participants, changing their religious beliefs was the most frequently cited factor influencing their cultural identity negotiation. Seven of the participants specifically noted that they did not participate in their tribe’s traditional practices and rituals because of their Christian faith. Mthobeli summarized it succinctly, “We do not have any particular customs in the sense of traditions like many Africans would observe because we grew up in a house of Christianity.” Of the men, the most often cited custom that they declined to participate in was the manhood ritual. Mthobeli, Malusi, Gabadeli, and Phegello described the pan-tribal manhood ritual as a three-month rite of passage in which the young man is taught by the elders of his tribe what it means to be a man in the tribal community. The capstone of the rite is the ceremonial circumcision of the young man. Gabadeli offered his personal experience with the manhood initiation ritual,

It’s something that still goes on but from a personal experience because my family grew up primarily Christian, there are certain things in the Zulu culture that we don’t necessarily do. . . . Especially like the manhood traditions where are going to the mountain with the circumcision and everything. . . . So, yes, those things are still practiced, a lot of the traditions and cultures that were from many, many decades ago are still being practiced today but now there are so many other factors like religion, economic status that also influence how we practice those things, if you do.

Mvuseselo described the traditional Swazi belief in ancestors as mediators noting that Swazis,
Believe in what you call Mvelamqandi, which you can call it the spiritual entity whom you cannot see. Some they call it Mlendengamunye. So, in that way the Swati people will tell you that through our forefathers we are able to visit our Mvelamqandi, or our god or our Mlendengamunye.

Mvuseselo further highlighted some of the Swazi religious practices. Of the inyangas he said, “I won’t speak deeply of other cultures, but for us we believe in herbs. So, that may be the difference from other cultures. We believe in herbs. We know about something called imphepho.” Imphepho is a muthi, a sacred herb prescribed by inyangas for many remedies. Medicinally, the plant is used as an antiseptic, insecticide, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and pain reliever. It is also used to call the ancestors and invoke trance states, cleanse energy, and as an offering when praying. However, speaking of his family’s commitment to Christian faith and practice, he noted, “We don’t really have customs and traditions that we usually practice. We are mostly based in the Christian nature of religion. So, most of the things that are traditionally African and, in a way, custom, we usually don’t have.”

The acceptance of the Christian faith and its doctrine of fidelity to one God sets harshly against the traditional African religious practices of ancestor worship. The participants described them as mutually exclusive. Phegello summarized the position expressed by other participants,

If you look in a Christian manner, Christianity’s main point is to know Jesus Christ as your savior and to not worship false idols. So, I take mostly values from my culture and historical things. So, that makes me as the person I am today. But you have to mix it one way or another with your Christian faith. Everything that can go together has to mix. Everything that clashes we have to make sure what is right.
The participants, including those who see themselves as culturally African rather than according to their tribal heritage, expressed a strong appreciation for the values and morals that were passed down through the generations. Honoring of elders, respect for women, humility, hard work, and perseverance were all mentioned as specific values that needed to be perpetuated. However, the participants have eschewed the traditional practices that formed the foundation for these values and morals in the tribal society. Mthobeli, who does not identify with his Xhosa heritage, expressed a desire to preserve the language and values of his tribe, “So, it is important for me to preserve that part of the culture which is the language and some of the traditional values where you grow up, honoring the elders.” Dumisile suggested that the morals and values of his ancestors should be preserved and improved,

These are traits and morals or values that have been passed down from generation to generation. But more than anything I think it’s also about developing them and making sure we don’t lose the essence of our culture, but we improve the morals and values that we’ve learned over the many years.

**Influence of Mobility on Cultural Identity.** At the close of apartheid, Black South Africans were no longer restricted to their designated homelands. In a positive sense, this opened the door for increased educational and economic opportunities, but it also meant that families would be moving farther from their extended families, the core of the community, where the heritage culture had been sustained. In African traditional cultures, the customs, practices, religion, and language are all passed through and strengthened by the community. For the participants, the lack of physical proximity provided a significant challenge to maintaining connection to their cultural heritage. Malusi said that as the “generations come through, the culture becomes a bit more diluted and diluted with each set of children.” As for his own
experience, Malusi wrote in the focus group how he has maintained a connection to his cultural heritage by reciting his clan names. In the Xhosa culture, knowing and reciting the clan names is a high form of respect expressed toward the member’s ancestry. He recalled how he was introduced to the clan names by the elders,

The first day when you arrive it’s somewhat of a big deal, almost as if the prodigal returns. A sheep is slaughtered and there will be some type of gathering. When the gathering occurs, we go greet all the elders individually normally they’ll all be sitting in a room together and in all the catch-up conversations one of them will definitely ask you if you know your clan names. Initially you obviously don’t know them and the elder will make big deal about, questioning your parents why their children don’t know them and give you speech about its importance of knowing it. I remember when my grandfather and uncles were explaining it to me, they said it’s about knowing who you are, where you come from and never forgetting that.

The elders also explained to Malusi that when the young people move away, they are not going to be surrounded by their culture, and people tend to be changed by their environment. Remembering the clan names would be a way to stay connected to his cultural heritage.

Mvuseselo expressed in the focus group a similar perspective on the cultural identity challenge of being in a mobile society, “It has changed drastically due to the movement of people seeking for greener pastures. . . . It is true that because of how we are located now it is hard for us to learn pure culture.” Phegello shared his own experience with mobility, “Like, when I was young, I moved to a city that spoke a different language. So, I had to adapt as quick as possible as a little kid in preschool, to learn to live with the people around me.” Mobility necessitates adaptability and willingness to fit in with the surrounding dominant culture.
Influence of Increased Access to Knowledge on Cultural Identity. To a lesser degree, the participants referenced that an increase in knowledge and the growth of technology in the country were factors in negotiating their cultural identity. Mthobeli observed,

Then our experience, they are different from that point of view, the day where our parents grew and where we are now. There is so much knowledge today. We are exposed to a lot of things that which they were not exposed to that limited their understanding, which limited their perspective on life and also on others.

Mvuseselo expressed a similar position, “It’s very different because now we live in a world of social media.” From an early age, the participants shared being exposed to dissimilar cultures. Malusi credited the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, and Dumisile pointed to Tom and Jerry cartoons as their introduction to English language and culture.

Language as Cultural Identity. Letago described the South Africa of today as “sort of a pot roast people,” a “vast collection of cultures that we are not just a homogeneous nation. We are now a collection of many things.” However, as described by the participants, the various ingredients of the pot roast are losing both form and flavor. The intensity with which the participants and their families hold their heritage culture was indicated in their willingness to sublimate the expression of their heritage culture in favor of a multicultural society in order to pursue economic and academic advantage. For the participants of this study, no place was this clearer than in the South African school system. All 10 of the participants were schooled with English as the primary medium of instruction from primary school through university. Letago and Thabiso described the South African primary and secondary school system as divided linguistically into three separate tracks: English-Afrikaans, English-tribal language, and Afrikaans-tribal language. The best schools, academically, are considered to be the English-
Afrikaans schools. These schools are sometimes referred to as Model C schools, although that term is a holdover from the apartheid-era school system to describe Whites-only semi-private schools. The others are considered, according to Letago, “of lower quality education.” In order to provide greater academic and economic potential for their children, many Black South African families have placed their children in Model C schools. Letago explained, “for you to have what they think is a good future or a bright future and a good amount of education you are ultimately forced to go to an either English or Afrikaans-medium school.”

Mvuseselo’s description of his experience with English-medium instruction was typical of the other participants, “Then that school, you enter the gate, you speak English regardless of your culture, regardless of your language, you speak in English.” The students were immersed in an English-language environment where they learned the subject content and language together. Phegello shared his frustration with the cultural implications of learning in an English-medium school system,

I got to a certain area and started asking myself who am I as a person. Because I find myself in a mostly European sense of way, knowing English, knowing about European things, going through high school and learning about Hitler, learning about all those disasters, learning about the Russian revolution, learning about the French Renaissance, and not knowing a simple fact about how it was in South Africa before the English or the Dutch arrived onto our shores. And that gives you a sense of not belonging in the world. While every other country keeps their cultures very close, we as South Africans are staying away from our cultures.

The participants described language as a central component of their cultural identity formation and negotiation because, more than all other symbols, it has connected them with the
history and values of their tribal community. Letago wrote in the focus group discussion, “Language is the pride of my tribal community thus maintaining it makes us know that our authenticity is kept.” The participants did not agree on a common language, but they did share the position that the preservation and perpetuation of their respective tribal languages was essential. Malusi encapsulated part of this idea when he wrote in the focus group, “I believe language is the base that cultural identity is built therefore even if traditions wither away after many years, I believe the individual languages is what will keep cultural identity intact.” Mthobeli offered, “What is important for me, I think, is preserving the language, that we do not get to a point where our children don’t know, they only know English and not their traditional language.” The participants expressed the feeling that the only real remaining uniqueness of their tribe was the language. Siphosethu noted, “Yeah, Zulu is unique because it is my language, this is my tribe.” Phegello said that being Bapedi means being proud of “my traditions as a certain language bearer culture in the most diverse country that we live in.”

Theme Two: University Understanding and Treatment of Cultural Diversity

Cultural socialization is a strong part of the South African heritage culture. The role of the family and the tribal community are essential in shaping and developing the young South African’s cultural identity. Eight of the participants credited one or more of their family members as being influential in framing their tribal and ethnic identity, moral belief system, commitment to success, and educational direction. When the student attends the university, the strength of these connections can be strained, motivating the student to find another way to nurture the connection to his or her heritage culture. While public universities are constitutionally mandated to be multicultural and multilingual, the way in which this mandate was manifest in the life of the student was not uniformly perceived or appreciated by the
participants in this study. The perceptions shared by the participants of their university’s understanding of their culture were dominantly negative.

**University Understanding of Cultural Diversity.** The question of the university’s understanding and treatment of their cultural identity was directly addressed in the individual interviews. Seven of ten participants believe that their university has little or no understanding of their culture. Dumisile said of his university’s understanding,

> I would say it’s very minimal. I think our university has not really focused on people’s cultures at all or the data of it, but they don’t educate about, okay, this culture and this and this goes on, or that other culture and this and this goes on. They are not accommodative of people’s customs and various cultures.

When asked how he would characterize the university’s understanding of his culture, Siphosethu said, “they don’t like regard you that you’re a Zulu or what.” When asked how he felt about that, he added,

> I feel like I’ve become very angry. Yeah, all my modules are taught by White people. So, like my brothers don’t want to go out and go to there and teach us at university. So, I was very, very down about that; not even seeing about five lecturers in the university who are Black or who are Zulu. Everyone is White up there.

Njabulu added of her university’s understanding of her culture, “Uh, they pretty much don’t. Majority of schools, they don’t understand it.” Gabadeli stated, “There are no signs of any understanding of it at all so I really couldn’t say.” Thabiso answered, “I don’t think they understand our cultures fully. I think with my school it’s very neutral.” Letago and Phegello contended that, in their experience, some of the university faculty have been overtly hostile toward their culture. Letago observed,
There’s definitely still a little bit of separation between the different classes and the different races. As a law student, I recognize definitely in the smaller classes, not in the large mass classes in auditoriums, in the small classes in the varsity the Black students are taught in a more strict manner than I guess the White students would be taught. I think a little bit of it is still racism. So, because most of my lecturers have been White and they would favor for the White children to have higher marks than the Black children.

Phegello shared that, in his experience, White lecturers would sometimes switch the language of their lectures or answer questions in Afrikaans, in contradiction to the university’s EMI policy and knowing that there were students who did not understand Afrikaans. He stated, “We’ve got a mixture of Black people and White people but in a way, they don’t understand our culture. Because they are very reluctant to learn because I’ve got mostly White lecturers.” He added, “So, it’s a very big problem where they believe we should all know these two languages. And we know other languages that they should speak at all, that they should get an understanding of from our point of view.”

**University Treatment of Cultural Diversity.** The participants’ expectations of the university with regard to its treatment of cultural diversity was tied to their perception of language as culture. Where the participants saw the university as failing to support cultural diversity was a direct reflection of how they perceive the university supporting language diversity. The participants who felt that their university understood their culture described their experience with broader criteria. Mvuseselo noted the high number of Swazi people as lecturers and in high places of authority at his university. Malusi described that the student council of his university was composed of “I would almost say, all of the cultures.” Mthobeli said of his university,
I think they are on the right track in achieving that because they are more accommodative of students than the other universities... With [my university], a lot of Black people are students there because you can correspond with them. They are trying to improve their way of learning to accommodate other languages in a way that will be accommodative to a majority of their students, which are African Blacks.

*Cultural socialization.* The participants indicated that during their pre-university years, cultural socialization was achieved primarily through the family and tribal community. At the university, family became a secondary means of cultural support and other resources needed to be found or created. Table 4 summarizes the participants’ responses to the interview question of what strategies they used to maintain a connection to their African and tribal culture. Table 4 summarizes the participants’ responses to the interview question of what strategies they used to maintain a connection to their African and tribal culture.

**Table 4**

*Means of Cultural Socialization*

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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<th>University Social Activities</th>
<th>Peers</th>
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Since the South African public universities are all English-medium instruction institutions, there is little accommodation of language in the presentation of learning materials,
either written or oral. Academically, the participants noted several ways in which their universities assisted students whose primary language was not English. However, the primary means by which the universities provided support for the students’ cultural identity is through social programs. In response to the question of what strategies were used to maintain connection to his African and tribal culture, Dumisile pointed out that his university had various cultural societies,

These are societies you join. They have a Swati society where you join, and you meet fellow Swati people. And the university gives you a budget of, for example it could give you R20,000 [approximately $1,350 in US dollars] for the whole year. And you plan events or call Swati speakers or if you want a braai [cookout] and have a party you can do that. So, the university has allowed cultures to have their own societies and they can meet each other and plan events and interact in that manner.

Gabadeli, Letago, and Malusi remarked that their universities also had culturally themed groups or societies in which the student could participate. Malusi, in his self-reflection writing, made a strong appeal for students to get involved in social groups as a way to maintain cultural connectedness:

However, an area where I have noticed a change is in my cultural identity. I hope you have heard the popular quote about the two wolves fighting. To paraphrase it, which ever wolf you feed will win the fight and that is how I think about my cultural identity regarding being taught in English. I definitely have noticed a shift in my culturally identity. When you are constantly speaking English and are around that culture instead of your own, your own culture naturally tends to be diluted. This English-medium program has definitely had this effect on me. My own mother tongue has started to slip away as
well as the traditions that come with my culture. If you value your cultural identity, I would suggest joining a group or doing an activity regularly that keeps you connected to your culture.

Many participants preferred to engage in informal peer-initiated social groups to share and strengthen their common culture. Peer-initiated cultural socialization groups were typically formed from casual contact between students, either through a common course or living in the same dormitory. As Gabadeli said, the students were looking for someone “like me.” “Like me” groups began in two ways. For Mthobeli, it formed around common interests and a common degree plan. For Mvuseselo, Siphosethu, Gabadeli, it formed around tribal background, language, and race.

When asked what recommendations the participants might offer to the university regarding how language and cultural diversity should be addressed, they answered uniformly that the university should offer courses in multiple languages. While acknowledging the impracticability of the solution, Malusi wrote in the focus group that universities should offer studies taught in all nationally recognized languages. Mthobeli said during the focus group that he believes that the answer begins at the parliamentary level with a discussion of which languages should be the official language of instruction for the universities. Letago, recognizing that the public universities are interspersed throughout the country in such a way that each university tends to be located among a dominant tribal people group, recommended in the focus group discussion that, “varsities should allow 2/3 languages per province with the main language being English since it is more widely spoken and the second, the language of the dominant tribe in the province.” Mvuseselo suggested in the focus group discussion that, at a minimum, the universities should provide notice boards and other public materials in multiple languages.
The majority perception of the study participants was that universities do not have a good understanding of Black South African cultures. This perception was primarily driven by the understanding of language as the principal characteristic of cultural identity in the university context. However, where the universities excelled was not in providing academic equality with respect to language diversity, but in providing social settings for cultural expressions. Although many students, including some of the study participants, involved themselves in these societies, it seems to be more practical and of greater benefit for students to create small groups where both cultural and academic support is shared.

Theme Three: Relationships

In the course of the data collection, the participants described several distinct relationships. The first and strongest was the family. As Gabadeli described his pre-university years, when going to school one is confronted with dissimilar and sometimes hostile cultures, but at the end of the day one could go home where there was a “strong and steadfast cultural experience.” Once at the university, peer relationships were described along two lines. The first were those relationships that were formed for a specific purpose, usually in the form of a study group or assigned project team. Four of the participants noted that these groups, either randomly selected or purposefully assigned, are composed of a mixture of cultures and languages. Within the groups, individuals tended to cluster according to ethnicity or language. The group lacked cohesion except for the purpose of completing the task. The second type of peer relationships described by the participants were those formed around cultural or lingual similarity. Mvuseselo described it as wanting to know people who are “from where we come from.” Gabadeli said it was about finding others who are “like me.” The peers in these groups formed the primary support structure for the participants’ cultural, social, academic, mental, and emotional well-
being. Malusi characterized it as a relationship with others who “really have the best interest of the one next to you and we really do look after each other.”

**Ingroup Characteristics.** When asked how they would describe themselves to someone outside their national or tribal community, the participants placed their national or tribal identity and language as the first priority followed by their faith, degree majors, and personal interests. When describing their social identity, the ingroup was uniformly defined according to race and tribal membership within the larger South African student body and for whom English was not their primary language. The Asian and Coloured populations were never mentioned as part of either the ingroup or outgroup even though the representation of Asian students in the university system is nearly equal to that of White students (Statistics South Africa, n.d.).

The participants each described being intrinsically drawn together based on race, language, and common goals for the purpose of mutual academic, cultural, emotional, and social support. Many of the participants engaged in small community relationships of cultural societies, peer groups, social groups, and study groups in order to meet these needs. Letago spoke about her community, “Whenever there is a sort of gathering, I tend to go to them whether it is gathering of my own culture or a different culture, as long as it is a Black African community.” Siphosethu described his friends simply, “I have a lot of Zulu friends. Many of my classmates, they are Zulu.” Thabiso shared that her friends were primarily a social outlet. She said they are, “Very playful. I’ve noticed that they are very playful and only a few, I can only point to a few that take their studies seriously.” Mvuseselo explained how these communities are drawn together,

We would want to just know who are the people around here who are from where we come from. That’s basically how we would prevail our culture and our Africanism
because we you, a few friends who knows how it feels to be a Swazi I think you feel at least staying there.

The participants expressed that their desire was to surround themselves with people who had a similar background, who understood their culture and their social, academic, and emotional struggles. Gabadeli framed it in the unique demographic context of his degree,

Especially in a class where you work in and 95 out of 100 students are White students and you identify four other Black students then it common that you kind of become more closer to them from the get-go. . . So, I find myself associating with more people who are like me, either because they are Black or because they are Zulu.

The participants communicated a general sense of heightened self-esteem at being part of the community expressed in terms of specific values or attributes that distinguished the Black South African. The most common descriptor was the commitment to academic, economic, and personal success. Seven of the participants used terms such as “hard work,” “be the best,” or “do my best” when describing their attitudes toward school. Siphosethu said of himself, “Like, when I describe myself, I say that I’m a go-getter, I’m African, you know.”

**Outgroup Characteristics.** When asked their feelings about English-speaking cultures, the participants presented a generally accommodating and neutral tone, neither disdaining nor embracing English-speaking people. Comments from Mthobeli, Siphosethu, Njabulu, and Phegello included the noncommittal phrase “I don’t have a problem with them.” Mvuseselo used the similar phrase, “I don’t have any hard feelings about them,” and added English cultures are the fortunate bearers of the dominant language, “It means they did not have any challenge.” Dumisile simply stated, “I have nothing bad to say.” However, analysis of the descriptors used by the participants throughout their interview and focus group responses presented a more mixed
perspective. Ten times Whites were described as historically racist in their attitudes and actions toward Blacks. Whites, and particularly Afrikaners, were equated with the oppression or suppression of Blacks. Whites were described as considering their race and culture to be superior to others. Whites were further described as having opportunities not afforded to Blacks because of their skin color or language. Although words of affirmation were in the minority, Afrikaners were described as having a strong cultural heritage and great pride in their culture.

Comparatively speaking, the English were considered more friendly and less racist than the Afrikaner. Two of the participants provided more embracing portrayals of their White classmates. Malusi spoke inclusively of his fellow students, “you know if I’m sitting next to someone who’s White and they’re my friend, I don’t think there’s any real difference.” Gabadeli shared in this view when she said,

    I think that’s a very powerful thing that we don’t only say Black people are South African or White people are South African or Zulu people are South African or Afrikaans people are South African. But all those things are encompassed into South African-ness if I can put it in that way.

    Overall, Afrikaners were seen in more antagonistic terms than the English because the history of apartheid has not been fully reconciled. Mthobeli recalled being taught the history behind the animosity,

    We grew up having that attitude that Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor. . . . The whole reason that we never felt like English was the language of the oppressor, it was because it was not the English who were politically who were ruling the country. It was the Afrikaners, and it was the Afrikaners in 1976 that actually tried to impose the language upon the masses, that Afrikaans must become the language of instruction for
maths and science in which we felt that this was going to further oppress and suppress the Black student from primary school to high school.

**Ingroup-outgroup Relationship.** While the political power structure in South Africa has shifted to a Black-majority government, Mthobeli posited that there still exists an economic imbalance in which 80% of South African land and economic power is in the control of White South Africans. Even so, Mthobeli said that he felt like apartheid was a historical event that no longer had significant influence, but described his lingering feelings of disappointment in the English and personal experiences of racism from Afrikaners,

I feel like I don’t have any problem especially with English, I really don’t have any problem. I think much more, on their side, they could have done in putting South Africa, especially the Afrikaans to account having been exposed to freedom, to democracy and South Africa being their former colony but I don’t have anything personally with that because I’ve been exposed to racism from Afrikaners mostly.

Thabiso also said that she experienced racism more often from Afrikaners. She described a common incident from her workplace,

You find, in workplaces, two senior people who are of a different race from me speak Afrikaans knowing very well that I don’t understand that. Even if I did, I think it is quite unfair. How would they feel if I started speaking Sepedi, if I started speaking Zulu?

Letago is a very outgoing and engaging person, but she found that some people are less receptive than others,

I’m more prone to making friends with English cultures than Afrikaans. In South Africa, English people are more friendly towards people of color than, I guess, Afrikaans people would be. Mostly, Afrikaans people can be impolite or straightforward racist to me.
There was one notable exception in the depiction of Afrikaners. In the context of the EMI classroom, two of the participants specifically remarked that the Afrikaners shared the same learning challenges as Black students. Malusi shared his classroom experience with Afrikaans speaking students,

There’s White people who are Afrikaans that struggle in class where they’re on Google translate half the time. I have friends, and I’m being honest, I have friends that tell me, and they’re Afrikaans, that they have to Google like almost every second word that the lecturer says.

Gabadeli shared a similar experience in sharing the classroom with Afrikaners who lack proficiency in English,

Although I know that majority of the White students, however, have had instruction in Afrikaans so it’s a little bit difficult for them to adjust into English when they come to university because the majority of their learning experience has been in their native language.

Although there were lines of distinction between the ingroup and outgroup, the differences were never characterized in terms of general conflict or antipathy between the races. Rather, they were portrayed either as remnants of the social and political history of South Africa or the personal inclinations of individuals.

**Theme Four: Academic Self-efficacy**

The essential characteristic of self-efficacy is personal sense of agency, the belief in one’s ability to exert control over the way life events are experienced. Bandura (1977) proposed that efficacy expectation, as distinct from outcome expectation, is the individual’s expectation that he or she is able to exercise control of the proposed actions or events in order to attain an expected
outcome. For the participants, the tasks associated with university learning have the additional challenge of learning in a language other than their primary language. Yet, seven of the participants expressed both high efficacy and high outcome expectations. Letago said,

My philosophy is “aim high, hit low.” So, I always try, I always overestimate myself, I guess. I would always think that definitely I am going to do this. Because if I aim high then I’ll work harder and if I don’t hit that mark, I will at least hit low or close to that actual goal I set for myself.

Thabiso added, “Approaching an assignment, I would be confident although I’m a very late. I take my time. When I do it, I’m effective. I will do it; it’s just going to take a while to finish it. I am procrastinator.” Mthobeli spoke of taking personal responsibility for the outcomes of his actions, “So, if I was different, I was going to be like, yeah, I’m going to blame the system, I was going to blame Whites, I was going to blame the politicians; anyone but me.” Mthobeli summarized, “You are the only person that can make you a failure in life.” Sipho answered succinctly, “Yeah, I’m a very confident person, you know. That’s all I can say.” Gabadeli added, “I’ve always tried to stay ahead of my studies, to stay ahead of whatever I was studying so I could make the best of my assessments, my tests, my exams.”

Three of the participants were more focused on the obstacles to success and comparatively less confident in their ability to control the events to achieve success. Njabulu spoke about the challenges of events that do not go according to plan,

It takes a lot of experiences to build you to where you want and not everything that you plan is going to go according to plan. So, some things that you plan, and something just comes in the way and you have to change plans or adjust your plans to suit the
circumstances that are around you. So, it’s not easy. It’s quite difficult. It takes time and a lot of patience.

Dumisile was confident in his ultimate ability to succeed, but spoke of perseverance and the discouragements along the way to his success,

I think it’s been very tough because I believe and know that I’m going to succeed but I didn’t think that succeeding was going to be this difficult. Because one day you’re getting into stations and the next day you’re failing an exam. So, it’s just up and down and it’s sort of practically put me in a position where I’m like I’ve come to terms that there’s no straight path to success or no technique of being successful. It’s just all about persevering through whatever situation you’re going through at that time and moment.

**Factors Influencing Self-efficacy.** When questioning the participants regarding their perceived academic self-efficacy, specific contributing factors became evident. Each participant set forth their personal approach to the rigors of learning. Phegello said that he approached new tasks by relating them to prior experiences and drawing upon his mastery of those prior experiences,

Most tasks I try to make them to what I have out of experience. So, I try to succeed through that. I try to simplify the situation into something I’ve seen or heard of before. I try to simplify it as much as possible that I understand it.

Malusi recommended in his self-reflection writing a strategy of intentionally building a base of performance accomplishments,

Those around me who have made a genuine effort to better their English skills with regards to their program have become quite accustom to the English language. They did so by going to their lectures’ consultation hours to speak them to gain more in depth
understanding. They also made a conscious effort to develop their vocabulary by engaging in more cognitive English language conversations. So, I urge you to make the same efforts and any other ways you find effective to develop your grasp of the English language should you choose to study in English.

Mvuseselo did not have a large base of performance accomplishments, but shared how his attitude was changed through the observation and emulation of the success of others. He shared how he was an average student who put little effort into individual study. When he worked on a group assignment, he was successful, but when he tried to recall the information for himself in an independent test or project, he was unable. From working in the small groups, he began to observe their strategies for success. He continued,

And one way or the other I started changing the attitude. I saw myself passing even if studied a little while. So, that motivated me to go to the library alone. Because somewhere somehow, I’m used to working in groups and wait for somebody else to say are we going to the library. If any others went to the library that would be the time I want to go to the library. But now, I’m a reader, I studied writing because I changed the attitude.

Mvuseselo concluded, “If I find discouragement in my way to success let me look at the people that are successful. They’ve made it.”

Dumisile drew from his prior success in high school and the persuasion of his high school accounting teacher to bolster his belief that he had the necessary skills and abilities to succeed,

I’m studying to be a chartered accountant. I chose it because in my final year of high school I just discovered that I really liked it and my grades were really good and my accounting teacher at the time encouraged me to go in that direction.
Letago found motivation and confidence in her abilities through the words of her aunt, “She really thinks there’s nothing I can’t do if I stick my mind to it. So, she’s the one that’s been pushing me a lot irregardless of whether it’s education or extracurricular activities.”

**Stress Management and Coping Skills.** Factors influencing academic self-efficacy are the development and implementation of stress management tools and coping skills. The participants were asked to describe how they would respond to episodes of discouragement and disappointment in their learning experience. Phegello outlined his strategy of assessing the situation for areas of control,

I look at the whole picture and I look at what went wrong in the whole situation. Is it a situation where I could have changed it myself or is it just a general situation that I had no control over? Wherever I had control over it I know that now I can better myself or I cannot better myself.

Dumisile said that he reminds himself of his motivation for learning, Oftentimes I just browse on a Range Rover car and look at it and I go I really want that car but my marks doesn’t allow me to get that car. And then I literally close the internet and I go sit at my desk and if I failed the test, I redo the test until a point that I get about 90%. Then I’m like okay, I’ve fully learned from my mistakes. Then I move forward.

Other participants needed to process the emotional impact of discouragement before moving on to more practical solutions. When asked how she responded to discouragement, Njabulu expressed her need to process her emotions before moving forward,

Sometimes I cry. If I feel like I’m really, really down I tend to detach myself from, especially social media, I just detach myself from the world. I listen to a lot of music, a lot of different kinds of music, classical, hip-hop, R&B, things that are going to make me
feel good at the end of the day. Sometimes I do research like Bible verses that will uplift me and most of the time the first one I find is usually the one to go with. And then, I leave it as it is until I feel like I’m ready to go back. And then once I’m back I take it from there.

The participants were asked to describe their learning experience with respect to their cultural identity. Two participants shared their feelings of frustration caused by instances of racial disparity. Gabadeli described the habit of some Afrikaner lecturers to respond to Afrikaner students in their common language, effectively blocking other students from understanding either the question or the response,

For example, if a student is sitting in the front of the class and doesn’t understand what the lecturer is trying to say and the lecturer is a White lecturer, an Afrikaans lecturer, then the student can address the lecturer in Afrikaans and the lecturer will elaborate in Afrikaans. And then you sit there, and you go, “okay, I might have also wanted to know that information.”

Letago said that racial disparity was more evident in the smaller classes where there was a lower student to teacher ratio. She called it a shift, “There were some moments where you could feel a shift. Definitely, irregardless of my culture as a Black person. Sometimes we were treated differently from other students.” She said the Black students were treated stricter than the White students who were given more favorable marks. Letago said that there seemed to be a presumption that the White students would succeed, and the Black students would not.

Three participants noted the academic impact of English as the language of instruction. Mthobeli addressed the amount of wasted time involved by an EFL student learning in English,
So, for me, I think it could have been better in which, that is one of the things that there are no application for, there must be some master’s book that must translated into traditional language. That, when you study English you must study English as English, you want to know English, not study medicine or biology or physical sciences.

Sometimes it is a disadvantage. It takes years for some of these students to master the language. And it takes the language for them to actually interpret and put in writing whatever language has been taught. So, it will take about four years, about three years for some, they are smart. So, those years are just wasted. Instead of something which would actually benefit them in the long run.

The participants who were educated from primary school with English as the medium of instruction, were less hampered by language acquisition and proficiency in their ability to engage in the learning process than others who came from a different language of instruction background. Nevertheless, Malusi speculated on the impact of EMI as a university policy on throughput and retention,

If the institution you are going to says that we only offer English, then I guess it’s your choice to attend and accept that they only offer English or try and find a different institution. But to be honest, there’s only a handful of institutions that offer other languages besides English. I can’t think of more than five that I actually know of. So, I definitely think that this is a matter of this is how it is.

Mvuseselo also shared his difficulty with comprehension and frustration with English as the language of instruction,

One way or the other it affects me because some of the words, they are stronger in Swati and weaker in English or stronger in English and weaker in Swati. In that way it will take
me a longer time to understand perhaps some of the concepts because they are not taught in my language.

Seven of the participants conveyed a higher sense of academic self-efficacy at their present level of study. The participants also shared their methods for coping with episodes of discouragement and disappointment in their learning experience. The challenges of racial disparity were very real and significant to the participants who experienced them. However, both participants who reported their experience expressed a high sense of academic self-efficacy with no negative effects. The participants who reported difficulty learning in an EMI context suggested that these challenges added a dimension of difficulty and stress in their learning experience that influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation.

**Theme Five: Challenges to Academic Success**

The participants were questioned with respect to their academic experience at the university. They were asked to share what people or events, positive or negative, had been influential or important in their experience, what challenges they might have faced, and what strategies and support they used to overcome those challenges. Overall, the participants described their learning experience in favorable terms. Dumisile described his leaning experience,

> It has been very good, as my culture has strong beliefs in working hard and you will eventually see the reward of all the work that you have been putting in. It has also made me come to terms with the fact that not everything will always be smooth but knowing that I should not give up, but I must continue working hard.

**Family Influence.** Dumisile’s reference to the values received through his culture and fostered by his social community was indicative of the majority of the participants. Eight of the
participants credited one or more of their family members as being influential in their decision to pursue higher education and their belief that they would be successful. Malusi, Dumisile, and Gabadeli each mentioned that their parents or grandparents were university educated. Mthobeli and Phegello had a father and grandfather respectively who went to college. These family members were able to share their experiences at the university with their children and grandchildren, impressing upon them the importance of a university education for a Black person in South Africa. Dumisile spoke proudly of his family’s education history,

Both parents went to university. It was definitely something that they had to struggle with more than I do because they were the first people in their respective families to go to university. It was very important to them for me to go to university because, especially them being university graduates, they’ve experienced university and have seen what knowledge can do for them and their own lives and what a degree can potentially do for them. So, for them it was very important and it was important to them for me to potentially go to university and get a degree or honors degree and chase my dreams.

Letago did not mention any family members who attended a higher education institution, but her family was equally desirous of and encouraging toward her university aspirations. She shared,

My family was more on the motivating side. I’ve come to notice that a lot of Black parents are more strict on their children’s education because they know how difficult it is, as a Black person, to get a job. So more Black parents are super strict on education and good marks and put a lot of pressure on you to be the top of the class, to do our very best.

While family ambitions for their children’s future are reported by the participants to be relatively universal in Black South African homes, sometimes the goals of the parents can run
contrary to those of the child. Both Gabadeli and Letago mentioned that there are certain career fields that the parents in Black South African families tend to push their children toward. Letago’s list of approved career choices included the medical profession, accountant, pilot, engineer, and lawyer. The impression she received from her family was, “If it’s not in the top five of these careers you’ve ruined your life and whatever career you’ve chosen is pretty much stupid.” When Gabadeli explained to his family that he was studying computer engineering, their reaction was, “What? You’re going to study IT. That doesn’t make any sense.” He continued,

It was a struggle for me to study computer engineering because my parents wanted me to study medicine and my grandparents wanted me to study medicine. And so, when I said I wanted to study computer engineering it was quite a problem.

When asked about his family’s support and involvement in his learning experience, Gabadeli was not enthusiastic. He said, “My family plays, well in my learning experience, zero. They have no input in that besides the paying of the tuitions and the accommodation fees but other than that, I see myself out.” When asked about her family’s support in her education experience, Thabiso responded “They’re not active.” After some probing follow-up questions, Thabiso suggested that her parents’ indifference toward her academic success could be motivated by gender-based expectations. She said that there was a higher expectation for her brothers to go university. On the other hand, when asked if gender played a role in her family’s support, Letago said it did not. On the contrary, her grandmother had been a single head of household and provider for her family, and strongly encouraged Letago in her academic pursuit. Gabadeli and Thabiso’s were minority experiences.

Eight of the participants described their families as highly involved in their education in practical, motivational, and emotionally supportive ways. Mvuseselo said of his family, “They
were so supportive. My uncle, my mom, my grandmom, they are academics, so they are helpful. It is easy for them to say you are on the right track and supportive.” Phegello said that his family supported him in every aspect of his education,

I can just call from my parents to my sister to my grandmother who was not educated. Her favorite line was to tell her kids that education is very important. Without education your eyes will not be opened to all the things that are being done in front of you. So, even if she was not educated school-wise she believed that education was the main and most important thing to have as a young person in this world.

Language Proficiency. Mthobeli offered this impression of his learning experience, “No, my learning experience was quite good. It could have been much better if the language of instruction would have been my mother’s tongue.” The area in which the participants had the greatest frustration was the language of instruction. Even though each of them had been taught with English as the language of instruction from primary school onward, their different levels of English-language proficiency caused varying degrees of anxiety. Mthobeli discussed his academic journey as he learned English,

I can say, it started a bit rough but as you got used to the system and the situation at school, and stuff like that, so, it has gotten much better. But if I had another way of learning, had an option to choose from my primary language, my home language, I would have went for that language. It was going to give me an advantage in terms of comprehension.

Mvuseselo wrote in the focus group, “The difference is that when I learn in my primary language it's easy to comprehend than it is with English. I even understand the heaviness of other statements when they are said in my language than with English.” As Njabulu wrote in her self-
reflection writing, varsity English is not the same as high school English and presents an increased challenge, particularly to the new university student. Dumisile described his initial struggle at the university “they were sort of not accommodative of the fact that not everyone is purely fluent in English. They were expecting everyone’s English to be really good and the reality is that it really isn’t.” Malusi provided the most colorful exposition on the university’s policy of English as the language of instruction,

I definitely do understand that they want to make the playing field equal, I guess. So, you might as well just chop everyone’s left leg so at least we’re all one thing. But I think maybe the direction should have looked at maybe trying to get everybody up to speed and maybe add languages instead of just marginalizing everyone to one language.

Mvuseselo noted that his university provides opportunities for academic support in the way of tutors, group assignments, and study centers. Dumisile added that his university provided writing centers where there are “professional writers or experts that sort of improve our academic writing and things like that.” Njabulu recalled from her personal experience that there are some lecturers who are more willing to provide additional assistance to struggling students.

**Student Initiated Support Strategies.** All 10 participants said that they participated in formal or informal study groups at some point and these groups served as a locus for their academic, motivational, and emotional support system at the university. Gabadeli pointed to his network of peers, individuals who share the same goals and aspirations, as his support system,

And so, let’s say I’m falling behind in a certain module it is easy for me to seek encouragement from my peers because we are going through most of the same things. And so, with that I think we’ve built our own little network of students to try and assist each other. And mostly, I think that is where a lot of our success comes from.
Malusi was part of a similar support team based on common academic and career goals. Of his groups he shared,

For myself, I am definitely fortunate enough to be surrounded by friends who are supportive, and we encourage each other to work hard and to push. Specifically, a lot of us were in the mathematical stats last year and actual science. . . So, specifically the four or five of us, we’ve really held on to each other for support to push on with our new degrees that we’ve chosen.

Dumisile added an additional dimension to the discussion, noting that for his study group, the help they extend to one another goes beyond academic and motivation to include mutual support for stress induced anxiety. He said of his peer group,

We check on each other, if we’re okay mentally and emotionally because academics can really take a huge toll on your mental health. So, I think that’s our number one priority to always check up on each other to make sure we are okay, and when we’re not to make a plan to meet up and to talk to each other and recommend that we should go to the facilities on campus, psychologist on campus provided by the university.

Notwithstanding some of the challenges of learning in English, eight of the participants noted the global value of learning in English and half of the participants said that learning in English was preferable to learning in their primary language because it would advance their career opportunities. Dumisile, who described his own early challenges with learning in English, said,

I think I would have preferred English because based on the fact that our country is so diverse it would be better for interacting with people. Because at the end of the day as much as learning in my own language could have been potentially better when I get into
the workspace I could meet and Afrikaans person or a Xhosa individual and I need to be able to interact with them based on the current work that we’re doing. And I need to understand what they are saying to me.

Mthobeli noted that English-language proficiency was valuable in business, ministry, and politics, his three areas of interest. Mvuseselo said that he writes his songs in English so that they might reach a wider audience. Njabulu, who was pursuing a career in media and public relations, remarked on the global career implications of learning in English,

Media is global and, I believe, while it’s a fact that English is used in most countries to communicate. And to be able to study in it will also help me be able to communicate with people from around the world and not need an interpreter to be around to make sure they understand what I’m saying but to have a common ground of understanding.

Gabadeli offered a different perspective when he said that he preferred learning in English because, “My entire education career from preschool to the end of high school was in English so that’s what I am used to.” While learning in English through primary and secondary school provided an advantage in their academic endeavors, the participants noted that they also lost something vital. Although the participants justified their decision to learn in English as beneficial to their economic viability, it came at some cost to their cultural heritage. Malusi stated in the focus group discussion, “I have lost some fluency in my mother tongue as a result of constantly speaking English.” Letago expounded on her experience during the focus group,

Having been born after the apartheid era, I was afforded the opportunity to study in English and Afrikaans medium schools because segregation had been abolished, that provided me with access to the higher standards of Education in the country, which is only in these schools, however with that, because my parents wanted to provide me with
the best schooling system unfortunately that meant that I’d missed out on being able to read and write in my own tribal language.

Phegello added some context from his early learning experience,

I moved to the city around about seven years old I moved to preschool there, so I was with, according to the structure there. So, I was put in from a young age until now to learn English. So, I really lost touch with my Northern Sotho. I can’t write it, writing in the language.

Letago observed that by adapting to an English-language dominated society, the next generation was losing the ability to connect to family members and people in other tribes with similar languages. She said that they “only speak English and they no longer speak any sort of African language. They find it difficult to understand. And slowly becoming a habit to raise their kids with this whole ‘English comes first’ ahead of their cultural language.” Two of the participants pointed out the interconnected history of the South African languages. Three of the four languages represented in this study, isiXhosa, isiZulu, and siSwati, are part of the Nguni family of languages that is a subset of the Bantu language group. Sepedi, which two of the participants noted is further subdivided into at least four dialects, is in a separate subset of the Bantu language group. The languages in each subset share similar lexicons and grammatical structures, making them mutually intelligible.

For the participants of this study, there was a tension between respecting the received traditions and language of their families and adapting to dissimilar social, cultural, religious, and political beliefs and customs. The internal conflict of cultures began before they were able to comprehend the implications of their circumstances. When asked about their academic or cultural experience at the university, every participant felt it necessary to begin by laying the
foundation for their experience built during their primary and secondary school years. They felt that the choice to learn in English was forced upon them, but at the same time half of them said that, in hindsight, they would have voluntarily chosen English if given the option. When asked to point to specific events or individuals who most strongly influenced their academic life, the near unanimous response included some member of their family. These same family members created part of the participants’ motivational support systems. Comprehension presented the greatest academic challenge to the participants. While the universities provided appropriate platforms for academic support to the students, the participants found extended value in participating in small groups of peers who would be able to provide academic, motivational, and emotional support.

**Research Question Responses**

**Central Question**

The central question to be answered by the students was “How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction learning context?” This study allowed the participants to identify, articulate, and examine three key properties of cultural identity: (a) avowal and ascription, (b) salience, and (c) intensity as well as identify the support structures and systems each used to affirm and negotiate their cultural identity. The participants shared a common perspective that the cultural identity of the Born Free generation, those born after the fall of apartheid, is different from their parents and ancestors. Their predecessors, by choice or political mandate, lived in predominantly monocultural communities where the beliefs and practices of their heritage culture had been passed down for generations. The participants live in a more mobile and information-rich society, motivated by the desire for economic and academic advancement, where they have been exposed to dissimilar and proximate cultures. Their university experiences provided a social context in which the
participants interacted closely with individuals of differing races and tribal affiliations. The participants described an emerging reconceptualized cultural identity in which elements of their heritage culture remain important, but their tribal identity was subsumed by national and racial identity. While many of the religious and traditional practices were considered irrelevant or impractical in the Born Free cultural identity, each of the participants expressed a need to maintain a connection to the history and values of his or her tribal community through a strong commitment to preserve their primary language. Although the participants do not share a common language, there was a common perception that their primary language was a valuable link to their respective heritage cultures.

Within the university context, where English is the medium of instruction, the participants were challenged to maintain the essence of their cultural identity. While the university presented a more embracing environment than their primary and secondary schools with respect to language and culture, seven of ten participants believed that their university had little or no understanding of their culture. To the participants, the university policy of English-medium instruction represented antipathy or indifference toward their culture.

Cultural socialization strongly influences the intensity with which the students commit to the values and traditions of their culture (Vietze et al., 2019). Prior to attending the university, cultural socialization was achieved primarily through the family and tribal community. Once engaged in the university, family became a secondary means of cultural support. The participants’ need to preserve and strengthen their cultural identity in what the participants perceived to be a culturally inhospitable environment was accomplished by surrounding themselves with people who had a similar background, who understood their culture, and their social, academic, and emotional struggles. To emulate the community support that formerly
would have been received from the family or tribal community, seven of the participants engaged in formal and informal social communities. Four participants reported that their universities allowed and funded culturally themed social groups in which the students were encouraged to participate. School sponsored social groups focusing on tribal or African themes were student-led. Some were more concerned with cultural connectedness, bringing in guest lecturers or hosting cultural activities, while others were more concerned with entertainment. Some of the participants reportedly participated in these social groups. One did not because of conflicting commitments, lack of time, and disinterest.

Four participants preferred to engage in informal peer-initiated social groups to share and strengthen their common culture. Peer-initiated cultural socialization groups were typically formed from casual contact between students, either through a common course or living in the same dormitory. As Gabadeli said, the students were looking for someone “like me.” “Like me” groups began in two ways. For Mthobeli, it formed around common interests and a common degree plan. For Mvuseselo, Siphosethu, Gabadeli, they formed around tribal background, language, and race. These four participants reported that the strongest and most consistently utilized avenue of cultural socialization was the small communities of peers that formed the core of their identity support in the university context. From a practical perspective, the peer-initiated groups permitted more flexibility and accessibility in maintaining contact with other members of the group than the university sponsored groups. The smaller groups tended to promote a higher sense of inclusion, allowing the participants to create stronger bonds with one another. Stronger bonding allowed the participants to be more vulnerable with respect to the academic and cultural challenges of university life.
Support Question One

The first support question was, “How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe their social relation to those outside their self-identified ingroup?” As the participants’ social identity formation is interleaved with their cultural identity, this support question clarified the students’ experience and provided meaning for their negotiated identity as they considered their relationship to other groups in the university context. When asked how they would describe themselves to someone outside their national or tribal community, the participants placed their national or tribal identity and language as the first priority followed by their faith, degree majors, and personal interests. When describing their social identity, the ingroup was consistently identified as African students who are Black and for whom English was not their primary language. The outgroup included all White South Africans.

When asked their feelings about English-speaking cultures, the participants presented a generally accommodating and neutral tone, neither disdaining nor embracing English-speaking people. Analysis of the descriptors used by the participants throughout their interview and focus group responses presented a more mixed perspective. Ten times Whites were described as historically racist in their attitudes and actions toward Blacks. Every instance of overt racism portrayed by the participants was attributed exclusively to Afrikaners. Although the participants were not alive during the apartheid era, each of their lives have been affected by its policies on their family’s economic and social wellbeing, becoming part of their cultural history. In considering their relationship with the outgroup, the participants’ awareness of their own cultural identity and history was weighed against the perceived culture and history ascribed to the outgroup. Whites and particularly the Afrikaners were equated with the oppression or suppression of Blacks. Whites were described as considering their race and culture as superior to
others. Whites were further described as having opportunities not afforded to Blacks because of their skin color or language. In a positive tone, Afrikaners were described as having a strong cultural heritage and great pride in their culture. Comparatively speaking, the English were considered more friendly and less racist than the Afrikaner. Two of the participants provided more embracing portrayals of their White classmates. Gabadeli shared a broader perspective of cultural diversity when she said,

I think that’s a very powerful thing that we don’t only say Black people are South African or White people are South African or Zulu people are South African or Afrikaans people are South African. But all those things are encompassed into South African-ness if I can put it in that way.

Although there are differences between Black students and White students with respect to culture, history, and language, the participants tended to be inclined to accept those outside their community on an individual basis rather than judge them as a group based on national history or prejudices. There were exceptions as individual participants expressed distrust of the outgroup, particularly Afrikaners. The participants tended to insulate according to racial, linguistic, and cultural connections but, when appropriate, the students worked together to support one another to accomplish their mutual academic goals.

**Support Question Two**

The second support question was “How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction perceive their academic self-efficacy?” Efficacy beliefs influence the way in which individuals think and those thoughts influence what actions they choose to pursue, their goals and commitments, and how much effort they are willing to put forth (Bandura, 2008). Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory describes how the internal
and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation. The resulting cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. Existing research indicates that the influence of EMI on cultural identity and academic self-efficacy are complex and context-dependent in nature and cannot be generalized globally, but need to be studied independently within a region or people group (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). This support question showed the degree to which the participants in South Africa hold their sense of academic self-efficacy and the factors that influence their cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional functioning. In response, the participants of this study described a strong sense of cultural identity. However, their experience of cultural conflict with the dominant culture was regulated by their level of English-language proficiency and involvement in a social support group.

Seven of the participants expressed a higher sense of academic self-efficacy. The remaining three showed a more modest sense of academic self-efficacy, focusing their responses on the challenges encountered in the university learning experience. Bandura (1977) outlined four factors that contribute to a positive sense of self-efficacy: (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experience, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional arousal. Intrinsic factors, such as stress management and coping skills, and extrinsic factors, including relationships and communication with others combine to influence the individual’s academic self-efficacy (Guan & So, 2016). The dominant factor that appeared in the participants’ responses included the encouragement of a person who persuaded them that they had the skills and ability to be successful in university level learning. Eight participants recalled family members, teachers, and peers, who supported them and were instrumental in guiding them to believe in their academic
self-efficacy. Two participants cited performance accomplishments, approaching new tasks by relating them to prior experiences and drawing upon one’s mastery of those prior experiences, as a significant factor in their confidence approaching new tasks. Another participant was more inspired by the vicarious experience of fellow students.

The participants also shared different insights into how they respond to negative experiences in their learning experience. The participants highlighted two significant challenges. Events of racial disparity and learning in an EMI context each negatively influenced the participants’ sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation.

**Support Question Three**

The third support question was, “What are the challenges experienced by Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction?” EMI presupposes that the learner is sufficiently skilled in English to participate in the education process. This support question sought to discover the student’s language proficiency self-perception considering the rigorous demand of higher education.

As participants described their learning experience, the area in which they had the greatest frustration was in comprehension of the learning materials due to the language of instruction. Each of the participants shared that they had been taught in English from primary school onward. However, their proficiency with English varied, causing a corresponding degree of anxiety that negatively influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy. The participants said that the universities provided suitable platforms for academic support to the students through tutors, group assignments, study centers, and writing centers. However, the participants believed that there was extended value in participating in small groups of peers who would be able to provide academic, motivational, and emotional support.
Eight of the participants noted the global value of learning in English, and half of the participants said that learning in English was preferable to learning in their primary language because it would advance their career opportunities. Of those who objected to learning in English, some participants objected because it added an unnecessary challenge to the learning process or gave unfair advantage to native anglophones. Others objected because they felt that it further established English as the dominant language and culture and, thereby, diminished their cultural identity. The latter argument uncovered what participants felt was a necessary but undesirable tradeoff. While learning in English provided potential benefits to their economic viability, the participants noted that it came at some cost to their cultural heritage. Some participants said that they could not read or write in their primary language. Another participant observed that succeeding generations were losing their ability to speak their heritage language. These participants voiced concern that the loss of their heritage language signaled a loss of their heritage culture.

**Summary**

Cultural identity plays an important role in the academic success of South African university students. The participants’ experiences gave evidence that their cultural identity was heavily invested in their heritage language, as their heritage language remains the primary source of connectedness to their heritage culture. As students enter the university, they are separated from their families and tribal communities, disconnecting them from their original source of cultural socialization. The university response to the student need for cultural socialization has been to provide resources in the form of social activities, societies, and groups.

Learning in English presented additional challenges to the participants. Participants encountered an environment in which they were required to comprehend English-language
learning materials combined with the rigors of attaining university-level English proficiency necessary for written and oral assessments and learning the specific terminology attached to their field of study. The university response has been to provide academic support to the students through tutors, group assignments, study centers, and writing centers. The participants noted that they utilized one or both of the cultural socialization and academic resources provided by the university. However, the participants preferred to participate in small groups of peers who would be able to provide academic, motivational, and emotional support.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context. Ten participants were purposefully selected to represent the perspectives of a cross-section of Black South African society. This chapter presents a summary of the findings relevant to the participant’s experiences in an English-medium instruction university. This is followed by an empirical and theoretical discussion of the findings in light of relevant literature. This chapter further examines the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study, including delimitations and limitations. Further research recommendations included in this chapter will propose future research. The summary concludes with the most significant implications of this phenomenological study.

Summary of Findings

The central question to be answered by the study was “How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction learning context?” For Black South African university students, the social context that has served to shape their cultural identity was a temporal continuity of personal experiences, historical and political events, socioeconomic changes, relational constructions, and personal worldview. The participants of this study are reconceptualizing their cultural identity from multiple coexisting cultures. On the one hand, the participants profess respect for the mores and values of the tribal culture of their ancestors and agree that the languages of their tribes must be preserved as a way to maintain their connection to the history and values of their tribal community. Reverence for their elders, the historical traditions of past generations, and a strong sense of community pull the
students toward their heritage culture. On the other hand, the participants expressed a call toward a broader culture of national identity in which the individual must adapt to a multicultural society. The political and socioeconomical environment that unified their ancestors as a tribal community have drastically changed. New opportunities are available to Black students that were not possible in their parents’ and grandparents’ era. The descriptions of the students’ lived experience are a picture of young men and women who are reconciling these two cultures and reconceptualizing their identity.

Seven of the 10 participants self-identified primarily by their national identity, while two regarded themselves by their tribal culture first. The last said that she was not a cultural person. Regardless of where each participant placed him or herself in the balance between the two cultures, there were two aspects of tribal culture to which the participants consistently held. The first was the concept of community, bonded through another concept, ubuntu, the shared belief of personal selflessness and a commitment to the betterment of the whole. The second aspect of tribal identity that the participants could not relinquish was their tribal language. Each participant asserted that, even if all the customs and practices of their tribe were forgotten, their language must remain as a connection to their tribal heritage. The participants’ experiences of their cultural identities took shape over the course of their lives with formative emphasis placed on early childhood enrollment in EMI schools, family and personal decisions regarding religious beliefs, mobility of the family, and an increase in available knowledge and technology.

Within the university context, the participants were challenged to maintain the essence of their cultural identity apart from family and tribal community. Seven of ten participants believed their university had little or no understanding of their culture. To the participants, the university policy of English-medium instruction represented antipathy or indifference toward their culture.
The participants’ need for cultural socialization in what they perceived to be a culturally inhospitable environment was accomplished by surrounding themselves with people who had a common background, who understood their culture, and their social, academic, and emotional struggles. To accomplish this, the participants engaged in formal and informal social communities. Formal social communities were organized by their universities in the form of culturally themed social groups. Informal social communities included peer-initiated social groups. Informal social communities were more prevalent among the participants for their practical and social benefits. Informal peer-initiated groups allowed more flexibility and accessibility in maintaining contact with other members of the group than the formal university sponsored groups. Having smaller groups tended to promote a higher sense of inclusion, allowing the participants to create stronger bonds with one another. Stronger bonding allowed the participants to be more vulnerable with respect to the academic and cultural challenges of university life.

The first support question was, “How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe their social relation to those outside their self-identified ingroup?” This support question clarified the students’ experience and provided meaning for their negotiated identity as they considered their relationship to other groups in the university context. When asked how they would describe themselves to someone outside their national or tribal community, the participants placed their national or tribal identity and language as the first priority followed by their faith, degree program, and personal interests. When describing their social identity, the ingroup was consistently identified as African students who are Black and for whom English was not their primary language. The outgroup included all White South Africans. The participants further subdivided the outgroup into Afrikaners and
English. In considering their relationship with the outgroup, the participants’ awareness of their own cultural identity and history was weighed against the culture and history ascribed to the outgroup. As a result of their association with the former apartheid government, Afrikaners were described in more antagonistic terms than the English speaking population.

The second support question was “How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction perceive their academic self-efficacy?” This question showed the degree to which the participants hold their sense of academic self-efficacy and the factors that influence their cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional functioning. Seven of the participants expressed a higher sense of academic self-efficacy. The remaining three focused their responses on the challenges encountered in the university learning experience. The dominant factors that appeared in the participants responses included verbal persuasion, performance accomplishments, and vicarious experience. The participants shared different insights into how they responded to negative experiences in their learning experience. The participants highlighted two significant challenges in their learning experience: racial disparity and language proficiency. The challenge of racial disparity caused feelings of marginalization among the participants who experienced them. However, both participants who reported their experience expressed a high sense of academic self-efficacy. The participants who reported difficulty learning in an EMI context suggested that these challenges added a dimension of difficulty and stress in their learning experience that influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation.

The third support question was, “What are the challenges experienced by Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction?” This support question sought to discover the student’s language proficiency self-perception considering the
rigorous demand of higher education. As participants described their learning experience, the area in which they had the greatest frustration was in comprehension of the learning materials, oral and written, due to the language of instruction. The participant’s proficiency with English varied, causing a corresponding degree of anxiety that negatively influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy. The participants said that the universities provided suitable platforms for academic support to the students through tutors, group assignments, study centers, and writing centers. However, the participants found extended support by participating in small groups of peers.

**Discussion**

The information in this section discusses the findings of this study in relation to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. The discussion reviews the findings that were developed from this study and their relationship to existing literature. The discussion also includes how the findings fit within the theoretical framework of cultural identity theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977).

**Theoretical Literature Discussion**

The literature, as examined in Chapter Two, explored the three theories forming the conceptual framework for this study: cultural identity theory, social identity theory, and self-efficacy theory. Cultural identity theory was advanced to understand the communicative processes used by individuals to construct and negotiate cultural group identities in particular contexts (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Tajfel (1982) presented social identity theory as a social psychological theory that declares one’s positive or negative social identity conception is based on intergroup social comparisons. Self-efficacy theory is based on the concept that the degree to
which individuals believe in their ability to influence events that affect their life and exert control over the way these events are experienced influences their functioning, expressed in four categories: cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional (Bandura, 2000, 2006, 2008). These three theories were significant in understanding how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context and whether that experience influenced academic performance.

**Cultural Identity Theory**

Cultural identity theory asserts that a group member’s cultural identity is established on his or her identification with, or sense of belonging to, a group based on cultural or subcultural categories including nationality, ethnicity, race, language, age, gender, or religion (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The participants of this study are reconceptualizing their cultural identity out of multiple coexisting cultures. On one side, reverence for their elders, the historical traditions of past generations, and a strong sense of community pull the students toward their heritage culture. On the other side, they are faced with a changing political and socioeconomical environment combined with the possibility for academic and economic advantage. The resulting reconception of cultural identity arrives at the intersection of the student’s cultural positioning and identification as historical, contextual, and relational constructions (Chen & Collier, 2012; Collier, 2005; Thompson & Collier, 2006). The participants of this study emphasized that they identified themselves as part of a multicultural community in which their tribal membership was situated within the broader social context of nationality and race. The broader social context catalyzed changes in the way in which the participants perceived and defined their cultural identity.
The differences between apartheid and post-apartheid era cultural identity conceptualization are most evident when examining Collier’s and Bornman’s (1999) study on cultural identity and intercultural friendships. In 1992, two years before apartheid was dismantled, Collier and Bornman (1999) conducted a series of focus groups examining the relationship between Afrikaners, British, Black, Coloured, and Asians based on avowed and ascribed characteristics. Each group presented multiple cultural identities, including national, racial, ethnic, and gender. Each group also described a vision for national unity, but disagreed on how to achieve this goal. The specific strategies were not disclosed. Anticipating the imminent changes, Collier and Bornman (1999) ended their discussion by sharing their participants’ uncertainty with respect to what a new South Africa would look like. As 28 years have passed between the study by Collier and Bornman (1999) and this, this study provides insight into that question by contrasting some of the elements of both studies. As participants in this study considered their national identity, it is important to point out a general difference in the mindsets of the respective participants. Collier and Bornman (1999) described the Black participants speaking in quiet tones and having to be coaxed for responses. The characteristics for competent intercultural relationship expressed by the Black participants of the previous study presented more of a peacemaking posture (i.e., respect our customs, accept differences, avoid assuming higher status, focus on similarities, and equalize power) compared to the demands of the Afrikaner participants toward the Blacks (i.e., use appropriate greetings, speak standard Afrikaans, use respectful titles, and wash more often). On the other hand, the participants of this study were bold in their conversation and forthcoming in their responses. There was a clear call from all participants for cultural and lingual equality in the academic social context. The participants of this study saw themselves as taking a more self-affirming rather than depreciating
role in society. As Mthobeli described this generation, “When they see white men, they don’t see a baas [boss in Afrikaans].” Collier and Bornman (1999) described the Afrikaner and English-speaking participants expressing preference for intercultural norms based on their own cultural standards, while the Blacks were more accommodative of differences. This study presents a generation more assertive in expressing a national vision where Blacks occupy prominent positions of leadership, power, and wealth.

Collier and colleagues emphasized that cultural identity is an emergent, contextual process (Collier & Powell, 1990; Collier & Thomas, 1988). For the participants, the core value of community remained consistent. However, the symbols and norms that had once been typical of preceding generations were reevaluated for relevance and usefulness. For the participants, the relational and communal aspects of their heritage cultural identity were counterproductive to achieving their present goals. Aspects of their parents’ and grandparents’ cultural identity were excluded, while new symbols and norms were embraced as more conducive to the present multicultural social context. This finding is supported by the cultural identity theory’s position that some aspects of culture are more robust, while others are more tenuous and susceptible to change (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Changeable features tend to be those that have become irrelevant to the group or that are necessary for the group to adapt due to social, political, economic, and contextual factors (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The generation that Mthobeli referred to as “struggle heroes” lived in a different set of circumstances politically, socially, and economically. The preceding generation lived under a repressive government that afforded little economic or educational opportunity. Apart from the struggle against apartheid, the progenitors of the participants were more closely associated with a national history not marked by cooperation and unity among tribes. Malusi spoke of “back in the day, a long time ago there was
the big war between the Xhosas and the Zulus.” Animosity between some of the elders exists to this day. However, the participants credited the efforts of the previous generation with providing the prospect for the present generation to be able to pursue greater economic and academic advantage.

The participants noted that opportunity often required leaving the insulated tribal community and integrating into a larger multicultural community exemplified by the university. The university culture was characterized as a “neutral culture that everybody adapts to” where no single culture has a dominant presence. Integrating into the larger social context meant that the participants had to adapt. Exposure to other cultures reinforced the commonality of morals and values while marginalizing certain tribal practices and religion. Linguistically, they accepted English as a common language of communication and education. Some tribal practices were rejected because they have lost relevance. Religion, mobility, increased accessibility to knowledge, and greater sense of global attitude played significant influential roles in determining which practices are rejected and which are retained. The participants did not see all changes as having arisen from a lack of relevance, but were necessary to achieve their individual and collective goals. This was particularly true with regard to the use of English as the common language. While many of the participants voiced their disapproval of English as the language of instruction, Mvuseselo was most emphatic in his own feelings of being marginalized by English as the dominant language. He questioned, “Why is that I have to change from mine to theirs. Why don’t they change from theirs to mine? Why should English be the medium? Why didn’t they choose any other language?” In general, the participants expressed a tension between the received traditions of their families and tribal communities and the call to national identity in which the participant was attempting to maintain a relevant connection to his or her tribal
community while adapting to a multicultural society. These received changes reflect a concession toward personal achievement and a common goal of national identity.

**Social Identity Theory**

Living in a multicultural university context, the participants interrelated with other cultures with varying degrees of similarity to their own heritage culture. To the degree to which others at their university presented proximate cultural characteristics, the participants formed social ingroups. The participants’ process of social identification, categorization, and comparison in defining social ingroups and outgroups agreed with the principles of social identity theory as set forth by Tajfel (1982). The central tenet of social identity theory involves exploring intergroup and intragroup relationships and specifying details of identity dynamics through observation within a social context (Hogg et al., 1995). When presented with the question of how they maintain connection to their cultural identity in the university context, eight of the participants identified participation in formal and informal groups that gathered around common cultural characteristics. Social identity theory is established on the concept that individuals gain a sense of importance and relevance through the groups to which they belong by emphasizing things that are similar in their own group and things that are different between groups (Bochatay et al., 2019; Turner, 1982).

Tajfel (1982) postulated that in the process of identifying ingroup and outgroup membership, social groups tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and the similarities within one’s own group, creating stereotypes. As people identify more closely with their own group, they highlight the positive in their own group and develop stronger antipathies toward other groups (Tajfel, 1978; 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In contrast to Tajfel’s (1982) postulate, the language participants used to describe the ingroup and outgroup communicated a general
sense of heightened self-esteem at being part of the community without apparent denigration of the members of the outgroup. Apart from the limited expressions of distrust voiced towards Afrikaners, the participants did not tend to emphasize the differences between groups, but expressed a general acceptance of Whites as others who were culturally different. This is significant when considering Bochatay’s et al. (2019) suggestion that intergroup comparisons may also lead to negative comparison outcomes resulting in the perception of ingroup inferiority. Weber et al. (2018) added that perceived negative stereotypes may pose a psychological burden on minority group members, that systematically undermine their performance regardless of the actual level of prejudice in a particular educational setting. This study presents a unique dynamic in which the popular majority has been placed in a socially minoritized position based on the language of instruction. Weber et al. (2018) went on to suggest that individuals who identify strongly with either the receiving or heritage culture tend to be more resilient against the detrimental influence of stereotype threat. In this study, none of the participants identified strongly with the receiving English culture. When considering English as the dominant culture, two of the participants who identified strongly with their tribal culture described themselves as feeling “foreign” and “not belonging.” However, both participants described having high academic and career aspirations, with no negative influence on their academic performance. This study suggests, in contrast to Weber et al. (2018), that mitigating factors, such as English-language proficiency, may have a stronger influence on academic performance and cultural adaptability than perceived ingroup inferiority.

Self-efficacy Theory

Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory describes how the internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-
efficacy and motivation. Such cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. Chee et al. (2019) suggested that in the context of an EMI classroom, students with a strong sense of ethnic or cultural identity may experience cultural conflict with the dominant culture arising from a perceived lack of fit between a student’s values and beliefs and those of the receiving culture. Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory describes how the internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation. Such cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. In compatibility with the research, the participants of this study described a strong sense of cultural identity. However, in the EMI context of this study, the participants were set in a unique circumstance. Although the Black students represented the popular majority, the university’s use of English as the language of instruction set anglophones in the dominant culture. The extent to which the Black students were proficient in the English language, they were able to fit into the dominant culture. As an example, two participants described how the dominance of English culture in the South Africa education system made them feel “foreign,” or “a sense of not belonging in the world.” For them, learning in English reinforced the ascribed beliefs, traits, and values that the English language embodies. Haider and Fang (2019) observed that the secondary culture is reinforced when English language materials, emphasizing Western literature and culture, are preferred, emphasizing the dominance of Western culture and ideology by linking them with English as the language of instruction. While EMI clearly created cultural conflict in these participants between their heritage culture and the dominant English culture, represented in both the language and content of the material, any impact on their academic self-efficacy was not evidenced. When
asked about his sense of academic self-efficacy, Phegello reported that he had a high expectation of his ability to succeed based, in part, on a highly competitive nature and the encouragement of family. Similarly, two of the participants reported evidence of racial disparity in their learning experience. While the experiences led to temporary feelings of marginalization, they both reported a high sense of academic self-efficacy. None of the participants described cultural conflict as a source of stress that led to a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. Their experience of cultural conflict with the dominant culture was regulated by their level of English-language proficiency and involvement in a social support group.

The participants who reported the greatest challenge to learning were the participants who had the lowest level of English-language proficiency. The participants expressed that the university standard for English-language fluency was unrealistic. This finding is supported by research suggesting academic achievement is negatively influenced when learners do not have an acceptable language proficiency or lack conceptual understanding of English (Chang et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2016).

In general, the participants’ prior learning experience in an EMI classroom provided the social, emotional, and practical tools to adapt to the EMI classroom at the university. Those participants who were more proficient in English were less affected by learning with English as the language of instruction. The participants with lower language proficiency suggested that these challenges added a dimension of difficulty and stress in their learning experience that subsequently influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation. The dominant positive factors influencing the participants’ sense of academic self-efficacy included verbal persuasion in which a family member or other person of authority encouraged the student in his or her academic pursuit, performance accomplishments in which the student approached new
tasks by relating them to prior experiences and drawing upon the mastery of those prior experiences, and vicarious experience in which the student was positively influenced in the belief of his or her own ability by perceiving him- or herself to be similar to the vicarious experience of another.

**Empirical Literature Discussion**

The existing literature, as examined in Chapter Two, explored English-medium instruction as an effective method of instruction, the relationship between language and identity, and the interrelationship between language and power relations. This literature discussion demonstrates how each of these subjects was addressed in this study.

**English-medium instruction**

Results from research in Europe and Asia revealed the influence of EMI on cultural identity to be inconsistent with little transferability (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). This study expands the scope of research by describing the learning implications and cultural identity negotiation implications of EMI for the Black South African university student. Further, this study explored how EMI influences cultural identity formation and negotiation and academic achievement in university students, which is an area that has been under-researched (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016; Sa'd, 2017).

The current body of literature regarding EMI reflects the bases for universities selecting English as the preferred language of instruction, as well as the challenges for implementation at the university level and use at the student level. The empirical literature is divided regarding EMI as an effective and desirable method for university education in countries where English is not the primary language. Five prominent themes have arisen to support EMI implementation, including: (a) increasing English language skills (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Huang, 2018;
Kuchah, 2016), (b) improved job possibilities (Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Huang, 2018; Kuchah, 2016), (c) globalization (Blattès, 2018; Chun et al., 2017; Dearden, 2016), (d) facilitation of ideas with the worldwide academic community (Blattès, 2018; Chun et al., 2017; Dearden, 2016), and (e) attracting international students (Blattès, 2018; Briggs & Smith, 2017; Dearden, 2016).

For the participants of this study, EMI was not a new experience at the university level. The participants were educated with English as the medium of instruction from primary school onward within a hierarchical education system that disproportionately disadvantages students in schools that teach in a tribal language against students who attend English-Afrikaans schools. Letago and Thabisco provided a description of the South Africa primary and secondary school system as divided linguistically into three separate tracks, English-Afrikaans, English-tribal language, and Afrikaans-tribal language. The best schools, academically, are considered to be the English-Afrikaans schools. When possible, Black South African families place their children in the academically superior English-Afrikaans schools. This creates a two-tiered system where students who attend EMI schools are prepared to attend a public university and those who attend a tribal-language school have a disadvantage should they choose to attend an EMI university. The alternative to a public university degree may be attending a private HEI where the language of instruction is in the student’s tribal language, but may also provide a lower quality education or a degree with less prestige and marketability in the workforce.

Eight of the participants noted the global necessity of learning in English, and half of the participants said that learning in English was preferable to learning in their primary language. According to the participants, EMI in their primary and secondary education had both positive and negative effects in their university life. While learning in English provided an advantage in
their academic endeavors, the participants noted that it came at some cost to their cultural identity. Two of the participants explained that they had lost fluency in their tribal language which negatively impacted their cultural identity. There was further concern that, by adapting to an English-dominated society, the next generation was losing the ability to connect to family members and people in other tribes with similar languages. As participants described their learning experience, the effect of EMI on their cultural identity was evident but was not always received as detrimental. Some participants expressed gratitude for having been taught in English because it provided a stronger base from which they could learn at the university level. Njabulu wrote in the focus group that rather than English as the language of instruction creating a barrier that causes the students’ cultural identities to become a shadow, it adds to the knowledge one already has. For Black South African university students, the effect of EMI on cultural identity negotiation was evidenced in the loss of tribal language fluency and a perceived disconnection from their heritage culture and history. At the same time, it appears that early implementation of EMI in education increases English-language proficiency and provides an advantage to prospective university students.

For the participants of this study, EMI presented a greater challenge to their academic success from a loss of comprehension of English-language learning materials. This study supports the empirical research in the field suggesting that academic achievement is negatively influenced when learners do not have an acceptable understanding of English (Chang et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2016; Nishioka & Durrani, 2019). Relevant studies in South Korea, Rwanda, and India indicated that students face considerable cognitive and linguistic challenges in acquiring conceptual understanding while learning in English (Chang et al., 2017; Milligan et al., 2016; Sah & Li, 2018). The self-described level of academic achievement of each participant
was attributed, in part, to the level of English-language proficiency. The degree to which each participant was able to comprehend the lectures and written material significantly influenced academic success.

A minority of participants in this study shared that although they had been taught in English from primary school onward, they lacked sufficient proficiency with English that caused difficulty in comprehension at the university. For those with low English-language proficiency, time spent in translation and understanding of materials accounted for a large portion of their study efforts, leading to high levels of frustration and difficulty in completing assignments in a timely manner. On the other hand, participants who had a high level of English-language proficiency felt that their prior EMI learning experience had benefitted them when they reached the university, providing a foundation from which they could comprehend the new material and concepts without the impediment of having to translate the texts and lectures.

**Language and identity**

Literature strongly supports the proposition that knowledge and use of primary language is closely associated with one’s cultural orientation and ethnic identity (Amiot et al., 2018; Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016; Slatinská & Pecníková, 2017). Research involving immigrant children who were encouraged in the use of their primary language were more likely to identify as indigenous and speak their primary language (Makarova, 2017; Mesinas & Perez, 2016). The findings of this study support the corollary to this proposition. Students in this study, who are discouraged in the use of their primary language, were less likely to identify with their tribal heritage or speak in their primary language. The participants suggested that, although their parents sent them to EMI schools to provide the “best schooling,” the result for some was a loss of fluency in their primary language, impacting their cultural identity. The correlation between
the use of the student’s primary language at home and in school with their cultural identity was said to be that those who studied in their tribal language through primary and secondary school were more in touch with their culture than those who studied at an English-Afrikaans medium school. While it has become the habit in many South African homes to promote an “English comes first” position, promoting English above their cultural language, the result is that younger children are becoming unable to communicate with and benefit from the elders of the community. The concern among the participants is that the loss of their primary language will mean the loss of their cultural identity.

Identity development involves successive sequences of self-exploration, change, and consolidation, resulting in the construction of social roles, cultural affiliations, beliefs, values, and behavioral practices (Mesinas & Perez, 2016). Individuals moving from one cultural context to another are challenged to accommodate information from within the receiving cultural context, reconstructing their identity (Amiot et al., 2018). During the participants’ pre-university years, the participants were supported in their cultural identity through their family and tribal community. The contribution of family members to the socialization process included facilitating the internalization of values, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the group that lead to feelings of belonging (Mesinas & Perez, 2016; Vietze et al., 2019). However, the change of social context and physical separation from family required that the participants weigh the cultural context of their new situation, negotiate their cultural identity, and find alternate resources for cultural socialization. To the participants, the university policy of English-medium instruction represented antipathy or indifference toward their culture. Consequently, the participants’ need for cultural socialization in what they perceived to be a culturally inhospitable environment was accomplished by surrounding themselves with people who had a common
background, who understood their culture, and their social, academic, and emotional struggles. Formal and informal social communities provided a platform for the participants to connect with others who are “like me.” Seven of the participants reported participation in either the formal university sponsored social groups or the informal peer-initiated groups. The participants reported that the strongest and most consistently utilized avenue of cultural socialization was found in small communities of peers that formed the core of the participants’ identity support in the university context. These ad hoc social communities strengthened their sense of cultural belonging and provided an environment of inclusion. This finding supports the research conducted by Schotte et al. (2018) that concluded that, while identification with the receiving culture is crucial for sociocultural adaptation and academic success, students’ identification with their heritage culture was less significant. Further, the research of Schotte et al. (2018) was supported by the experience of the participants in this study that more adaptive students fostered more supportive networks, which reinforced psychological adaptation. Participants who identified with the multicultural society of South Africa described retaining the core symbols of their primary culture (i.e., language, pride in culture or tribal accomplishment, family, faith, ubuntu or community, race, strength or resiliency, family history, and leadership) but assimilated with the other cultures more freely.

**Language and power relations**

The empirical literature regarding language and power relations supports the proposition that learning in English creates a power relation between the language of instruction and the student’s primary language in EFL students. Bourdieu (1991) stated that the value of linguistic capital reflects power relations between languages, defined in relation to the worth of language in particular linguistic markets and the symbolic power associated with it. Individuals competent
in the dominant language are better able to respond to the demands of education while marginalizing those less proficient to “the negative sanctions of the scholastic market, i.e., exclusion or early self-exclusion induced by lack of success” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 62). In South Africa, the constitution promotes eleven official languages as co-equal in status. However, the use of English as the sole language of instruction in the public university system creates an education system where language proficiency is more highly valued as a commodity and, therefore, more sought after in the primary and secondary education levels as well. For those students who are unable to attend EMI schools in the primary or secondary grades, the implications for academic success at the university level are severe. With a university system that only uses English as the language of instruction, the prospective university student with a lower level of English-language proficiency must choose between a public or private HEI. While private HEIs are plentiful at 284 registered institutions and offer greater potential for finding a program that is taught in the student’s primary language, the highest level offered by the overwhelming majority of private HEIs is a National Diploma or National Certificate which may not support the students’ career aspirations (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020b; SAQA, 2012). Private institutions that offer degree programs tend to focus on specialized training, such as business management or media, which do not require a high investment in infrastructure (Tamrat, 2018). In general, there are few highly qualified, reputable private HEIs available to the prospective student, limiting the student’s probability of academic and economic success.

EMI presupposes that the learner is sufficiently skilled in English to participate in the education process. Bourdieu (1991) observed that when the family linguistic practices agree with the linguistic requirements of the school, the child would be seen as more intelligent and easily
educated, creating a potentially inequitable learning environment for students with less linguistic competence. Mvuseselo reflected on his experience as an EFL student, noting “it should not be that if you are not excelling in it that you are deemed less intelligent.” One of the outstanding observations of the participants was that Black university students were in a stricter manner that White students. The perception was that White students were more capable of succeeding and the Black students were less capable of learning. The false equivalence that dominant language proficiency is an indicator of intelligence prejudices the judgement of instructors against those who are less language proficient.

Power relations have a long history in language usage and policy from the conquest and subjugation of people to office policies designed to globalize a workplace (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dirk & Gelderblom, 2017; Kaiper, 2018; Nishioka & Durrani, 2019); this study reflects that history in a unique way. During the apartheid era of South Africa, the government enacted language policies designed to marginalize tribal culture and language. The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 dictated that all non-White South African schools would use Afrikaans and English in equal measure as the language of instruction, restricting autochthonous languages to religious instruction, music, and physical education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). The Soweto uprising of 1976, launching the formal resistance to apartheid, was a direct response by the African Teachers Association of South Africa to the implementation of the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 (Bonner et al., 2012). The new constitution of South Africa declared the nation to be multicultural and multilingual (Constitutional Assembly, 1996). However, the benefits of a democratic government have not yet been realized in the post-apartheid education community. In response, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (2020a) issued a directive to the nation’s public universities reasserting its 2017 statement recognizing that
“language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions” (p. 11). Higher education institutions were directed to develop, by January 2022, strategies, policies, and implementation plans for promoting multilingualism that include at least two official languages, other than the medium of instruction or language of teaching and learning, for development for scholarly discourse as well as official communication. The policy recognizes the de facto status of English as the language of learning and teaching, but encourages the universities to provide a flexible approach in its implementation and to provide necessary support to students for whom English is not their primary language. Further, the universities must demonstrate the investment they have made or will make in the development of official languages into languages of teaching and learning, scholarship, and research (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020a). Even so, the perception of the participants was that the government and popular mandate are driving schools at every level toward English as a language of instruction. As a result, the English-Afrikaans primary and secondary schools have become the institutions of choice for Black families who are able to afford them, and the standards of the rural schools continue to deteriorate. After fighting to prevent the South African government from subjugating their culture and to defend the right to educate their children in their tribal language, the people of South Africa seem to have moved away from linguistic diversity toward English as the lingua franca. When asked what recommendations they might offer to the university regarding how language and cultural diversity should be addressed, the participants of this study took the opportunity to voice their frustration and urged that the university should offer courses in multiple languages. English has become the pragmatic, if unpopular, choice of a nation striving toward economic growth and equity.
Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. The theoretical framework that guided this study included cultural identity theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977).

Theoretical Implications

Collier (2005, 2009) posited that cultural identities are negotiated within a social context and that the individual’s cultural identity may be affected variously by historical events, political conditions, by others, and the situation or site of interaction. Cultural identity theory has been applied to understand how individual members of a cultural group interpret themselves within their social context and how that group intersects with others. The data collected in this study confirms cultural identity theory as an appropriate lens through which to view Black South African university students in an EMI context. The participants described a social context of personal experiences, historical and political events, socioeconomic changes, relational constructions, and personal worldviews that influenced their reconceptualized cultural identity. The data collected through this study presented seven subthemes associated with cultural identity negotiation and social context: (a) comparison with previous generations, (b) conflict between heritage culture and national culture, (c) religion, (d) physical and social mobility, (e) knowledge and technology, (f) maintaining cultural connection, and (g) language as culture.

One significant implication that developed from the data is that the Black South African student’s cultural identity negotiation is influenced by a complex and intense interaction of multiple cultures. The participants’ descriptions emphasized the often-conflicting factors of their heritage and national cultures as they reconceptualize their cultural identity. For example, the
participants’ heritage culture promotes tribal monoculturalism, which in its extreme has led to tribalism and tribal conflict, but which also promotes cohesion and perpetuation of the tribe’s values and customs within the tribal community. In contrast, the national culture to which the participants are called espouses multiculturalism, recognizing cultural diversity with the intent to eliminate uneven power relations between cultural groups providing equal socioeconomical opportunity to each. Similarly, seven of the participants described balancing the religious customs of their tribal heritage with their Christian faith. As repeatedly described, the practice of worshiping ancestors is inconsistent with monotheistic Christianity. However, the participants also described a desire to preserve the morals and values that were foundational of their tribal community.

A second implication is that the Black South African university students who cultivate cultural support networks exhibit a stronger sense of academic self-efficacy and are better able to adapt to the receiving culture. The participants described the cultural, social, academic, and emotional support they received by surrounding themselves with people who had a common background, who understood their culture, and who were coparticipants in their social, academic, and emotional struggles. These formal and informal communities were an essential element in maintaining the essence of their heritage culture and adapting to the receiving culture.

Social identity theory is a social psychological theory asserting that one’s positive or negative social identity conception is based principally on intergroup social comparisons (Tajfel, 1982). The mental process of social identity theory: (a) social categorization, (b) social identification, and (c) social comparison, is not an artificial process, but intrinsic (Turner, 1982). Social identity theory has been used to understand intrarelationships between group members and interrelationships with those outside the group. This study applied social identity theory to
understand how historical and present power relations between native-English and EFL groups influence the self-esteem and pride of Black South African university students. The data collected through this study first presented the participants’ perceptions of social group members and those outside the group. As suggested by social identity theory, the participants used positive descriptors when speaking of themselves and other Black South African students, generally reflecting a strong self-esteem and pride. When asked directly to describe their feelings toward English-speaking cultures, the participants presented a generally neutral tone. However, analysis of the descriptors of Whites, Afrikaners, and Anglophones used by the participants throughout their interview and focus group responses yielded a more mixed and mostly negative perspective. The differing data may be explained by subconscious prejudices in the participant’s perspective, reflective of their social, economic, and political history. At the same time, the participants withdrew from the more direct question as a matter of courteousness, not wanting to offend a White anglophone interviewer.

One implication that developed from the data regarding social identity theory is that negative historical events and the communicated prejudices of parents have a declining influence on the racial and ethnic attitudes of Born Free Black South African students when weighed against the perceived benefits of a broader inclusive society. The participants clearly recalled and understood the inequalities and oppression present in the apartheid-era government. However, participants also described the changing political and socioeconomic environment in South Africa. Gabadeli encapsulated the essence of what other participants said about a more inclusive and diverse South Africa,

I think that’s a very powerful thing that we don’t only say Black people are South African or White people are South African or Zulu people are South African or Afrikaans people
are South African. But all those things are encompassed into South African-ness if I can put it in that way.

A second implication is that the extent to which Black South African university students are proficient in the language of instruction, they are more inclined to dismiss the non-primary language as a social identity threat. Social identity theory suggests that because identity salience is context driven, students in a university where instruction is in other than the student’s primary language negotiate their discernment of that non-primary language in terms of whether it is seen as a social identity threat creating a perception of ingroup inferiority (Myburgh et al., 2015). In the EMI context of this study, the participants were set in the circumstance where the university’s use of English as the language of instruction set anglophones in the dominant culture. The participants, who were all EMI educated from primary school, described varying levels of language proficiency. Students who were less language proficient experienced greater cultural conflict with the dominant culture and dissatisfaction with English as the language of instruction, as well as an increased feeling of marginalization.

Bandura’s (1978) concept of reciprocal determinism suggests that the way in which individuals interpret the results of their performance informs and alters their environments and self-beliefs, which in turn informs and alters future performance. Reciprocal determinism argues against the philosophical doctrine of determinism, that all events or actions are ultimately determined by outside forces, stating that the individual has the ability to influence his or her own behavior through cognitive processes and environmental factors including the attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of those surrounding the individual. Pajeres (1996) elaborated on the concept of reciprocal determinism adding that individuals possess a self system comprised of one’s cognitive and affective structures, including the ability to symbolize, learn from others, plan
alternative strategies, regulate one’s own behavior, and engage in self-reflection. A key
determinant of whether individuals employ these self-regulatory strategies rests in the beliefs that
they hold about their capabilities to do so (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Therefore, individuals must
also possess the belief that they can use these strategies effectively. Bandura’s (2008) self-
efficacy theory explains that endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities, and
distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised combine to
create personal agency. This study applied Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory to
describe what Black South African university students believe about their personal agency with
respect to academic self-efficacy, what factors contributed to that belief, and how the internal
and external conflicts of identity negotiation influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-
efficacy and motivation. In concurrence with the possible factors outlined by Banduras (1977),
the participants described verbal and social persuasion, performance accomplishments, and
vicarious experience as significant factors contributing to their positive sense of academic self-
efficacy. Additionally, the participants described intrinsic factors, such as stress management and
coping skills, and extrinsic factors, including social support provided by their social community,
as factors influential in maintaining their positive sense of academic self-efficacy. The data from
this study confirms the proposition of self-efficacy theory that one’s social identity with a social
group is indicative of one’s perceived social support from that group (Ahn et al., 2017; Guan &
So, 2016). The perceived support from that social group then provided self-efficacy information
to the individual in the form of vicarious experience and social persuasion.

There was one point of deviation from the expectations suggested by the relevant
research. Chee et al. (2019) wrote that in the context of an EMI classroom, students with a strong
sense of ethnic or cultural identity may experience cultural conflict with the dominant culture
arising from a perceived lack of fit between a student’s values and beliefs and those of the receiving culture (Chee et al., 2019). Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory describes how the internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation. Such cultural conflict can be a source of stress and lead to greater feelings of marginalization and a lower sense of academic self-efficacy. In compatibility with the research, the participants of this study described a strong sense of cultural identity. However, their experience of cultural conflict with the dominant culture was regulated by their level of English-language proficiency and involvement in a social support group. The implication of this finding is that the Black South African student’s level of English-language proficiency and cultural socialization reinforced the student’s self system which proved more influential than the internal or external cultural conflict in determining the student’s academic self-efficacy.

**Recommendations**

The theoretical implications of this study support four recommendations. First, it is recommended that the dynamic nature of the student’s cultural identity should be recognized while providing opportunity for growth. Ascriptions based on race or tribal affiliation contain the possibility of stereotype threat for the student which can adversely influence academic performance. Second, to promote the student’s cultural, social, academic, and emotional wellbeing and assist the student’s adaptability into the receiving culture, it is recommended that formal and informal cultural support communities should be encouraged and supported. It is further recommended that the university recognize the potential threat to the student’s academic success presented by his or her level of language proficiency. Recognizing the challenges that the student will encounter, lower-level courses should be structured, when possible, to allow for
more group assignments or other work where the peer-mediated instruction is possible. At the same time, the university should take measures through remediation to improve the student’s level of language proficiency. Finally, it is recommended that administrators provide opportunities for intercultural awareness and competence growth. Intercultural competence among faculty, staff, and administration will promote effective communication in the classroom and build academic self-efficacy in the student. Additionally, while intracultural awareness and support are important for the student’s social and academic wellbeing, it is also important that the student develops intercultural awareness and competence if he or she is to function effectively in a multicultural world. It is, therefore, important that students be provided opportunities to engage with other students of different cultural backgrounds and to be encouraged to develop their sense of intercultural competence as well.

**Empirical Implications**

The body of literature is extensive with respect to EMI in Europe and Asia-Pacific, but fails to substantially address the historical and cultural distinctions of the African continent, and South Africa in particular. Where the influence of EMI on cultural identity has been considered in Europe and Asia, research results have yielded a regional product with limited transferability, recommending additional research in this area (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). This study provided research to support much of the existing literature supporting EMI implementation. When asked why they chose to study in English, the answers of the participants in this study included: (a) to improve their English language skills, (b) English opens economic opportunities outside of South Africa, (c) and cross-cultural communication. Although eight of the participants saw value in learning in English, they were evenly divided in their opinion of whether they would have preferred to learn in English or
in their tribal language. Half of the participants commented that, given the choice, they would have preferred to learn in their home language. From a practical perspective, the participants said that comprehension of the learning materials was a significant concern. Equally important to the participants was losing connection with their heritage culture. Mvuseselo encapsulated this concern when he said, “language is one of the significance of one’s culture. If you lose your language, you lose your culture.” The implication is that, for Black South African students with a strong bond to their heritage culture, English-medium instruction has practical value, but there is a profound effect on their cultural identity.

This study further supported and added to the research regarding language and identity development. Identity development involves successive sequences of self-exploration, change, and consolidation resulting in the construction of social roles, cultural affiliations, beliefs, values, and behavioral practices (Mesinas & Perez, 2016). Individuals moving from one cultural context to another are challenged to accommodate information from within the receiving cultural context, reconstructing their identity (Amiot et al., 2018). Mobility was a sub-theme listed in Chapter Four under the theme of Cultural Identity and Social Context, and one of the cited factors influencing the participants’ cultural identity negotiation. Mvuseselo suggested that, because of an increase in the physical mobility of the population, young people are being encouraged to pursue English as a common language in order to thrive in a multilingual society. As a result, “those children know nothing about culture, let alone to recognize or appreciate it.” The participants had all been immersed in an English-language environment since primary school. However, their first intentional move away from home was to the university. Gabadeli summarized the transition from home life to university life observing that there is a “sort of a neutral culture that everybody adapts to.” This neutral, melded culture challenged the
Participants to adapt and seek out ways of belonging that were previously provided through their families and tribal community. This research added to the existing literature in that it shows the participants identifying a common need for cultural socialization and creating or participating in social communities that would provide for that need. Mvuseselo described it as being drawn together with people who “are from where we come from.” The need to be among people of similar culture, language, or race was described as an intrinsic process whereby the participant was supported in his or her self-concept. The implication is that participating in a social community of people with a similar cultural background creates a sense of belonging and safety from which the individual is better able to negotiate his or her social context.

This study supports the research regarding language and power relations and adds to the body of literature presenting documented instances of inequitable learning environments based on language proficiency. Bourdieu (1991) observed that when the family linguistic practices agree with the linguistic requirements of the school, the child would be seen as more intelligent and easily educated. The resulting teacher-student perception creates a potentially inequitable learning environment for students with less linguistic competence. Two of the participants of this study described their experiences with respect to language bias in the classroom. Letago said that she observed that Black university students were “taught in a more strict manner than I guess the White students.” When asked to clarify, she said that there appeared to be a perception among the White instructors that “White children will succeed more so than Black children.”

Significantly, all of the participants were educated in an EMI classroom from primary school forward for the purpose of giving them an equal opportunity to succeed in the university classroom. The perception of the White instructors was not seen as a response to the student’s actual ability or level of intelligence, but a racially motivated bias against Black students.
Mvuseselo reflected on his own experience as an EFL student, noting “it should not be that if you are not excelling in it that you are deemed less intelligent.” The participants with lower English-language proficiency described the constant process of translating the learning materials into their primary language before they can be comprehended and internalized. The participants with higher English-language proficiency described their advantage in being able to directly understand both the lectures and written material. The difference between the two sets of students is the process by which the participant is able to effectively participate in the learning process. The implication is that the false equivalence that dominant language proficiency is an indicator of intelligence prejudices the judgement of instructors against those who are less language proficient creating a barrier to academic success for the Black South African student.

**Recommendations**

The empirical implications of this study reinforce the recommendations suggested by the theoretical implications. Given that English-medium instruction can have a profound negative effect on the EFL student’s cultural identity, it is important that the student be given opportunity for cultural socialization in the university context. Additionally, participating in a social community of people with a similar cultural background creates a sense of belonging and safety from which the individual is better able to negotiate his or her social context. Therefore, formal and informal cultural support communities should be encouraged and supported, allowing students engage to other students of similar background and provide opportunity to communicate in their primary language. Finally, the university should recognize that the potential for racial and cultural bias exists among administration, faculty, and staff. Measures should be implemented, such as cultural competency education, to inform those in policy and instruction roles of the influence of presuming language proficiency as an indicator of intelligence and to
improve cultural communication skills. In South Africa, this may include training instructors in the dominant tribal languages represented in the region served by the university.

**Practical Implications**

In the higher education setting, gatekeepers such as university policy makers, administrators, and instructors determine and enforce the language of instruction (Dirk & Gelderblom, 2017; Garska & O'Brien, 2019). Advocates for an EMI policy point toward the growing need to be competitive in a global market (Adamchik et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Blattès, 2018; Dearden, 2016; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Lee, 2019; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Sah & Li, 2018). In Africa, deep-rooted socioeconomic, cultural, and political complications challenge the implementation of educational reform. This study provides insight into the lived experience of Black South African university students as they negotiate their cultural identity in an EMI context. As educational leaders examine the lived experience of Black South African university students, a deepened understanding of how these students negotiate their cultural identity in an EMI context will provide understanding of the challenges linguistically minoritized students may encounter in their educational experiences and help to broaden perspectives on those students’ practices in relation to language competence and academic self-efficacy. In addition to the practical implications for South Africa and the continent of Africa, the findings of this study may be transferable to higher education institutions where English is the primary language of instruction and where international students are recruited. Enrollment of international students in U.S. higher education institutions rose to 1,095,000 students in the 2018-2019 school year, more than 5% of the total student enrollment (Institute of International Education, 2020). Additionally, more than 78% of public universities and 87% of private universities, globally, sanction EMI for undergraduate or graduate studies
(Dearden, 2016). Specifically, this research provides implications for teaching and assessment practice, recruitment practice and policy for EFL students, and student support services.

A further implication of this study is that the academic, social, and cultural wellbeing of the EFL student is best supported when the university recognizes the cultural diversity of the student population and actively provides opportunities for intracultural and intercultural engagement between the university’s faculty, staff, and students as well as between students. The participants described their challenge to maintain the essence of their cultural identity within the university context, where English is the medium of instruction. Seven of ten participants believed that their university had little or no understanding of their culture. To the participants, the university policy of English-medium instruction represented antipathy or indifference toward their culture. The transition from home, where cultural socialization was formerly achieved primarily through the family and tribal community, to university, created a void in the students’ cultural support community. In response to this void, the university has an opportunity to facilitate cultural support communities as part of the students’ campus life. More than half of the participants described how their university allowed and funded culturally themed social groups in which the students were encouraged to participate. These groups encouraged social and cultural awareness activities that promoted cultural connectedness. While some of the participants participated in these social groups, others did not because of conflicting commitments, lack of time, or disinterest. Additionally, the students created intimate ad hoc social communities to share and strengthen their common culture. The participants’ need to preserve and strengthen their cultural identity in what the participants perceived to be a culturally inhospitable environment was accomplished by surrounding themselves with people who had a
similar background, who understood their culture, and their social, academic, and emotional struggles.

Secondly, university policy and practice regarding cultural support opportunities should be clearly and frequently communicated to the student. Seven of ten participants believed that their university had little or no understanding of their culture. Yet, more than half of the participants were able to recall how their university provided for culturally themed social groups. The messaging from the university to the student regarding support for cultural diversity should include: (a) why the university believes that supporting the student’s cultural identity is important to both the student and to the university, (b) how the university will be actively supporting the student in his or her university experience, and (c) what the university expects as a result. The way in which the university experience is described by the participants indicated that their university had communicated the “how” without clearly connecting it to the “why” and “what.”

A final implication of this study is that cultural adaptability and academic achievement in EFL students are enhanced through increased English-language proficiency. The participants of this study, who were all EMI educated from primary school, described varying levels of language proficiency. The students who were less language proficient experienced greater cultural conflict with the dominant culture and greater dissatisfaction with English as the language of instruction, as well as an increased feeling of marginalization. Participants who had a higher level of language proficiency and cultivated cultural support networks exhibited a stronger sense of academic self-efficacy and were better able to adapt to the receiving culture. Bandura’s (1977, 2008) self-efficacy theory describes that conflicts of identity negotiation, such as were described by the participants, negatively influence the Black South African student’s
sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation. However, an increase in the use of language learning strategies has been shown to have a correlative relationship with the student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and English-language proficiency (Kim et al., 2015). Universities who offer EMI degree programs often, but not always, require students to demonstrate an acceptable level of English-language proficiency. The standard of what is an acceptable level of English-language proficiency is set by the university in accordance with the testing methods used. As posited by Cummins (2017), there is a significant functional difference between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which is the degree of language competence necessary in a social context, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is the learner’s ability to read, write, and communicate on a level effective enough to excel in their academic pursuits. Lower acceptable levels of language proficiency for admission allow opportunity for a greater incidence of EFL students who experience conflicts in cultural identity negotiation. The policy of accepting lower levels of English-language proficiency may increase admissions, but have a negative effect on retention and the student’s academic outcome. English language support offered as a part of the university’s academic support strategy as well as accommodation in the classroom would benefit the EFL student’s cultural identity negotiation and academic self-efficacy, elevating the probability of academic success.

Recommendations

The practical implications of this study support three recommendations. It is recommended that the university recognizes the cultural diversity of the student population and actively provides opportunities for intracultural and intercultural engagement between the university’s faculty, staff, and students as well as between students. It is further recommended that the policy and practice regarding these opportunities should be clearly and frequently
communicated to the students. As has been previously stated, the academic, social, and cultural wellbeing of EFL students is best supported when they are able to engage in cultural communities where their background is understood and embraced. At the same time, it is unhealthy for EFL students to insulate themselves from the larger university community. Therefore, intercultural awareness and competence should be actively advocated and taught as part of the university social context. Finally, since cultural adaptability and academic achievement in EFL students are enhanced through increased English-language proficiency, it is recommended that students should be provided resources for enhancing language proficiency. These resources may be provided in the form of course offerings, tutorial services, or peer-mediated strategies.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

This study has both delimitations and limitations. The delimitations were intentional decisions to limit the study’s boundaries so that the depth of data might be better explored. The limitations were due to events and circumstances that were unmanageable. Both the delimitations and the limitations should be considered when attempting to generalize this study’s findings and conclusions.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations associated with the boundaries of this study include the choice of participants and the setting in which the research was conducted. This study intended to broaden the understanding of the influence of EMI on cultural identity negotiation and academic self-efficacy by exploring the lived experience of Black South African university students. Therefore, maximum variation sampling was selected to be used to identify 10 Black South African university students representing a cross-section of Black South African society. The rationale for
this decision was that there are nine dominant tribal language groups, each representing a unique sociocultural foundation. While all participants would share the common experience of negotiating cultural identity in an English-medium university context, their perspectives would be unique relative to their sociocultural background. Utilizing a sampling strategy in which each tribal language group might be represented would provide an information-rich group. Four of the nine language groups were included in this study including isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi, and siSwati representing speakers of 67% of the Black South African population.

This sampling was further delimited by the condition that each student must be between 20 and 30 years of age. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that shared experiences of a given phenomenon should occur within a proximate timeframe so that participants might have better recollection of the experience. The reasoning for the choice of the participants’ age range was also to isolate those students who were born after the fall of apartheid in 1994. This generation, which has grown up in a different political and socioeconomic environment from their elders, provides a unique perspective for this study in contrast to previous cultural identity studies involving South Africans.

The study was further delimited with respect to setting. There are 26 public universities, 284 registered private HEIs, and 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges in South Africa. To maximize the diversity of participants and the range of information, the setting for this study was all South African HEIs that have had at least one English-medium degree program spanning the previous four years. Ten participants representing eight different disciplines were selected from eight universities, seven public and one private: Boston City Campus, Stellenbosch University, University of Free State, University of Johannesburg,
University of Mpumalanga, University of Pretoria, University of South Africa, and University of Venda.

**Limitations**

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 had a significant limiting effect on the procedures of this study. In response to the pandemic, South Africa was placed on a scaled lockdown from March 2020 through completion of the data collection. The implications of the South Africa lockdown were that all universities were either closed or transitioned to a virtual classroom. Local and international travel was restricted to that which was deemed essential. As a result, participant solicitation and data collection methods that had been intended to be conducted in person were moved to an online platform. The revised data collection method limited participation to those students who were sufficiently literate in technology, had access to the necessary resources, and had a satisfactory level of English-language proficiency.

A second limitation of this study is that participation in the focus group and self-reflection writing were impeded by the pandemic restrictions. The inability of participants to consistently communicate due to the limited availability and reliability of online resources adversely affected the participants’ ability to contribute during data collection. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that in-depth interviews of up to 10 individuals were the primary means of data collection for phenomenological research. Data collection interviews continued until unique perspectives of the phenomenon were exhausted or saturated. Ten participants in this study completed the individual interview. However, complete supporting data collection was not achieved. In total, 70% of the participants contributed to the focus group and 50% of the participants responded to the reflection writing exercise. Continuous attempts were made to solicit responses but were unsuccessful (Appendix K). Some of the participants who were unable
to complete the requests were limited because of resources and others related personal challenges that hindered their continued participation. Further, Guba (1978) suggested overlapping methods as a form of triangulation process that undergirds claims of reliability to the extent that the independent methods produce complementary results. In this study, individual and focus group interviews, as well as the participant’s self-reflection writing provided separate data collection methods that produced complementary results. In addition, all collected data and the subsequent analysis was member-checked by the participants. Seven of the ten participants responded to the member-check, all of whom affirmed the accuracy and completeness of the results.

The delimitations of this study provided for the possibility of all nine tribal language groups to be represented. However, the participants who volunteered and fit the eligibility criteria were comprised of four language groups: isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati, and Sepedi. A limitation of this study is that it did not meet the goal of presenting a full cross-section of the Black South African population. However, the four language groups that participated include the top three most populous tribes: Zulu, Xhosa, and Pedi (Northern Sotho). The sum of all four language groups represented speakers of 67% of the Black South African population.

Additionally, the delimitations of this study did not provide parameters for gender representation. Enrollment in South African public universities by gender are distributed as 42% men, and 58% women (Council on Higher Education, 2018). Although participation was open to all university students, the participants who responded and met the eligibility qualifications for this study were 70% men and 30% women.

Finally, as indicated by the participants’ responses to the interview and focus group question regarding their perception of English-speaking cultures, the participants presented a generally neutral tone. However, analysis of the descriptors of Whites, Afrikaners, and
Anglophones used by the participants throughout their interview and focus group responses yielded a more mixed and mostly negative perspective. The differing data may be explained, in part, by the presence of a White American researcher. Linguistic outsiders are generally perceived by participants as objective or neutral, giving participants more liberty to speak freely about sensitive issues, but are hindered by an inability to speak the participant’s primary language (Cormier, 2018). However, while every effort was made to encourage the participants to be open and forthright, the personal nature of the question and cultural conventions of courtesy and respect may have hindered the participants from being as candid as they might have been with another researcher.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The conclusion of previous research on the way in which learning in a language other than one’s primary language influences cultural identity formation and negotiation in higher education students, and how that influences academic achievement has limited transferability due to socioeconomic and cultural variables (Boussebaa & Brown, 2017; Dearden, 2016; Sa'd, 2017). This study has added to the body of research, but it is regionally focused and delimited by the study sample. Future research could benefit from reproducing this study in other settings including U.S. HEIs and other former European colonies in Africa. In addition, within this study, the participants’ experience of cultural conflict with the dominant culture was demonstrated to be regulated by their level of English-language proficiency and involvement in a social support group, which further influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy. As suggested by the limitations of this study, it may be beneficial to undertake a quantitative comparative study of the effects of EMI on self-efficacy along a spectrum of language proficiency levels.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe how Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction context. Three theories guided this study. Collier and Thomas’ (1988) cultural identity theory provided a basis for understanding how EFL students form identity within their heritage culture group and internally negotiate the choices and challenges raised by learning in a foreign language relative to their core beliefs. Tajfel’s (1982) social identity theory provided a framework for understanding how historical and present power relations between native-English and EFL groups influence the self-esteem of the EFL students. Finally, Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory described how the internal and external conflicts of identity negotiation combine to influence the EFL student’s sense of academic self-efficacy and motivation.

The study endeavored to answer the central question: How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction learning context? The central question was supported by three support questions focusing on the participants’ social identity, self-efficacy, and learning challenges. Data collection methods included individual interviews, a focus group, and a self-reflection writing exercise. Data was gathered from 10 Black South African university students representing a cross-section of South African society. The data analysis followed Moustakas’ (1994) research method.

The most significant implication that developed from the data was that Black South African student cultural identity negotiation is influenced by a complex and intense interaction of multiple cultures. The participants’ descriptions emphasized the often-conflicting factors of their heritage and national cultures as they reconceptualize their cultural identity. The most important example of this contrast involved the contrast between tribal monoculturalism and national
multiculturalism. The participants described their heritage culture as promoting tribal monoculturalism, which in its extreme has led to tribalism and tribal conflict, but which also promotes cohesion and perpetuation of the tribe’s values and customs within the tribal community. In contrast, the national culture to which the participants felt called espouses multiculturalism, which recognizes cultural diversity and is intended to eliminate uneven power relations between cultural groups providing equal socioeconomical opportunity to each. Some of the participants readily dismissed their heritage culture, citing socioeconomic and religious reasons. Gabadeli explained,

A lot of the traditions and cultures that were from many, many decades ago are still being practiced today but now there are so many other factors like religion, economic status that also influence how we practice those things, if you do.

Others felt that multiculturalism created too great a separation from their cultural heritage, representing a breakdown of the traditional community, and strove to create a balance between the coexisting and often-conflicting cultures. Phegello described his personal motivation and journey in seeking to reconnect with his cultural heritage, “The time that we live right now a lot of our languages are disappearing and when our languages disappear and the history of it, we disappear as a person.” He said, “I got to a certain area and started asking myself who am I as a person.”

Another finding with both theoretical and practical implications was that EFL university students who cultivate cultural support networks exhibit a stronger sense of self-esteem and are better able to adapt to the receiving culture. The transition from home, where cultural socialization was formerly achieved primarily through the family and tribal community, to university, created a void in the students’ cultural support community. The participants described
the cultural, social, academic, and emotional support they received by surrounding themselves with people who had a common background, who understood their culture, and who were coparticipants in their social, academic, and emotional struggles. Dumisile described the benefits he felt from participating in an ad hoc group of fellow students,

So, weekly we sit down around our dining room table and talk about what we’ve learned during the week or during the day, how it’s benefited us mentally or emotionally and we sort of share our experiences for the week. Yeah, that’s one thing that I really, really like.

More than half of the participants described how their university sponsored culturally themed social groups in which the students were encouraged to participate. Some of the participants participated in these social groups; others, like Dumisile participated in intimate ad hoc social communities created to share and strengthen their common culture. These formal and informal communities were an essential element in maintaining the essence of their heritage culture and adapting to the receiving culture.
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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

December 11, 2019

Arthur Kent Cason

Dear Arthur Kent Cason,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HOW BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AN ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION CONTEXT

Arthur Kent Cason
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the experience of South African university students in an English-medium context. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a South African citizen between 20 and 30 years of age, whose primary language is one of the nine constitutionally recognized languages of South Africa, and are a current or former university student where the primary language of instruction is English. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Arthur Kent Cason, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe how Black South African university students experience and understand learning in an English-medium learning environment, and how cultural identity and academic self-efficacy are experienced by students receiving English-medium instruction.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in at least one (1) interview. The interviews will be conducted via electronic conferencing software (i.e., Skype or Google Hangouts), will last approximately 45 minutes, and will be audio recorded. Follow up interviews may be required but will be
conducted either via email or electronic conferencing software (i.e., Skype or Google Hangouts).

2. Participate in at least one (1) focus group conducted via a discussion board in Google Classroom that will provide additional information and to review and provide feedback on rough drafts of the data analysis. The focus group will last approximately 45 minutes.

3. Write a reflective letter to a hypothetical student. This exercise should take approximately one hour.

4. Participate in member-checking translations of the interview if an interpreter was used for your interview. Depending on the amount of translation required, this exercise may take approximately one hour.

5. Participate in member-checking the data for accuracy and completeness. This exercise should take approximately one hour.

6. Participate in member-checking the final synthesis for accuracy and completeness. This exercise should take approximately one hour.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means that they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the personal interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
• Data were stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

• Interviews will be recorded, translated as needed, and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

• I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Arthur Kent Cason. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at XXXXX@XXXXXXX.XXX. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Mark Lamport, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.
Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

☐ I will require an interpreter.

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

                             Date

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator

                             Date
APPENDIX C: ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you currently enrolled in or have you recently completed a degree program in which English was the primary language of instruction?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Are you presently enrolled in or have you graduated from a public South African university in which English is the primary language of instruction?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. What is your age?
   ☐ Under 20
   ☐ 20 - 30
   ☐ 30 and over

4. Are you a South African citizen?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. To which people group do you most closely identify?
   ☐ Afrikaner
   ☐ English
   ☐ Ndebele
   ☐ Northern Sotho
   ☐ Sotho
   ☐ Swazi
   ☐ Tsonga
☐ Tswana

☐ Venda

☐ Xhosa

☐ Zulu

☐ Other. Please specify:

☐ I prefer not to state

6. Which language is most commonly spoken in your home?

☐ Afrikaans

☐ English

☐ IsiNdebele

☐ Sepedi

☐ Sesotho

☐ SiSwati

☐ Xitsonga

☐ Setswana

☐ Tshivenda

☐ IsiXhosa

☐ IsiZulu

☐ Other. Please specify:

☐ I prefer not to state
7. Would you like to participate in this study?

☐ No ☐ Yes; If yes, please provide the following:

Name:
Date:
Phone:
Email:

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, I can be contacted at XXXXXX@XXXXXXX.XXX or you may text/call at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Arthur Kent Cason
Liberty University Graduate Student
APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Icebreaker and general questions:

1. What are some of your family’s customs or traditions that are important to you?
2. What is your role within your family?
3. What makes your tribe’s culture unique from other African tribes?
4. Please describe why you chose to study in English.
5. Please describe how you chose your field of study.

Central research question: How do Black South African university students experience cultural identity in an English-medium instruction learning context?

6. What does it mean to you to be an African?
7. South Africa is constitutionally multi-cultural and multi-lingual. What does that mean to you?
8. What does it mean to you to be a(n) [tribal name]?
9. How closely do you identify with your African and tribal culture?
10. Describe growing up in a(n) [tribal name] home.
11. How important to you is maintaining the language, customs, and traditions of your parents and ancestors? Please explain.
12. How do you think your experience of cultural identity is different from your parents and ancestors?
13. How do you describe yourself to those outside your national or tribal community?
14. How would you describe your learning experience with respect to your cultural identity?
15. What are some of the challenges in school related to your background?
16. How would you characterize the university’s understanding of your culture?
17. What support or strategies did you use to maintain your connection to your African and tribal culture?

Sub-question 1: How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction describe their social relation to those outside their self-identified ingroup?

18. Please describe your experience with English-medium instruction.

19. How would you describe the differences between English-medium instruction and learning in your primary language?

20. How did your learning experience affect significant others in your life?

21. Please describe the role of your family during your learning experience.

22. Please describe the role of your university peers during your learning experience.

23. What people or events, connected with your learning experience, stand out for you?

Sub-question 2: How do Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction perceive their academic self-efficacy?

24. How do you feel about English-speaking cultures?

25. Please tell me about the people who are important or influential in your life.

26. What is more important to you, how others value you, or how you value yourself?

27. Why is learning in English important to you?

28. How would you describe your learning experience with respect to how you perceive your ability to succeed?

Sub-question 3: What are the challenges experienced by Black South African university students who have received English-medium instruction?

29. What challenges, if any, did you experience with respect to English-medium instruction at the university?
30. How did you address those challenges?

31. What support or strategies were you available to you?

Closing questions:

32. What feelings were generated by your experience of learning in English?

33. What thoughts stood out for you?

34. What else related to your learning experience you would like to add?
APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Please introduce yourself and tell us something about your national and tribal background.

2. How important to you is maintaining the language, customs, and traditions of your tribal community?

3. South Africa is constitutionally multi-cultural and multi-lingual. What does that mean to you?

4. How has cultural recognition and appreciation changed over the past 25 years?

5. When considering which university to attend, what were some of the school qualities and characteristics you considered?

6. How would you describe your learning experience with respect to your cultural identity?

7. When you think about the English language, what do you think of?

8. How would you describe the differences between English-medium instruction and learning in your primary language?

9. Describe how language diversity should be addressed in the university.

10. We have been talking about language and cultural identity. Is there anything you would like to add?
APPENDIX F: SELF-REFLECTION SCENARIO

Participants were be asked to write a letter, in the language of their choosing, to a hypothetical prospective student with a background similar to their own using the following scenario as a guideline:

A male/female student from a background like your own has matriculated from high school and is considering studying in an English-medium program at your university. English has been his/her language of instruction since Grade 4, but it was used very little in their home and community. He/she is unsure of his/her English skill at the university level. He/she is also unsure of whether he/she will be able to adjust to the changes of university life. The people in his/her home community are almost all from the same cultural background so he/she is uncertain how he/she will fit into the new community.

Your task is to reflect upon your own experience as a university student and write a letter to the prospective student. Consider the following to guide you in your reflection: Why did you choose an English-medium program? How did you feel about learning in English when you began the program? How do you feel about it now? Has your perception of your cultural identity changed as a result of being in this program? How has learning in English helped or hindered you in achieving your academic and professional goals? What advice would you give to the prospective student considering studying in an English-medium program? What challenges can they expect and how would you advise them to handle these challenges?
APPENDIX G: SAMPLE OF SELF-REFLECTION WRITING

Dear Prospective student

I am writing this letter with the intention to give you some insight into your decision to attend a tertiary institution where English is the medium used for education.

When I was tasked with this same decision, I considered the benefits of being taught in English. English is the primary language of the world therefore I saw the value in attending an English-medium tertiary institution as it would allow to be employed all over the globe. Seeing that jobs are already scarce I did not want to limit my opportunities even more.

Once I was enrolled into my chosen English-medium program the transition felt natural. This coming from someone who had the luxury of being taught in English from the word go. At home English was the language we used to communicate to each other majority of the time, so I did not really feel the transition because there was not really any for me. Being about a year into my English-medium program I cannot say I have felt a change from that natural feeling of being taught in English that I described above.

However, an area where I have noticed a change is in my cultural identity. I hope you have heard the popular quote about the two wolves fighting. To paraphrase it, which ever wolf you feed will win the fight and that is how I think about my cultural identity regarding being taught in English. I definitely have noticed a shift in my culturally identity. When you are constantly speaking English and are around that culture instead of your own, your own culture naturally tends to be diluted. This English-medium program has definitely had this effect on me. My own mother tongue has started to slip away as well as the traditions that come with my culture. If you value your cultural identity, I would suggest joining a group or doing an activity regularly that keeps you connected to your culture.
Now there are other challenges that come with choosing an English-medium program. Since I have some context about you and your situation, I am able to assist. In terms of understanding the work and concepts you will be at a disadvantage but not for too long. I have recognised a trend by studying at an English tertiary institution for almost a year now. People who have been exposed to English for a prolonged period of time and are not necessarily confident in their ability to speak the language, like yourself, only tend to struggle in that department at the beginning of their studies. Now there is a condition to this, that condition is effort. Those around me who have made a genuine effort to better their English skills with regards to their program have become quite accustom to the English language. They did so by going to their lectures’ consultation hours to speak them to gain more in depth understanding. They also made a conscious effort to develop their vocabulary by engaging in more cognitive English language conversations. So, I urge you to make the same efforts and any other ways you find effective to develop your grasp of the English language should you choose to study in English.

Those are my thoughts; I hope you find them useful and I wish you all the best.

Kind regards

Malusi
## APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF THEME WITH SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme One: Cultural Identity and Social Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mthobeli P01</td>
<td>I identify myself as an African. I do not take much pride in terms of me being Xhosa per se, but I take more pride in terms of being African because my view of Africa is not within our differences in terms of languages and tribes. But my view is a sense of our unified state as a Black nation whether you’re from Zimbabwe, whether you’re a Nigerian, or whether you’re Ghanaian, whether you are from Niger or Chad whatsoever. For me, honestly, because I do not deeply observe the cultures and stuff like that, but the pride, the pride of being Xhosa, having so many struggle heroes coming out from my tribe. That really means a lot. We really do not have any tribal traditions but there is just your foundational African norms and customs that one must observe. And, other what is unique is most Xhosa families are family oriented. You will hardly, especially back in Eastern Cape, you will hardly find a family that is only ran by the mother. So, the father and the mother are always together. Especially the older generation. Those who have moved to Johannesburg, somehow, they have broken away from such traditions. But you will really hardly find where the father is not there. Not that there are no homes that are like that. We do not have any particular customs in the sense of traditions like many Africans would observe because we grew up in a house of Christianity. It [maintaining language, customs, and traditions] is important in a sense that it helps protect the language from being extinct in a generation or two to come if the language is not encouraged to be spoken or learnt. For me, it [maintaining the language, customs, and traditions] is not necessary. It is important to an extent in terms of the language and some of the norms and cultures, but not everything. So, it is important for me to preserve that part of the culture which is the language and some of the traditional values where you grow up, honoring the elders. But those values, to me, are very much important to preserve. Language and those things are very much important for me to preserve because you don’t want to raise a society which lacks the respect and the honor for the elders. The respect for woman as well, it starts there. That’s how we were trained, not to raise a hand to a woman. How you speak to your mother, that’s how you are going to speak to your girlfriend or your woman, to your wife. If you are taught, and those words are instilled while you are still young, that you love your sister, you protect your sister, you respect your</td>
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mother, you respect your dad. You don’t speak in any way in which you want. So, you are not going to be emotionally oppressive to any woman or to anyone. What is important for me, I think, is preserving the language, that we do not get to a point where our children don’t know, they only know English and not their traditional language.

To be an African and a Swazi person. The thing is, I believe in uniqueness. So, the more unique I am, the more special I feel.

It’s [maintain the language, customs, and traditions] very important because I’m growing, and as I’m growing, I have children. If I stop or I cut the chain, it means I’m greedy and that greediness will go to my children. So, I believe that from generation to generation that generation should be generous enough to pass on their information to the next generation. And for that we are having a way to preserve our culture.

In my veins runs the blood of my forefathers. In my aura is a resemblance of my forefathers. So, one way or the other I will have to preserve the culture. So, that’s how important for me to know the language, learn about the language, try to research about how they used their language.

But, at the same time I need to preserve for the next generation, preserve my language, preserve my culture. Not because I’m amongst other people now I should change. No, I’m a Swazi speaking person but I’m incorporating and learning from the others.

Language is the pride of my tribal community thus maintaining it makes us know that our authenticity is kept, the customs makes us who we are and portrays our magnificence keeping or maintaining it rather it will preserve the small group that is left.

And you can travel to as many places as you can. And in that way, you can learn as much as you can grasp because now, I’ve been in some provinces whereby they’ll teach you some few stuff and you take those stuff . . . you come and practice it at home. In that way that information has traveled from that particular place to your home and in that way, you will start cooking differently, you will start speaking differently. You will start dressing differently because you have learned from other places or other cultures.

That [studying in an English-medium school in a Venda dominant area] practically makes me feel foreign if I may put it like that. At first, I felt foreign because now I will have to use English every day because English is our meeting point. I don’t know Venda and most of them they don’t know Swati
then English is our meeting point. Because I am from a Swati background, I am not that fluent in English. I’m used to my language. I’m fluent in my language.

When you’re speaking in your language you feel good, you feel welcome, you feel proud, you know what you are talking about. Now you are speaking a word or a term you find out that does not link to that particular thing you are talking about. You go home and you find out, no, the word that I used it is not linking to the particular concept that I was talking about. But because I wanted to use English any word that feels close to me, I will put it there. So that’s how I feel. I feel like they make me to change who I am. In that way, language is one of the significance of one's culture. If you lose you language, you lose your culture.

It is the language that is pride of the nation. You take away the language you strip them off their pride.

We don’t really have customs and traditions that we usually practice. We are mostly based in the Christian nature of religion. So, most of the things that are traditionally African and, in a way, custom, we usually don’t have.

It [cultural recognition and appreciation] has changed drastically due to the movement of people seeking for greener pastures. Many gave birth to children in White setup if I may say and in that way those children know nothing about culture let alone to recognize or appreciate it. It is true that because of how we are located now it is hard for us to learn pure culture though some other tribes still go an extra mile to teach their offsprings.

Siphosethu P03

Going to the university you see a lot of different people. So, I take my Zulu and make it my first thing. I put it in front of me. Like, I want you to see that this is a Zulu man. I want to show people that I’m a Zulu. I’m proud of being Zulu.

To me, I take my place as an African more than I take my place as a Zulu.

Yeah, Zulu is unique because it is my language, this is my tribe.

My culture, my Zulu language is unique. Not the best language. It is unique on its own not compared to others. Being a Zulu is so special because like most of Zulu people are united. When you say this person is a Zulu you know that this man is hustling it. Either he’s in school, going for further things. Zulus are the hardest working people in South Africa. It makes you to have that dignity, to have that respect. The only tribe with a province named after it.

It [being an African] means we are strong and vibrant. We fought colonialism; we fought our apartheid so that means we are African. I’m so proud to associated with those people that fighted. Those challenges that they were facing, they fought against them. So that means I am an African, you are an
African, we are able to fight the battles that you’re still going to face looking to the battles that were fought by our previous leaders.

Yeah, it [maintaining the language, customs, and traditions] is very important because we can’t abandon our beliefs for church. So, it is important for them to go hand in hand. For an example, sir, if I believe that I have to slaughter a cow at someone’s funeral and the church says “no.” Those thing is going. Not only us about celebration but sometimes it’s about cleansing.

For myself maintaining customs and traditions isn't the first thing on my mind. My parents did not place much importance on it as I was growing up. I place my identity in God, that has value for me. I do how ever find maintaining the language to have some importance. I have lost some fluency in my mother tongue as a result of constantly speaking English. This is something I am trying to rectify with help of audiobooks.

I believe it [cultural recognition and appreciation] has declined. I notice the lack of importance culture has in my peer group but especially in the younger generation. One of the indicators for me is that most of the South African children today don't know in-depth knowledge about their culture. When I was younger my father and uncles made sure I memorized the clan names from both my mother and father's sides of the family.

I believe language is the base that cultural identity is built therefore even if traditions wither away after many years, I believe the individual languages is what will keep cultural identity intact.

I would say they [those who were raised learning in their primary language] are definitely more in touch with their culture than me just from a point of being able to speak their language fluently. I think that stems from their parents speaking it to them at home. For myself, yes, my mom was Xhosa but when she spoke to us 80% of the time it was in English.

So, for myself I would say, I’m actually not sure but are you familiar with this tradition, it’s basically where if you’re 18 you basically go to the mountain and that’s like a rite of passage. But, for me, even that isn’t really and truly important. For me, it’s more of a Christian value basis that my parents raised me with. So, there are chats maybe about customs and maybe they aren’t really important to me, if I can say it like that.

Normally what happens is that people leave the rural area at certain age and most of then move to a different city like Johannesburg or Cape Town as those places are know as the places to make money. They explained to me that while you are in that space you aren’t going to be around your culture and people tend to change and get altered by their environment, but they said as long as you
remember who you are and where you’re from you’ll be able to keep your identity.

To be honest, not too many [customs and traditions] just because of how I was raised. So, my family is Xhosa so both of my parents are. So basically, if I can describe it, both of their upbringings were fairly different. They grew up in a very rural place where they only spoke Xhosa, where I went to a predominantly White school where it was English and Afrikaans.

However, an area where I have noticed a change is in my cultural identity. I hope you have heard the popular quote about the two wolves fighting. To paraphrase it, which ever wolf you feed will win the fight and that is how I think about my cultural identity regarding being taught in English. I definitely have noticed a shift in my culturally identity. When you are constantly speaking English and are around that culture instead of your own, your own culture naturally tends to be diluted. This English-medium program has definitely had this effect on me. My own mother tongue has started to slip away as well as the traditions that come with my culture. If you value your cultural identity, I would suggest joining a group or doing an activity regularly that keeps you connected to your culture.

What’s being portrayed, a lot of people believe that being an African is being of color. Yeah, being of color. But I think being an African is, I think it’s a personality to be honest. Because anybody can be African if you learn the languages, you learn the cultures you can just say I’m an African. Although I might not look African to some people but because I know the languages, I’ve studied the cultures, I understand the cultures, I practice them, then it constitutes as me being an African. Because I understand and that is who I identify as. So, for me, I think it’s a personality for someone.

Cultural identity is you knowing which culture you belong to and not who you are. Not knowing your mother tongue does not mean that you do not know your cultural identity, or you do not belong. We are all different individuals, what makes us one is the culture we belong to.

So, I got to choose which South African culture I wanted to adapt to. With Heritage Day, African Day, I get to pick and choose which culture I want to wear on that specific day. I was never really restricted. I was quite free to express who I am, what I believe in, and all that.

Cause I know that a lot of children that don’t have the option to pick who they are, once they leave and go to school or once they’ve left their parent’s house, they tend to lose their identity and not know where they fit in in life. And just pick whichever one feels like it suits them at the moment. But for me, because I was able to choose, I know that the person I am today is the person that I want
my children to see, I want my grandchildren to see, I want my great-grandchildren to be able to say that because she lived like this it made her who she is today. It gave me an identity and it allowed me to be who I am today.

I was never given a direct way of life other than Christianity because I was brought up in the church. And even with that, there was freedom growing up. My parents never forced me to go to church. They never forced me to speak a certain language. They never forced me to act a certain way.

| Dumisile P06 | I think it’s [maintaining the language, customs, and traditions] very important. These are traits and morals or values that have been passed down from generation to generation. But more than anything I think it’s also about developing them and making sure we don’t lose the essence of our culture, but we improve the morals and values that we’ve learned over the many years.

What it means to me is that South Africa is a very diverse country. It’s a country with many different ethnic groups, many different languages. Some identified as official languages. Others aren’t yet identified as official languages. But more importantly in outlines the beauty of Africa as a whole where the southern part of Africa has so many different languages. The middle of Africa has French and Italian and Portuguese. The top of Africa also has their own languages. Africa is not restricted to one common language but has so many different languages and for me, I think South Africa is a pure reflection of that. |

| Gabadeli P07 | It [being a Zulu] means pride. If anything, absolutely, it’s a pride thing, you know, “I am Zulu.” That’s not something that you want to hide or something you are ashamed of. It’s pride. Pride in the culture, in the people.

This is something that I’ve noticed quite recently that as time goes on different generations experience life in different ways. There are so many new laws and new rights, new technology, every time that are introduced into the world. And with that, the culture kind of evolves with it. Although there is a resistance from the older generation to change with the times. But it is inevitable. Change has to come.

So, if I were to describe myself, firstly my name and my surname. That’s my family. That’s primarily who I am. Then next, my culture. That’s also a big part of who I am. Then next, my religion. That also makes up a big part of who I am and what I believe in, my morals and my values. And then next, my hobbies and interests because those also have a major role in who I am. So, if I were to describe myself to people I’d start in that order. That’s what's most important. |
First and foremost, my family is a very education-oriented family. So, everybody holds education in pretty high esteem. That is one thing that was a very important part of my life growing up. As well as Christianity. I grew up in a Christian family. So, all of those values are things which became very important to my own life from my family.

It’s [Zulu rituals and practices] something that still goes on but from a personal experience because my family grew up primarily Christian, there are certain things in the Zulu culture that we don’t necessarily do. So, yes, those things are still practiced but I myself personally haven’t experienced a lot of them. Especially like the manhood traditions where are going to the mountain with the circumcision and everything. So, yes, those things are still practiced, a lot of the traditions and cultures that were from many, many decades ago are still being practiced today but now there are so many other factors like religion, economic status that also influence how we practice those things, if you do.

It’s [maintaining the language, customs, and traditions] very important to me. I would want my children to also grow up knowing the things that I knew, experience some of the things that I knew because it’s all those experiences that make me who I am. Taking away from that, I think would have made me a different person and I’m quite happy with the person that I am today. And so, I would definitely want to pass that on from generation to generation because I think it’s a very important thing that future generations know where they came from.

Even in the high school it’s a multicultural experience. There’s so many people of so many different cultures but still you get to go back home where you still have your family who are strong and steadfast in the cultural experience, in their traditions. And so, yes you get to step out into a multicultural environment but you also get to reel back in and embrace who you are when you’re at home. But when you’re in a university it’s a different thing. I have neighbors, the people who live to my left and to my right, are completely different people from who I am. And so, when I step out of university, this multicultural environment, I still go back to my own apartment which is still a multicultural environment. And so, the interaction from university and the place that now become my new home doesn’t have a difference. It’s the same type of experience. And so, I think as time goes on you sort of lose some of the things that you had when you were at home. And so, some of the things that were enforced.

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I wish I was Zulu. I know the language more than I know my own home language. And the customs that they practice, and, and, and.

I am not a very cultural person so it’s not something that I put into my head.
It is very important to know the customs and basic traditions of who you are as it is easy to identify people of your kind. I myself know a few things as I was taken to a model c school where I learnt Afrikaans and English throughout from preschool and that took away the sense of belonging within my culture.

I think it’s important for one person to always remember where they come from. I think English is the medium of communication. I mean, imagine if I didn’t know English, how would we be communicating now. But me knowing English doesn’t mean that I should ever forget where I come from and embrace my language. And it’s very important.

Letago P09

I’ve never really thought of myself as Sepedi. I don’t identify myself with culture as much as I do with race. So, I’ve always just seen myself as a young Black woman. I’ve never really considered myself as a young Pedi person because I don’t really identify that well with culture.

I think that language and culture is used to divide people when instead it is supposed to unite us. The different classifications of who belongs to what language or tribe is creating a false perception that we are different when in fact we are all the same. We are all Black South Africans at the end of the day, we might speak differently and dress differently, but our rules and principles are all interlinked. Most of all South African customs from all the indigenous tribal groups are similar if not the same. But trying to categorise ourselves in groups is what is leading to things such as tribalism. As much as we are different, we are also the same.

I have come to think of English as my home language since my family and I speak it more frequently than any other language even whilst at home. I was also taught in English as a first language through my childhood and overall education. English is the language I associate with the most however, I consider Sepedi my cultural language, it is the language of my people and the one I used to identify myself with, but it is not my primary language for communication.

We’re technically all the same but have small little aspects that make us all different. One of them obviously being the language. So, we all speak different. I think what I like about Sepedi is subdivision like languages in a way. It’s like in English, we see it as a dialect. So, certain areas speak differently but it’s all under Sepedi.

The language is very important. Customs not so much. Like I mentioned before, I’m very proud of my language. I am biased but I think it’s one of the best languages in South Africa. So, because of that I would really like to keep language. Because one thing I’ve realized is, with the younger generation such as my cousins and nephews is, they only speak English and they no longer speak any sort of African language. They find it difficult to understand. And slowly
becoming a habit to raise their kids with this whole “English comes first” ahead of their cultural language. And I don’t like it because we need to upkeep our culture. It’s something that’s a part of who we are.

Because we are influenced by religion, we don’t do other customs associated with ancestors and such things. So, we don’t participate in those because of religion is against, Christianity for us. So, we don’t follow a lot of traditions that are in the culture.

Like, when I was young, I moved to a city that spoke a different language. So, I had to adapt as quick as possible as a little kid in preschool, to learn to live with the people around me. So, that’s a way that shows you how to respect others. It’s a useful tool for a Christian to have growing up.

Being a third-world country in one way has been a good thing. It puts us in a good place because we still have villages, townships, and things that strictly hold traditions very strongly, especially our villages. So, I believe as we turn into a first world country it will be very hard to keep our traditions. The whole country is changed.

It is very important for me that my customs and traditions are maintained. Having been born after the apartheid era, I was afforded the opportunity to study in English and Afrikaans medium schools because segregation had been abolished, that provided me with access to the higher standards of Education in the country, which is only in these schools, however with that, because my parents wanted to provide me with the best schooling system unfortunately that meant that I’d missed out on being able to read and write in my own tribal language. The same is said for the younger generation as well, African people are now financially stable enough to afford sending their children to adequate schools in South Africa however those schools only cater to White students’ languages, there are very few schools who have adopted African languages into their curriculum that are on the same standards as English and Afrikaans medium schools. Because of this the younger generation is only literate in English or Afrikaans.

Very recently, to help incorporate their children into school Black parents have begun communicating with them in English so many young Black children in South Africa cannot or barely understand their tribal language. Slowly we are losing our customs and culture, this is also causing a divide between Black people from English schools and Black people from lower models’ schools who still teach in tribal languages. The low model school students view the English medium school students as snobby or unwilling to speak and communicate with them because they think that their superior and vice versa the English medium school feel that lower model school students are undisciplined and unwilling to learn or try to understand them. This also extends to our customs and traditions.
because most English medium students don’t know or understand the importance of their culture because they are not taught what each “ritual” or event represents so they shun their own culture because their taught in English schools that also don’t understand the importance of each act and view it as outdated or redundant and these ideals are passed on to the Black children in these schools.

What I have witnessed is that on every Heritage Day (24 September) that children and people raised in predominantly Black communities and celebrate more and seem more proud of their culture than Black people and children raised in English communities and this all stems from the lack of knowledge of our own cultures, we cannot hold pride and decorate ourselves in our tribal colours and patterns when we do not understand the importance and meaning behind the culture. Yes, all Black people I’m SA celebrate their heritage but only a few truly know why they are celebrating and why it is something to be proud of.

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To be an African is, I’ve been asking myself in such ways about that the last five-six years through all the things that I’ve seen happening around us and seeing my situation. What is it to be an African is to know yourself as an African since our history has rarely been written in books but to know yourself as a person, to know yourself your background as your family. So, we’ve got something called clan names in South Africa. Your surname is imparted to your clan name. So, with the surname part I believe if you know the history behind it you will know yourself as a person. Basically, it’s just to know your history and to know what makes you a Black person in Africa.

Being a Northern Sotho is, firstly, it means to be proud of who I am, what I am, my traditions as a certain language bearer culture in the most diverse country that we live in.

So, my primary years I lived with my grandmother for a few years. So, I didn’t really speak Northern Sotho. And then when I moved to the city around about seven years old, I moved to preschool there, so I was with, according to the structure there. So, I was put in from a young age until now to learn English. So, I really lost touch with my Northern Sotho. I can’t write it, writing in the language. So, I believe that the only choice that I had, it’s not a choice that I would change at the moment because it would be very hard to change back to my normal language. But I’ve only learned in the language in primary, high school, and all so it comes easiest.

Well, it’s [maintaining the language, customs, and traditions] very important because the time that we live right now a lot of our languages are disappearing and when our languages disappear and the history of it, we disappear as a person. So, in the sense of identity seeking. So, like I also have myself, while I
knew a lot about my culture, I honored it, I got to a certain area and started asking myself who am I as a person. Because I find myself in a mostly European sense of way, knowing English, knowing about European things, going through high school, and learning about Hitler, learning about all those disasters, learning about the Russian revolution, learning about the French Renaissance, and not knowing a simple fact about how it was in South Africa before the English or the Dutch arrived onto our shores. And that gives you a sense of not belonging in the world. While every other country keeps their cultures very close, we as South Africans are staying away from our cultures. So, instead of embracing them the way we ought it’s very important for us to reevaluate that and educate our kids and young people about our past.

My parents’ side is mostly traditional but my parents themselves are mostly modern. So, we don’t really participate in the traditional side, but I’ve seen that as I’ve grown up at my grandparents’ house. There’s traditional ways when you sort of like the ancestral way of talking to ancestors and celebrating them. And the route to manhood, there’s certain things that we have to do as men in our culture. Specifically, certain places that we go, certain people that we speak to about manhood. So, those are the few traditional things that I have been viewed to do but my parents allowed me to do because mostly we are a Christian modern family, so we don’t really participate in a lot of the traditions.

I put, not really a boundary, but if you look in a Christian manner, Christianity’s main point is to know Jesus Christ as your savior and to not worship false idols. So, I take mostly values from my culture and historical things. So, that makes me as the person I am today. But you have to mix it one way or another with your Christian faith. Everything that can go together has to mix. Everything that clashes we have to make sure what is right. Because at the end of the day, you as a human being yourself, you are the one that defines the Christianity that you live.
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APPENDIX J: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH BRACKETING

Participant 02: “Mvuseselo”

Interviewer: Arthur Kent Cason

6/23/2020 and 7/16/2020

Interviewer: What are some of your family’s customs or traditions that are important to you?

Participant 02: We don’t really have customs and traditions that we usually practice. We are mostly based in the Christian nature of religion. So, most of the things that are traditionally African and in a way custom, we usually don’t have.

I: What kinds of things are important to you in connection to your family?

[New session. Skype connection issues. Switched to Zoom.]

P02: In connection to my family, we pray together and we hold some social gathering where we come together and we make a special prayer as a family, not those individual prayers that we make every day, but we come together.

I: What is your role within the family?

P02: I’m a first born. I only have one sibling.

I: What makes the Swazi culture unique from other African tribes?

P02: The Swazi culture is having a different perspective when it comes to other cultures. It has its own type of code in terms of dressing. It incorporates the African kind of celebrating ancestral and spirituality. The spirituality of the Swazi people is much more different because they believe in inyangas [An inyanga is a traditional healer as opposed to a sangoma who is a diviner] and believe in what you call Mvelamqandi [Swazi name for God: “he who was in the beginning,” inner light of creation] which you can call it the spiritual entity whom you cannot see. Some they call it Mlendengamunye [Means messenger of Mvelamqandi]. So, in that way the Swati people
will tell you that through our forefathers we are able to visit our Mvelamqandi, or our god or our Mlendengamunye. Those are the two things. In Swaziland, I’ve never been there, but I’ve learned from that, they tell me that it is something that is normal to them to be polygamous [Polygamy is a common practice across South African tribal traditions, but it creates a dilemma within the church]. So, we are such a people it’s not for us to be polygamous. So, those are the few uniqueness that we have.

I: Why did you choose to study in English?

P02: It was the only thing available. We did not have the time to choose from any other languages, so we did all our subjects in English.

I: What was your field of study?

P02: Developmental Studies.

I: And what does that prepare you for?

P02: It prepares me to work with the community. We work with the municipalities, local people. We develop in many aspects. We deal with the elderly and we deal with the vulnerable, your projects, your old age homes. That’s basically what Developmental Studies prepares you to do.

I: What does it mean to you to be an African?

P02: To be an African, to me, it means it’s my pride and it shows because I so believe that Africa is one of the chosen nations among the nations; one of the richest. That’s the pride of being an African. Number one, I can be able to say in Africa we have the richest land. That is why perhaps some people from the West, some people from the East, they will come up to experience what Africa is or what Africa is made of. So, for me to be an African it shows that I am in one of the chosen nations of God. I feel that being an African is a special thing for one to be an African. You’re one of the chosen amongst all of the nations that are there. Not disputing the fact that all
the nations are chosen but I feel that Africa is one of the special because I feel that even if you have three cows, there’s one special cow amongst them.

I: South Africa is constitutionally multicultural and multilingual. What does that mean to you?
P02: I feel one of the things that make it a rainbow nation, it allows us to come out of our comfort zone. Or, let me say it allows me to come out of my comfort zone because I’m able to connect or interconnect with people who speak Afrikaans, people who speak Venda, people who speak Pedi; I’m half Swati [Swati is a colloquial way of saying Swazi, referring to the language siSwati], half Pedi [also called Bapedi or Northern Sotho] so I’m able to incorporate that. And I’m able to respect other people’s cultures. I’m able to respect other people’s language. Some of the things in my language they may be an insult in somebody else’s languages. But because I’m learning, and South Africa gives me the chance of learning I’m not amazed if a certain word becomes a certain word in another language that is an insult to others [In my experience I’ve seen words travel from Kenya to South Africa with very little change between languages]. I’m learning; I’m always able to respect and understand where that particular person is coming from. I think that gives me a chance to learn, to grow.

I: What does it mean to be a Swazi?
P02: For me, especially here, especially in South Africa, we don’t face much of discrimination especially because I’m here in Mpumalanga. There are a lot of Swazi people in Mpumalanga [Mpumalanga is the South African province bordering to the north of Eswatini]. So, I feel like I’m at home. I really haven’t faced a situation whereby I will have to rate myself. To be a Swazi, for me, now as I’m here I feel home, I feel welcome. Even with the people around, the Venda speaking people, the Zulu speaking people around me, and the Ndebele speaking around me, we
are brothers and sisters. We are close. To be a Swazi, it just means I am unique, I’m different from them but at the same time we are equal because we are in the same land.

I: How closely do you identify, how important is it to you to be an African and a Swazi?

P02: To be an African and a Swazi person. The thing is, I believe in uniqueness. So, the more unique I am, the more special I feel. So, if I’m an African and a Swazi speaking African I take pride in being a Swazi speaking African. I am a musician. When I go to shows, I am a public speaker. When I go to shows or when I go to radio, like go to minister somewhere outside my province I find people speaking other languages. But I make sure that I put it across that I am a Swazi speaking person and I take pride in that. But they can respect, honor, and also love the fact that I am a Swazi African person. So, I haven’t been outside the country. I won’t speak much about that but around South Africa, the few provinces I’ve been I have been able to say I’m a Swazi speaking person and I take pride in that. I want to learn from you, and you can be able to learn from me. Because we find that culture is growing. The more it grows, the more you need to learn it from the outside. That’s how important Swazi is to me.

I: Is your music in siSwati?

P02: No, my music is currently in English, but I have written, the ones that I have outside to the people, it’s in Tsonga and English. So, I have written some verse in siSwati. The reason why I have written in English is because I wanted to reach as much audience as I could that are outside South Africa. And at the same time, I want to reach my people. That is why I am writing stuff in siSwati.

I: What was it like growing up in a Swazi household?

P02: We believe in herbs as Swati people. I won’t speak deeply of other cultures, but for us we believe in herbs. So, that may be the difference from other cultures. We believe in herbs. We
know about something called *imphepho* [mphepho is the ritual burning of imphepho is believed to invoke the ancestors and to drive away malicious spirits which are regarded as common causes of illness in African traditional medicine; the herb is shown to be effective as a wound dressing or boiled and taken as a tea for several ailments]. I don’t know if you have heard of such a word. It’s there even in Zulu. Yes, we believe in herbs. So, when you are in a Swazi home you will learn about herbs. You will learn how they grow or what is their importance. Even if you cannot learn about all of them but the few but the knowledge that the parents and grandparents have, they will pass it on to you.

I: How important is it to you to maintain the language, customs, and traditions of your parents and those who came before them?

P02: It’s very important because I’m growing, and as I’m growing, I have children. If I stop or I cut the chain, it means I’m greedy and that greediness will go to my children. So, I believe that from generation to generation that generation should be generous enough to pass on their information to the next generation. And for that we are having a way to preserve our culture. If I change myself to be something else, it means I’ve lost my culture or I’ve lost myself as a person. In my veins runs the blood of my forefathers. In my aura is a resemblance of my forefathers. So, one way or the other I will have to preserve the culture. So, that’s how important for me to know the language, learn about the language, try to research about how they used their language. When I relocate from here, I study Venda for about, I think a couple of years. Now I have learned to live amongst the Venda people. But, at the same time I need to preserve for the next generation, preserve my language, preserve my culture. Not because I’m amongst other people now I should change. No, I’m a Swazi speaking person but I’m incorporating and learning from the others.
I: How do you think your experience of cultural identity is different from your parents or your ancestors?

P02: It’s very different because now we live in a world of social media. We live in a world of traveling. Traveling back then, if I make my research well or if my mind serves me well, you would take a longer time to travel from your place, which is America to South Africa. You would take a longer time because you would have to use a boat or a ship. That takes couple of months. But now you can use the flight and that would take approximately 17 or 18 hours. It’s a shorter time. And you can travel to as many places as you can. And in that way you can learn as much as you can grasp because now I’ve been in some provinces whereby they’ll teach you some few stuff and you take those stuff, you come and practice it at home. In that way that information has traveled from that particular place to your home and in that way, you will start cooking differently, you will start speaking differently. You will start dressing differently because you have learned from other places or other cultures. So practically, that’s the difference. That’s the most different thing that we are traveling, we know about social media, and practically that is the thing that makes us to have a different perspective. And our culture is growing very fast. Some of the things we cannot be able to practice there. Reason being, we don’t have space anymore. Usually, if Black people will go to the field and try to worship some, to learn about animals, but you will learn about them as you see them live. They will tell you how this animal reacts and whatsoever but now we don’t have that. The animals are taken to the zoo. Some of them are taken to the national park so you don’t have access to them [Most of the large or predatory animals are contained in national parks. I have been to Kruger National Park many times]. What do you do? You Google. And Google is faster and quicker, and at the same time, you have much more information than your forefathers.
I: How would you describe yourself to someone outside your national or tribal community?

P02: I would just say, I’m an African, and what makes me different from others is that I believe in communality, if I may put it like that. So, I believe in the love of the neighbor before yourself. So, what it means to me, or how do I describe myself to that person, I will say perhaps in Germany or in Japan you believe in individuality but living as an African I believe in a communal kind of living. So, in that way I believe in the love of people, in them coming to my house giving them food. That makes me a true African. A true African is a person that is communal, able to extend a helping hand, regardless of the kind of a person you are meeting, you are able to extend a helping hand. And by so doing it means that you are practicing Africanism. Practically, that is how I would describe it.

I: How would you describe your learning experience with respect to your cultural identity?

P02: One way or the other it affects me because some of the words, they are stronger in Swati and weaker in English or stronger in English and weaker in Swati [English is a more robust language. When someone is speaking in a tribal language it is common to hear English words interspersed]. In that way it will take me a longer time to understand perhaps some of the concepts because they are not taught in my language. With all due respect some of the things that they will say, or they will put, they are perhaps French concepts. And in that way, they take French concepts, put it in English perhaps they feel lighter but in Swati they are very heavy cause I’ve never heard such an explanation. So, in that way I will have to translate from English to Swati so that I can be able to understand. And that consumes a lot of my time. By the time I would have covered a chapter now I will have to translate some of the concepts, some of the sentences, even some of the words so that I can understand them better. If perhaps I was doing in my language it could have been better because it’s close to me. Some of the things that are said I
just write, and I understand them then even my marks will go up because I understand better. So, practically that’s the biggest challenge. If you are taught in other languages, or in English, let me put it like that, and you are a Swazi speaking person you are not living in an area whereby you can go to the next door and say, “I don’t understand this. Have you ever met such a concept?” But you are far from home. That means you are on your own. The phone is perhaps the only option. If you have no data or no airtime to call, then one way or the other you will struggle until you find a solution. And by the way, by the time you find a solution, it might be too late. Or you might explain it somehow. I think that is the biggest challenge that you have in university, an English-medium university.

I: With respect to how school affected you as a person, you’re in an English-medium school in a predominantly Venda area. How does that make you feel about yourself?
P02: That practically makes me feel foreign if I may put it like that. At first, I felt foreign because now I will have to use English every day because English is our meeting point. I don’t know Venda and most of them they don’t know Swati then English is our meeting point. Because I am from a Swati background, I am not that fluent in English. I’m used to my language. I’m fluent in my language. I’m fluent in other languages that are close to me but I’m not that fluent in English. Then I will have to learn more ways. I had to buy a dictionary so I can be able to know more ways. And by the way, because I’m from a Swati background and I’m a public speaker now, practically speaking, when you go to other places it’s not the same when you’re speaking in your language. When you’re speaking in your language you feel good, you feel welcome, you feel proud, you know what you are talking about. Now you are speaking a word or a term you find out that does not link to that particular thing you are talking about. You go home and you find out, no, the word that I used it is not linking to the particular concept that I was
talking about. But because I wanted to use English any word that feels close to me, I will put it there. So, one way or the other, those are the most particular challenges I would say. Because when you are there you will have to learn Venda, you will have to learn English at the same time, simultaneously. Because the person will speak in English, they will answer in Venda and you will have to make sure that you understand that Venda. You will be able to answer again in English. So, one way or the other, you feel foreign and perhaps you feel lost. But as time goes on, if you are a sociable person, as time goes on you learn English, you learn new words, you learn Venda, even if you just learn the basics. I started preaching at schools so that I can be able to learn. Because if I’m with my friends here they don’t teach me much of the things. We talk about schoolwork. So, I started preaching in local high schools [Evangelism is allowed and often encouraged in rural schools. I have done so many times]. There, the children they are all fluent in English, they are fluent in Venda. So, one way or the other we have a meeting point. Nobody will laugh at anyone for not speaking English. So, I preach in my English and they are able to understand and at the same time I am learning the Venda. So, one way or the other I incorporated all these things and learned along the way. I’m still learning though.

I: How would you characterize the university’s understanding of your culture?

P02: They do. We have doctors of language there, they’re from Mpumalanga. They work that side. We have mostly doctors of language that specialize in Swati, they work at the university so that makes us more welcome. And of course, we have people in the high corridors that are part of us, so we feel at least one way or the other we are gradually having more Swati people frequenting that university because of the Swati people that are in the high corridors.

I: What support or strategies did you use to maintain your connection to your African and tribal culture?
P02: We would want to just know who are the people around here who are from where we come from. That’s basically how we would prevail our culture and our Africanism because we you, a few friends who knows how it feels to be a Swazi I think you feel at least staying there. I learned from a Zimbabwean concept. Zimbabweans, they always do like this, when they are in a particular foreign space, even if they live 50 or 60 miles away from each other, they will call each other ‘brother.’ The reason being, they don’t want you to know that they are from very far places or very far apart places. Just because they speak a similar language, it makes them brothers. I adopted such a strategy. We don’t know each other, but because we are in this space and we speak the similar language we are brothers.

I: Did you learn in English the entire time growing up or did you learn in siSwati or another tribal language in primary school?

P02: In my primary school we have, if I may put it like this, they teach us in English, yes, but most of the time they speak in Swati for us to be able to comprehend. So, it’s an English-medium school but the teachers, because they are Swati speaking, they speak in Swati. They sometimes analyze or explain a concept Swati so you can be able to understand because they are not suppressed to speak in English all the time. It will help us understand more because they would explain the English concept in Swati. So, it’s an English-medium school but also the teachers will speak Swati. They will explain to us just like that. The only school I was in that was a English-medium school and they do not allow us to speak any other language until outside the gate, it was when I was doing my grade 12. When I was doing grade 12, I was in another school. Then that school, you enter the gate, you speak English regardless of your culture, regardless of your language, you speak in English. But there are Swati speaking people there, they have Tswana speaking people, Ndebele speaking people so that made us to have a melting point. That
meeting point was English. So, we spoke English until outside the gate. But we would cheat because are more. We would cheat if the teacher does not see us or the principal does not see us we speak in our language.

I: How did it make you feel when you changed over from learning in your primary language to learning in English?

P02: It did not make me feel somehow. By the way, as I alluded, I am a public speaker, I always wanted to speak English fluently so that I can be able to reach as much people as I can. So, from my young age I wanted to be a lecturer and when I started reciting about a lecturer, particularly a teacher but mostly they have to know how to speak English most of the time because they are going to teach in English where they are teaching. So, one way or the other that transition did not affect me at all. It’s just that I had to go an extra mile because now I’ll have to use words to shorten my speech. So, one way or the other I would not have much of a problem because I always wanted to explore. That is why the languages, I am learning Tsonga, I’m learning Pedi, I’m learning isiVenda [The language is properly called Tshivenda], I’m learning Ndebele, I’m learning Xhosa, even all the South African languages. I’m still learning them because I want to be that kind of a versatile kind of a person.

I: How did your learning experience affect significant others in your life?

P02: The truth is because now I am used to speaking in English, I’m having difficulty communicating with my grandparents. Because in my Swati sentence I will put an English word and that English word is unknown to them [this is common among younger Africans]. Then that sentence does not make sense anymore. So, practically that is the difficulty of how it affected them. Most of the time I came back, and I’m used to speaking English but I was preaching in a primary school. So, when I go there, I would be using a lot of English words that makes my
sermons words even much more weaker because now the children they don’t know these kind of words I’m used to in the university world or with my peers. So, one way or the other, communicating with the people on the ground its now more difficult because I’m losing my language. I believe when I’m using English more the time to learn some new Swati words is not there. I’m busy learning more English words than Swati words. In that I will come back home, speak in an English sentence, then it will not make sense to them. Then I will have to come back and translate the statement twice. So, one way or the other that is the way it affects my surroundings.

I: Describe the role of your family during your learning experience.

P02: They were so supportive. They were so supportive. My uncle, my mom, my grandmom, they are academics, so they are helpful. It is easy for them to say you are on the right track and supportive in a way that, the dictionary I was talking about earlier, my mom bought it for me. I’m trying to learn how can we quicken the process. I suggested a dictionary. She bought one for me. In that way it showed support. If I’m calling and I say, no, I don’t understand such a concept, they are able to say, no, let’s research about it. We will give you a reply. We are able to call each other again. They are able to give me an answer. In that way I was able to peruse through this difficult time.

I: Describe the role of your university peers during your learning experience.

P02: My peers, I only had two Venda speaking friends and a few Pedi speaking friends, so most of them, they were Swati speaking. We came as a group. So, one way or the other, I did not know them from home but when we met there we became a group that is taking care of on another. So, one way or the other as I was learning they were also learning. So, I did not feel alone in this state. So, they’re goal was helping each other learn and helping each other explore
the new world, or the new setting that we are in. So, one way or the other we assisted each other in exploring the new setting. Sometimes we would laugh at each other when we speak certain words that are not there in our language. We would say hey this one is very difficult. One way or the other we would exchange knowledge because of the places we come from. Particularly, we were helping each other grow as we exploring the new setting.

I: Did you form study groups?

P02: We had study groups, but those study groups were not based on culture or religion or language. They were chosen randomly in the class. So, in that particular group you will study or prepare for an exam or prepare for an assignment. That particularly means you will have one Swati speaking person, one Tsonga speaking person, one Venda speaking person or another Ndebele speaking person or Xhosa speaking person, different people, different cultures, different languages. We meet there and we speak in English. One way or the other that particular person wants to put a certain statement across, but they cannot express themselves in English. They want to express themselves in perhaps Ndebele and we all don’t understand. So, that made us to go an extra mile. It made it complicated, but I think it was a way of stretching us. We are more stretched because now you are forced to learn because you have to accomplish the work in front of you. You are forced to learn. You are forced to understand. You are forced to comply. Some of the time you don’t need to understand, you just comply and show that you hear that person, and you don’t judge where they’re coming from. You just make sure that you put your differences aside and make sure that you finish the work at hand.

I: Please understand that however you answer this next question will not offend me in any way. I want you to be as honest as you can [Signs of respect can sometimes prevent Africans from
speaking their minds whether it’s because of age or race]. How do you feel about English-speaking cultures?

P02: I don’t feel any hard feelings about them being perhaps speaking English at home and being able to travel the world and so speaking English. It means they did not have any challenge. When you come from perhaps England or America, you speak English every day. At the same time when you come to South Africa and you find a Swati speaking person, the Swati speaking person has to change from Swati and speak English. In that way I will say I feel a little bit, I don’t know what word to use, but I little bit withdrawn. I feel a little bit far because why is that I have to change from mine to theirs. Why don’t they change from theirs to mine? Why should English be the medium? Why didn’t they choose any other language? So, one way or the other those were the questions. Why English? Out of all the millions of languages that are there. Some languages are small, some languages are big. Why does English have to be the main language, or the main medium of the whole world? Even if we go to the Dutch speaking people one way or the other, they will have to learn English because English it’s everywhere. So that’s how I feel. I feel like they make me to change who I am. In that way, language is one of the significance of one’s culture. If you lose you language, you lose your culture.

[New session. Participant ran out of data.]

I: Let me just recap because I didn’t save that last little bit the last time we attempted. The last question I asked you was “tell me about people who are important or influential in your life.” You mentioned your mother and someone who was a mentor to you, and I was hoping you would elaborate on that. Why is it that these individuals are influential in your life?

P02: My mother is one of the people I am open to so one way to the other I can relate to her mistakes in life. She’s very close but I’m able to see her failures and also her success. She’s an
academic so one way or the other I can be able to follow. So, that basically why I choose her.

Should you come as far away as America or wherever it’s very hard to see their failures or where their mistakes are. So, one way or the other you see that they are success and their glory but one way or the other you don’t see their baggage. So, that is one reason why I choose my mother.

The reason I choose my mentor. As a mentor first you got to look at things, the things you want to achieve in life and find whatsoever at least they achieve one or two of the things you want to achieve in life. Try to find out how they did it. How could they at least support the dream that you have of perhaps becoming something like them. Whether it’s a matter of theology, the calculus, he’s a doctor by profession, a medical doctor, an optometrist. I don’t want that part of his life but the lecturing part, or his way of addressing issues as a public speaker, I love those things. So, being close to him makes feel motivation. So, one way or the other, these are the two most people that I look up to. These are the two most influential people in my life, my academic life, my speaking life, my music life. The motivation. I can go to them and say, no, things are [unintelligible] and see if you can fix those things. Maybe I can pick a role model that just by name, but I cannot be able to follow where I’m supposed to fix or I’m supposed to take glory or to take truth. One way or the other these people won’t be there to celebrate with me. So, these are the reasons why I choose them.

I: What is more important to you, how others value you, or how you value yourself?

P02: How I value myself is very important to me. Self-confidence is the most key thing for somebody to survive. One way or the other, if you want to prosper in life you have to be self-confident. How people view me, one way or the other there is enough haters I cannot, they can’t to view me as a loser but nevertheless they speak something else. But whenever I look in the mirror, I say, Mvuseselo [pseudonym for anonymity], you are good, you can do it, you can make
it. One way or the other, I know that whatever I think that are external won’t change me. So, I view myself, I put myself in a big way so that I can be able to push myself. When people come with their view, one way or the other, some of them can be good, some of them can be bad but because I already have my own self-confidence that keeps me motivated.

I: How does that affect your academics?

P02: My belief, as I said, that if I get myself better or stronger, one way or the other it will show in the way I am developing, especially my academics. So, if I lack confidence every time, I’m doing something, or every time I’m writing an assignment, one way or the other they can be able to put something bad. They can be able to put a grading stuff into my life. One way or the other I will say, because people say this thing is very difficult, but I say look I want to try it while even more than once. If you can make it difficult, a challenge, I go outside, I look. Because I am so confident, I can be able to approach the challenge, approach other people, tutors and make sure that I push myself there. But because I heard people saying this module is difficult one way or the other, I can sit down and say, no, this thing is difficult and while I am seated, one way or the other, I will say and that failing is not for them. It comes back to me. So that’s how it affects my academics.

I: How important to you is learning in English?

P02: It is important because the whole world I believe, we meet at the point which is English. English is the meeting point for each and every language. So, if I’m learning in English I’m in a position to communicate with other people. So, with more information in English that means that I can be able to stand and debate of any nature, any color, any tribe because we are debating in English. So, I think that is the most significant thing of learning in English.
I: How would you view your learning experience with respect to how you view your ability to succeed?

P02: I’m an average student, if I may put it like that, but I never saw myself failing in life. So, if I approach an assignment, I won’t lie to you, at first, I could not see the value because I thought that the other course is very simple. Being a musician is very simple. I hit some few notes and I get money. But now, because I am in a position whereby I need to access that information and be able to produce that information or that product for me to succeed it was a little bit challenging because I wanted an easy out. I failed some assignments. Okay, I’m very good in writing groups so I would passing the assignment, but I failed the test, I’m used to working in groups and all that. And one way or the other I started changing the attitude. I saw myself passing even if studied a little while. So, that motivated me to go to the library alone. Because somewhere somehow I’m used to working in groups and wait for somebody else to say are we going to the library. If any others went to the library that would be the time I want to go to the library. But now, I’m a reader, I studied writing because I changed the attitude. Nobody told me to, but I saw that this situation wouldn’t take me anywhere. Then I changed that myself. I look at myself in the mirror and said if you sit here fail this degree, fail the next degree and at the end of the day you will be a failure. So, for you to be a person who is a role model to others you’ll have to change yourself. One thing that made me to change, I am a trained by use. It’s from a statement that I hear once quoted in the Bible. Because he encouraged himself not to partake in the food of the king [Daniel 1:8-16]. So, those words are my motivation to say he needed not anyone else to convince himself to not partake into the party and into the drinks of the king. Even said so, no, from today I don’t partake and that made him to be unique. So, I wanted to be unique. I changed my attitude and that attitude made me to start passing my tests. So, basically that’s how it is.
I: Everybody goes through times of discouragement. How do you deal with discouragement?

P02: As I said, I did not believe that only academics can be a way to success. One way or the other I still don’t believe even now. I believe in talent mixed with academics mixed with business. So, one way or the other that is what I believe. With that given, it made me to say if life goes on saying you cannot do it what about the 10 people that have made it. I can be part of the 10 even if one person did not do it. Let me give you an example. If one couple is having a failed marriage it does not mean that you should not get married just because somebody’s having a failed marriage. So those are the things that I started saying no, but because the 10 people who will have made it in life. Some others they’ve not succeeded under one way, but they still succeeded. Success is success. It is not measured by the three-year degree you have done it in four years or three-year degree you have done it in five years. Some others have done a three-year degree in three years and they are still not working. Some of them they don’t even have houses, no cars, nothing to show for their record time. But others are five years in their degree and made it in life. They have good jobs and all that. So, one way or the other, those were the things that’s what I look to. If I find discouragement in my way to success let me look at the people that are successful. They’ve made it. So, this is how I deal with discouragement, I look at the green light, I focus on the green light.

I: What challenges, if any, did you experience with respect to English-medium instruction at the university?

P02: The only thing that I think I’m having problem with is the language barrier. It is true that some statements are very strong in English and very weak in my language. So those are the things that perhaps are challenging because I want to translate first for me to conceptualize. So, one way or the other, that is the challenge. If I don’t understand the concept in English, how
much more in my own language. I would have a problem in English, that I don’t understand these concepts, but I will have to first translate it, and those translations are not easy because some words are not even there in my language. I have to ask people what does this word mean and by that time I could have been far. So that is the main challenge that I think I’m having.

I: So, how did you address those challenges?

P02: As I said before in my explanation, I would ask for help, I would request for help from other people who have done this degree and I would request for help from other experts in my language because I believe at least knowledge that is above me. Those are the criterias I’m using to at least match these two languages.

I: Are there support strategies available to you at the university?

P02: Yes, like the library. There are study groups, study groups you create them on your own. Some groups they form for you to write assignments, you can also make them study groups. So, if you can have two study groups you are likely to understand more better. Study centers are there. We call it 24 hours because they are always open unlike the library. The library closes around 9:00, around 10:00. But we have 24 hours where you go and study. We have tutors who, I only had one module that did not have a tutor. I still don’t understand why, but all the other modules they are having two or three tutors. Some were doing their final year. Some were their intern, they were interns in the school. Some they were lecturers they were experts. The lecturers were doing extra classes.

I: What feelings were generated by your experience of learning in English?

P02: It’s true that you will want to hate the Whites who created this medium of instruction. One way or the other you feel that these people were creating education to sideline other languages. Yeah, I would feel like that. So, if you find an illiterate Swati speaking person, give him an
English written paper you are creating two kinds of burdens. The burden of him being illiterate and the burden of him learning in a foreign language. At least if you can ease this burden of learning in a foreign language you can address the issue of illiteracy. Because that person is speaking Shona each and every day, if you put a Swati book in front of him, it’s easy to relate. But that person is illiterate and you are putting a burden of an English written book in front of him it means that you have intention to sideline that particular person. So, education is there for you. Education is there for those who are very close to English. You have to understand that communication has to have one language that at least can cover not all but most of us. We have to choose and the fact that somebody was able to choose English for all of us, I don’t know perhaps. So, some of an ambiguity of feelings there. Nevertheless, I feel better because I can be able to communicate with an Afrikaner, English speaking person, a French, a Portuguese or so and so. I have friends who are Shona speaking. I am an African. That man is an African, but we cannot hear each other and English became neutral for us. And one way or the other that person is able to explain to me what that particular word means in English. Because if he were to explain that word in Shona it will cause a lot of confusion.

I: What else related to your learning experience you would like to add?

P02: I think you have covered it all but basically, I would like to say learning is a disadvantage when we had nothing but information. But now of course because we have information we get to understand that learning in English is not for us to be sidelined, it’s not for us to be far from education.
**APPENDIX K: CONTACT LOG**

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