

EXPLORING LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION NIGERIAN
GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN: EDUCATIONAL
BACKGROUND, TRANSITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS, AND ACCESS TO LEARNING
SERVICES

A Thesis Submitted to
the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education
in the Department of Educational Administration
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Canada

By

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June 2019

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Abstract

This thesis suggested that success in a host institution's work with international graduate students requires that university learning services intersect well with students' peculiarities and needs. Numerous researchers have attempted to determine the weighty issues international students face (Andrade, 2006; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Hanassab, 2006; Leary, Hotchkiss & Robb, 2016; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010). However, most have not considered the regional educational distinctions, particular institutional contexts, or students' backgrounds from previous learning orientations or countries of origin. There has been limited work to solicit feedback and recommendations from students concerning how their most significant problems might have been solved in a manner to have adequately addressed the challenges they have faced. There is the assumption that institutional awareness of the needs of students enhances the design of befitting programs and services (Strange, 2010) and thus increase the universities' capacities to retain international students through to the successful completion of their studies (Leary et al., 2016).

Thus, this research investigated the learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) and examined how learning services were perceived to match their needs. By qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups with Nigerian students and student service personnel, the study established knowledge of the educational identity, transitions, and adjustment needs, and challenges of these students and those directly assigned to support them. The study affirmed the awareness of and access to the University's learning services and assessed how these services matched the needs of these students.

The researcher analyzed the findings of this study using theoretical frameworks in students' success, students' persistence, and principles and strategies of good practice in student services. Also, the researcher presented findings from this study along with implications for enhanced provision of student services, as well as to guide faculty in means to better know their students. The study presented implications for theory, practice, and policy, and concluded with the researcher's suggestions for further research.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge immensely the ceaseless efforts of my supervisor, Dr. Keith Walker. I am thankful for your recommendations and assistance in shaping this study and seeing to the honing of my ideas and skills that have made this thesis work a success. Thanks too for your valuable counsels and encouragements.

Special compliments go to all my instructors, Research Advisory Committee chair and members, Dr. Michael Cottrell, Dr. Vicki Squires, Dr. Jing Xiao and the external examiner in my thesis defense, Dr. Tim Molnar for all their suggestions and guides towards the completion of this research project. You have all contributed meaningfully to strengthening my academic and career prospects. I would also like to thank the interview, focus group, and interpretation panel participants, the Department of Educational Administration's support staff, Katrina Hutchence and Jennifer Kovar, and the Social Sciences Research Laboratories of the University of Saskatchewan for providing information, administrative and technical supports in recording and transcribing data in this research project.

I also owe profound gratitude to my family and friends, especially my wife, Nancy, and children – David and Victor for putting up with my busy schedules and withdrawals and giving me all needed support to accomplish this study. Lastly, I am also thankful to my parents, siblings, and friends for their prayers and countless support towards the completion of this project.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Permission to Use | i |
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Acknowledgements..... | iii |
| List of Figures..... | viii |
| List of Tables | viii |
| Chapter 1 | 1 |
| Background of the Study | 1 |
| Purpose of the Study | 4 |
| Researcher’s Position..... | 4 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 5 |
| Research Questions..... | 6 |
| Definition of Key Terms..... | 6 |
| The Significance of the Study..... | 7 |
| Assumptions..... | 8 |
| Limitation of the Study | 9 |
| Delimitation of the Study..... | 9 |
| Organization of the Thesis..... | 10 |
| Chapter 2..... | 11 |
| Literature Review..... | 11 |
| Internationalization and International Students in Universities..... | 12 |
| Trends in Activities of International Students in Some Canadian Universities..... | 13 |
| International Students and Supports: The University of Saskatchewan Experience | 14 |
| Needs of International Students in Canadian Universities | 15 |
| Demographic Composition of International Students in Canada..... | 15 |
| Needs According to Different National Groups, or Identities, Among International Students | 17 |
| Teaching and Learning (Academic) Needs of International Graduate Students..... | 20 |
| University Support Programs and Services for International Graduate Students..... | 21 |
| Nature, Type, Access to Support Programs, and Reservations..... | 21 |
| Programs, Service Units, and Personnel | 22 |
| Conceptual Framework for the Study..... | 24 |
| Chapter 3..... | 28 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Research Methodology | 28 |
| Method and Designs | 28 |
| Individual Interviews..... | 29 |
| Focus Groups..... | 30 |
| Combination of Individual Interviews and Focus Group..... | 30 |
| Selection of Participants | 33 |
| Data Collection and Procedures..... | 34 |
| Data Analysis | 36 |
| Elements of Trustworthiness..... | 38 |
| Ethical Considerations | 40 |
| Summary | 41 |
| Chapter 4..... | 42 |
| Presentation of Data..... | 42 |
| Participants Demographics | 42 |
| Participants for Individual Interviews | 42 |
| Participants for Focus Group..... | 43 |
| Participants for Interpretation Panel..... | 43 |
| Data Referencing | 43 |
| Data from Individual Interviews: Nigerian Graduate Students | 44 |
| Educational Background..... | 44 |
| Classroom Experiences | 44 |
| School Facilities and Student Services..... | 46 |
| Curriculum and Course Workloads..... | 49 |
| Summary of the Participants’ Perceived Educational Background | 52 |
| Transitions and Adjustments..... | 52 |
| The Participants’ Motivations for Choosing the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) as Their Place of Study..... | 52 |
| The Participants’ Perceptions about Quality of Teaching and Learning at the U of S | 54 |
| Arrival, Settlement, and Economic Pressures | 57 |
| Teaching and Learning (Academic) and Communication Issues..... | 58 |
| Coping Strategies of the Participants | 61 |
| Summary of the Participants’ Transition and Adjustment Experiences at the U of S | 63 |
| Student Learning Services and Programs | 63 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Students’ Perspectives | 63 |
| Sources of Awareness | 63 |
| Forms and Effects of Services and Programs..... | 64 |
| Participants’ Reservations over Learning Support programs, and Recommendations | 65 |
| Issues of awareness or publicity..... | 65 |
| Perceived lack of depth and focus in programs..... | 66 |
| Perceived neglect of students’ peculiarities in designing and administering programs..... | 67 |
| Support Personnel’s Perspectives | 71 |
| Organization and Features of Programs | 71 |
| Perceived Trends in Access, and Challenges in Administration of Programs | 73 |
| Summary of Data and Findings from the Individual Interviews | 79 |
| Data and Findings from Focus Group..... | 80 |
| Educational Background | 80 |
| Transition and Adjustments | 81 |
| Student Learning Services..... | 82 |
| Summary of Data and Findings from the Focus Group..... | 88 |
| Report from the Interpretation Panel | 88 |
| The Condition of Student Learning Support Programs..... | 88 |
| Publicity and Administration of Learning Support Services | 91 |
| The Timing of Programs and Events..... | 92 |
| Summary and Conclusion | 95 |
| Chapter 5..... | 96 |
| Discussion, Summary, and Conclusion | 96 |
| Review of Purpose of the Study..... | 96 |
| Review of Statement of Problem | 97 |
| Review of Research Questions | 97 |
| Review of Research Methods | 98 |
| Discussion of Findings and Literature | 98 |
| Understanding the Educational Context of the Nigerian Graduate Student | 99 |
| The Learning Needs and Issues Encountered by the Participants During Transitions | 101 |
| Learning Services: Strengths and Reservations..... | 103 |
| Matching Support Programs to Students’ Needs..... | 104 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Findings Related to Strange’s (2010) Theoretical Foundation of Student Success | 104 |
| Findings Related to Tinto’s (2015) Conceptual Model of Students’ Persistence | 107 |
| Findings Related to Strange and Hardy Cox’s (2010) Model: Principles and Strategies of Good Practice in Student Services | 109 |
| Centering practices on students’ needs..... | 110 |
| Recognition of individual differences. | 111 |
| Flexibility in approach..... | 112 |
| Responding to needs appropriately and on time..... | 113 |
| Anticipating needs rather than reacting to them..... | 115 |
| Applying resources efficiently and sustainably..... | 116 |
| Focusing on outcomes and results. | 118 |
| Designing and implementing services jointly. | 119 |
| Summary of Discussions..... | 121 |
| Responses to the Research Questions | 121 |
| Research Question One..... | 122 |
| Research Question Two | 124 |
| Research Question Three | 128 |
| Conclusion and Recommendations..... | 130 |
| Implications of this Study | 137 |
| Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy..... | 137 |
| Implications for Further Research..... | 138 |
| Closing Thoughts | 139 |
| References..... | 140 |
| Appendix A: Ethics Course Certificate of Completion | 151 |
| Appendix B: Certificate of Ethics Approval..... | 152 |
| Appendix C: Participants’ Recruitment Poster | 153 |
| Appendix D: Participant’s Consent Form for Interview | 154 |
| Appendix E: A Sample of Interview Prompts and Questions (For Students)..... | 157 |
| Appendix F: A Sample of Interview Prompts and Questions (For Student Service Personnel). | 159 |
| Appendix G: Participants’ Consent Form for Focus Group | 160 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|------------|
| Figure 2.1: Flow Map of the Literature Review..... | 12 |
| Figure 5.1: Determinants of Learning Services for International Students in Context..... | 132 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Table 2.1: Some Learning and Social Characteristics Attributed to Students from Different Regions of the World..... | 19 |
| Table 3.1: Flow of Data Collection and Analysis..... | 36 |
| Table 4.1: Summary of Data and Findings from Individual Interviews..... | 77 |
| Table 4.2: Data and Findings from Focus Group (FG)..... | 87 |
| Table 4.3: Report of the Interpretation Panel (IP)..... | 94 |

Chapter 1

Background of the Study

Canada has become an essential destination for international students. The Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) (2014) reported that Canada was the world's seventh most popular academic destination country, hosting five percent of internationally mobile students. Researchers have also attributed preference to Canadian education over other nations, citing factors such as quality of education, economic opportunities, flexible immigration policy, or other social cum environmental attractions (Chen, 2007; Leary, Hotchkiss & Robb, 2016). In 2016 alone, the total number of international students on a valid study permit in Canada stood at 414,285, and there were 9,000 students in Saskatchewan (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 2017). The growing number of international students in Canada speaks to the high premium that foreigners place on Canadian certificates, and the acceptance of the country as a peaceful and tolerant society (CBIE, 2014). Equally, Canada's increasing investment in recruiting international students may attest to the returns such undertakings bring to her overall national growth and development (Kunin & Associates, 2012).

Remarkably too, the CBIE's (2014) document, entitled *A World of Learning: Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education 2014*, pointed to the emergence of Nigeria as one of the top countries of supply of Canada's international students. The report noted that between 2003 and 2013, the number of international students from Nigeria rose by 29 percent; this growth surpassed rates of leading countries like China (CBIE, 2014). In 2016, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) indicated that the number of Nigerian study-visa holding students in Canada was 10,735, and 890 of these students were in Saskatchewan (IRCC, 2017). These numbers delineated a total of 2.5 percent of Canada's international students and 9.8 percent in Saskatchewan, respectively.

From the above statistics, Canadian universities have become conversant with matters concerning international students in the country. Despite these recruiting successes, there are still challenges in identifying actual learning needs of most international students and providing proper support. Some authors have suggested that language and communication, cultural differences, learning adjustments, funding, and social issues (Andrade, 2006; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Hanassab, 2006; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010), are significant challenges of international students globally. However, the missing piece is that the bulk of research on

international students' experiences has come from countries with longer histories of recruitment (i.e., UK, USA, and Australia). Only a few studies recognize the unique Canadian tertiary education environment and student population distribution including the visible minority, white European origin, Aboriginal, first-generation, rural, matured, and international student groups (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005; Grayson, 2008; Kirby, 2009). For the most part, these researchers have not identified international students as a heterogeneous group (with different countries of origin), but rather their works typically inform or compare the experiences or activities of only two major student groups domestic and international.

Furthermore, past studies have failed to adequately describe and analyze the needs of international students in transition particularly, as regarding issues with students' previous educational background and learning peculiarities associated with individuals from different parts of the world. Strange (2010) credited the knowledge of students' learning styles and preferences as one of the most important theoretical foundations for providing support, and consequently, promoting student success. Similarly, Kirby (2009) suggested that the Canadian post-secondary should understand and accommodate the distinct learning needs of its diverse students' body. The researcher also argued that a one-size-fits-all approach to meeting the learning needs of the various student groups in Canada is not appropriate. Much like domestic students, international students experience learning differently and have needs that are peculiar to their ethnic, racial, or national identities (Kommers & Pham, 2016; Mwangi, 2016; Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). These identified gaps in the literature suggest a reassessment of measures adopted in administering support to international students on our campuses.

Already, students of all levels find it arduous to navigate the rigors of university education. Researchers have argued that international students experience more significant challenges in transition than domestic students (Edgeworth & Eiseman, 2007; Ren, Bryan, Min & Wei, 2007). For instance, a study at Ohio University on amidst other things, how student services assisted international students in their process of adjusting to American college life, revealed that most international students experience tremendous difficulties, and they do not receive appropriate support in several areas of need (Grasgreen, 2011). Grasgreen (2011) noted that there were disconnections between the students' experiences and services the administrators

thought was needed. Such is a unique case of planning and services delivery based on unsubstantiated assumptions.

Moreover, it is likely that some international students come as first-generation students to their host universities and may have little or no access to social capital. Social capital connotes the privileged information or resources a student obtains from social networks which helps to make some critical decisions like choice of a college, an academic course, or social engagements while in school (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Proponents of social capital maintain that it is usually handed down to children through their families and bears much relevance to students' overall college experience (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). This lack of social capital has likely placed many international students in circumstances where support programs such as academic advising and counseling become more useful to them than any other group. Student support experts have postulated that success depends on personal and institutional factors (Kuh, 2016; Strange, 2010). Excellent student services must, amongst other things, consider individual differences or circumstances (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Thus, tying support services and programs to the needs of international students with consideration to national peculiarities and experiences, will not only indicate effectiveness in service delivery but might also contribute to higher persistence among them.

Likewise, the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) has become home to thousands of international students from over one hundred countries (U of S, n.d. admissions: International Students). According to the university's website, there were a total of 3001 international students registered in different programs, at the end of the 2016/2017 Academic Year (U of S, n.d. Student Headcount and Demographics). Eight percent of her graduate international students' population are Nigerians, fourth in number with China, India, and Iran topping the list (U of S, 2016 Enrolment Report). The number of students and countries of origin of international students at the U of S points to the extent of variation in students' needs, challenges, and aspirations in the university. It may be challenging to study the learning needs of every student to provide suitable individual services; researchers have suggested that studies of international students by ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds (Kommers & Pham, 2016; Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000) may provide for more efficient support services.

The number of international students in the university is expected to be on the rise. Therefore, to enhance smooth transitions and promote productive learning experiences for

international students, the university has created the International Student and Study Abroad Center (ISSAC), and support programs and services (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.). Nigerian (international) graduate students and of course, other students have their unique backgrounds and learning peculiarities. While available academic support services seem generically designed, effectiveness and equity in the current circumstance imply that support programs and advisory initiatives, get differentiated enough to reach the expectations of the various international students' populations African, Asian, Europe, and others. The U of S is expected to make conscious efforts to deepen her understanding of the learning needs of her students' body so that it could continue to retain and promote the overall success of international students. Such knowledge will be useful in optimizing available resources and encouraging the best experiences for all students. Therefore, this study explored the learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students and examined how learning services matched their needs and expectations at the U of S.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the learning experiences of Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan and ascertain how available learning services have matched their needs and expectations. The study engaged a review of the prior educational background of selected Nigerian graduate students, described their early learning transitioning and adjustment challenges, and awareness of and access to learning services at the U of S.

The Researcher's Position

My transition to studying in Canada as a first-generation Nigerian graduate student was rough at the beginning. The challenges were those of academic adjustments. Past education and accomplishments from home earned me admission into the University of Saskatchewan (Canada), but on arrival, I quickly noticed apparent variations in the context and workings of my Nigerian education and that of the U of S (Canada). At the onset, these differences showed in very basics such as the selection and registration of courses, sourcing academic journals and organizing an academic paper, dealing with the nitty-gritty of citations or proper attribution to sources, and relating with instructors. Regrettably, I could not obtain help from immediate family or social networks to deal with these differences and issues, being new in Canada. The only recourse was the U of S's student learning support programs and resources. Through no fault of the university, available programs and resources in the form of workshops, orientations, and a

graduate students' introductory course from my department did little to solve my problems. The underlying issue was that the different academic foundation and cultural orientations contrasted with the norms and practices of my new environment, and I had wished that the U of S knew these differences to align learning support services more fittingly. Hence, my interest in first-generation international students and student services at higher education. Based on my initial transitioning experience and classes at the U of S, I embarked on this research to establish awareness of the different educational and cultural backgrounds among international students and to seek increased awareness in aligning learning support programs to students' needs.

Statement of the Problem

Even though universities in Canada have recruited international students for decades, there are still needs to continuously evaluate operations in sustaining retention and success of international students. While research remains sparse concerning the learning experiences of international students, Grayson's (2008) study of international students' academic achievements and outcomes in four Canadian universities, found that international students performed lower than domestic students. Reasons suggested for these findings were that international students face everyday struggles like local students, but additionally, they have other difficulties occasioned by change of environment, language, culture and inadequate support (Grayson, 2008; Leary et al., 2016).

As universities grapple with providing support services to international students, some efforts may not be yielding optimum results for all because of the growing students' heterogeneous population. Support programs and services seem designed to meet needs without adequate consideration to different students' educational backgrounds, learning characteristics or aptitudes, and ethnic or national identities. However, research has suggested such factors for providing practical support to international students (Kommers & Pham, 2016; Ikegulu, 1999; Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000). On the contrary, support programs may adequately be meeting needs and expectations of all students, without necessarily tying them to learning characteristics of any ethnicity. Whatever the case, confidence in the University of Saskatchewan's mission and commitment to providing equal learning opportunities to all its students, and her efforts to ensuring the success of international students, are the motivations behind this study.

Hence, this study explored the contributions and limitations of research on the experiences of international students, mainly, how previous educational background plays into

their learning identities and needs, transitions, and desired services. Also, the researcher drew from extant literature on students' success, students' persistence and retention, student services, and feedback from first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the U of S, to appraise the university's learning services and programs. The crux of the study was to find out the extent to which students were aware of services available for their use, and how such services match their learning needs. The study offered an increase in awareness of the need to align pedagogy and learning services with the distinct needs of international graduate students. Moreover, findings from the study are likely to provoke reviews of the backgrounds and experiences of other international student nationals in the areas of impact of previous learning contexts on the transitions or adjustments and access to learning services and guide universities to responding accordingly.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan describe their academic background, against their perceptions of prior experiences when studying in Nigeria?
2. What are the teaching and learning challenges Nigerian students have encountered when making transitions to the University of Saskatchewan? How have these students identified and navigated these challenges as they have adapted to the University of Saskatchewan?
3. What are the perceived supports available at the University of Saskatchewan, and how have these helped students to navigate through identified challenges? What do they perceive are missing or adjustable?

Definition of Key Terms

For the study, these were the key terms:

International Student: Any student who is attending a Canadian post-secondary institution but is neither a Canadian citizen nor a landed immigrant (permanent resident). The student must have been granted a study permit by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

First Generation International Graduate Students: These are students who are the first in their families to pursue a post-graduate certificate or degree in a university abroad. The study

referred to Nigerian students of this description at the University of Saskatchewan, as the first-generation Nigerian graduate students.

Academic Needs of International Graduate Students: International students face different learning adjustment challenges in the transition to a new educational environment. An international graduate student may require assistance in the following areas: choosing courses, adapting to graduate-level reading, and writing, improving communication skills, participating in class discussions, seminars, and workshops, use of library services, instructor/supervisor-student relationships, and seeking academic advice or support.

University Support Programs or Services: Universities create services and programs to support all students to achieve academic, career, or other personal goals. Besides, there are services and programs specially designed and administered to aid international students to adjust, adapt, and overall succeed. For instance, most international graduate students find programs like language support, reading and writing workshops, use of library services, academic advising, and others very helpful all through their studies (Leary et al., 2016).

The Significance of the Study

The study was not only significant to the University of Saskatchewan but also tertiary institutions across Canada. Canadian tertiary institutions who are engaged in recruiting students from other countries may use the findings of the study to gauge standards for dealing with international students. Most research about international students has come from elsewhere. According to Leary et al. (2016),

How a Canadian university responds to or supports international students through their transition into the first year is not well understood. Neither has any significant attention been paid to the correlation between international students' university experiences and their educational outcomes. (p. 110)

Hence, this study sought to ascertain an understanding of the educational background and characteristics of one group of Canada's international student population: First-generation Nigerian graduate students. I thought that such knowledge might influence preferences and choices of instructional models and assessment criteria by university faculties. On the part of students' service providers or administrators, offerings of the study may guide program design and delivery for international students in universities and colleges. Overall, the study considered

the problem of the shortage of literature concerning international students' affairs in Canada and contributed to this literature.

At the institutional level, this study offered insights that may guide the University of Saskatchewan to strengthen student learning services. The Learning Charter of the university, expressed commitment to “provide appropriate academic and other supports to students who experience various challenges to their learning, including challenges of a cultural, social, psychological, or physical nature” (U of S Learning Charter: Institutional Commitment 4, June 17, 2010, para 1). As a university that upholds equity in learning and service delivery to its distinct members, this study presents knowledge for appropriately aligning support services with students' needs. Such insight is valuable for optimizing the use of resources and helping to achieve higher efficiency in the provision of student services.

This study may also contribute to increased awareness of students' prior learning backgrounds or previously acquired learning styles, and transition and adjustment challenges, which may help instructors in choosing tools and pedagogy for their diverse classrooms. The study has unveiled perceived strengths and deficiencies in student services and programs, as well as providing informed findings for developing better policies and programs to address identified problem areas.

Assumptions

I built the study on the premises that:

- Conducting need assessments of international students would be based on their previous academic preparedness or known ethnic study orientations and that these lead to a better understanding of their unique experiences in Canadian universities.
- Despite the provision of existing learning support services like graduate-level reading and writing workshops, library services, and laboratory workshops, there is a need to tailor the programs offered by these services to fit students' peculiarities.
- University students' population distribution is increasingly heterogeneous, and the needs of international students differ from other cohorts.
- Students' perceptions or opinions are crucial for designing programs and creating services aimed at meeting their needs and overcoming potential experiential challenges.

- The interview questions posed to the participants elicited adequate and reliable data to describe their educational background, need and transition experiences, and perceptions of the University of Saskatchewan's student learning services.
- The methods and measures adopted in collecting and analyzing data were suitable and did not introduce biases into the research.

Limitation of the Study

The research had the following limitations:

- The study has some degree of homogeneity in the experiences of the participants under review resulting from the fact that they were of the same nationality, educational background, and share similar learning struggles.
- The use of a single international student sub-group, first-generation Nigerian graduate students' experience to examine the learning services in the University of Saskatchewan was a small sample of international students.
- The use of larger sample size and engaging first-generation international graduate students from other countries could help to understand other areas of strengths or weakness in learning services
- Exploring only the actual academic (learning) activities and corresponding services accessed by the selected participants limited the findings expected from this study
- The study of the U of S student services and support programs and corresponding student experiences was complicated because of the differences in these programs and students' experiences
- My shared identity with the participants, as a first-generation Nigerian graduate student at the U of S, may have shaped my view of Nigerian education and the experiences of students studying abroad. Thus, ensuing biases that arose from this connection served to present or elucidate the participants' comments. Nonetheless, such biases can prove limiting.

Delimitation of the Study

The study had the following delimitations:

- The study focused on the experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students and restricted its findings to issues of learning, and corresponding services

- Other out-of-the-classroom support programs such as health, housing, career, financial, administrative, and immigration services were not the focus of this study.
- I committed to studying so that findings could provoke studies of other international students' experiences in different areas of need. However, I never meant that other aspects of student services are less critical, nor embarked on studying all issues related to international students' affairs at the U of S.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter one introduced the background, problem, and motivations that drove the research. In the chapter, I also discussed the purpose, assumptions, limitations, delimitation, and significance of the study. In chapter two, I presented a review of contemporary literature on internationalization and recruitment trends, needs, and learning and social differences among international students. Moreover, I reviewed research on first-generation students, teaching and learning and adjustment concerns for international students, and university support programs or services for international students. The chapter concluded with conceptual frameworks guiding the studies – theories and principles of student success, students' persistence, and student services. Chapter three covers the methodology of this research. I offered explanations for my choice of research designs and ethical considerations. Chapter four covered data from individual interviews, focus group, and interpretation panel. The chapter contains data and findings as grouped into categories and matched along each of the three components of this study, namely: Educational Background; Transitions and Adjustments; Learning Support Services. Chapter five presents a summary, discussions, implications, and conclusions from the study. The thesis concludes with a list of references and appendixes of this research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Countries of the world, including Canada, have continued to attract and recruit international students for various reasons. Typically, international students bring global perspectives, by way of different ideas, skills, cultures, and languages, and ultimately too, generate revenues for their host countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2016; Trice, 2003). For instance, in 2011, \$8 billion and 81,000 jobs were reportedly generated in Canada through recruitment and support of international students (Kunin & Associates, 2012). Consequently, the Canadian government adopted a national strategy to double the number of international students to over 200,000 new students within the next decade starting from the year, 2011 (Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada, 2014). Given such a movement, Canada, through higher education institutions, has joined at the forefronts of a global hunt for international students. On the other hand, international students have chosen, and are being increasingly lured to Canada, for her niche as a welcoming nation, possessing high-quality education, and having a safe environment (CBIE, 2016). Hence, as the country recruits growing numbers of international students through higher education institutions, it behooves these organizations to seek not only to increase in enrollment but also show exceptional commitment to the success of her international students.

Providing support to international students is crucial. Researchers have suggested that higher education institutions must not recruit students for only numerical or economic benefits but must also be equipped to meet the needs and expectations or goals of their various students (Bean, 1986; Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012; Kuh, 2016; Tinto, 2012, 2015). According to Strange (2010), student success is a function of students' (personal) characteristics and institutional dynamics. In other words, the author had theorized that students have the responsibility to seek to succeed, and conversely, institutions must always strive to understand the needs of their students and provide the necessary support. Therefore, to continuously recruit and promote the success of international students, there must be congruence between the characteristics and needs of the students and the academic and social aspects of the campus environment. That way, international students could increasingly find satisfaction in Canada and uphold the country as a premier destination for international studies.

Figure 2.1 shows a flow map of the major concepts and topics in this section.

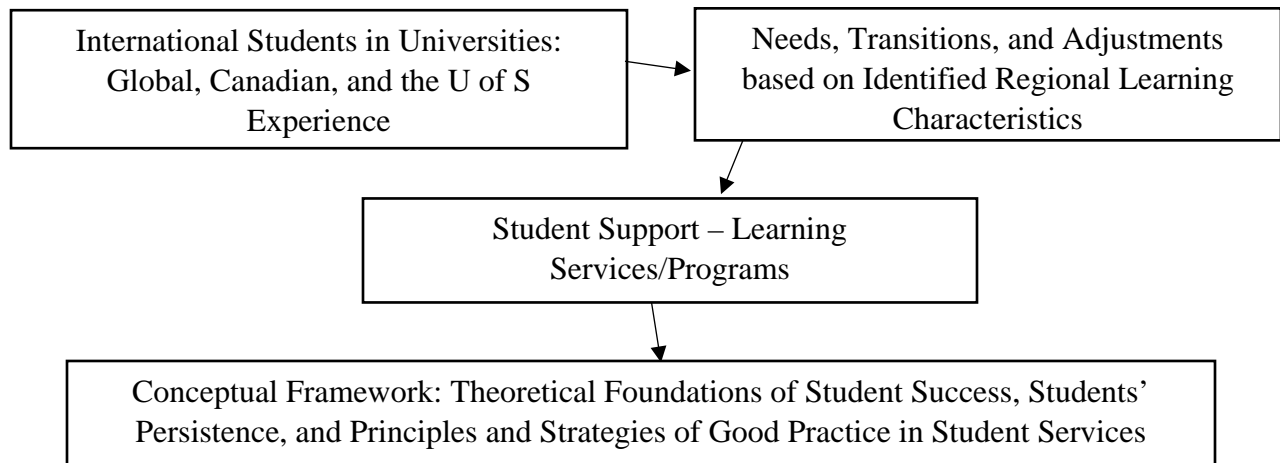


Figure 2.1: Flow Map of the Literature Review

As illustrated in Figure 2.1, this chapter briefly reviews the literature on internationalization and activities of international students in universities around the world. It also highlights the actions of some Canadian universities with international students and sums up with happenings at the University of Saskatchewan. Secondly, the chapter explores demographics, learning needs, and transition and adjustment issues of international students based on regional or national identities or educational backgrounds. Thirdly, the section highlights the nature and manner of support services available to international students and zero in on the classroom (learning) support programs for graduate students, primarily first-generation cohorts. Lastly, the chapter concludes with an introduction of the conceptual framework that guided this study.

Internationalization and International Students in Universities

Internationalization is the underpinning factor for international exchanges. By way of definition, the word “internationalization” connotes programs and efforts of learning institutions, systems, and individuals towards global academic integration (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Students and universities under the current global climate seek knowledge beyond national boundaries to incorporate global ideologies. Currently, the estimate is that by 2022, the number of internationally mobile students will reach seven million (ICEF, 2014). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) *Education at a Glance, 2015* stated factors that drive international students’ mobility as the increase in global demand for tertiary education, reduced transportation and communication costs, and the internationalization of labor markets for highly skilled people. Remarkably, this era of a greater quest for knowledge and cross-border exchange has brought new investment opportunities for national and regional governments to

attract international students to their universities and to raise revenues and increase the labor force (OECD, 2014). The effect of such circumstances is that as countries continuously strategize to attract more international students, students' decisions on the choice of destination are influenced by what the host country offers and personal ambition.

Several factors such as higher demand for education globally, the prestige of different certificates and diploma, favorable government policies, support programs for international students and economic opportunities are accountable for motivating students' mobility (Altbach & Knight, 2007; OECD, 2014). It is worthy of note that Canada is among the six countries who hold 50% of all international students worldwide, and the other countries are Australia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States (OECD, 2014). By 2012, Canada's prominence in recruiting international students was established, as housing 5% of internationally mobile students (OECD, 2014). Like the other top destination countries for international students, Canada is still deeply engaged in the hunt for more, with the overarching aim of internationalization and prospering the economy (Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada, 2014). As nations of the world increasingly seek inter-dependence in all facets of human endeavor, internationalization especially, of higher education and the global hunt for international students seem widely accepted as a veritable tool for achieving the purpose, with every country cashing in on areas of strengths to increase its share of international students.

Trends in Activities of International Students in Some Canadian Universities

The past decade has seen a tremendous increase in the activities of international students in Canadian universities. The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) reported that recruitment of international students increased substantively after 2000 (CICIC, 2015). In 2014, the country became the 7th most popular destination for internationally mobile students (CBIE, 2014). Canadian Bureau of International Education (2014) also reported that the number of international students in Canada between 2008 and 2015 grew by 92% and were from over 187 countries. These numbers are pointers to the volume of activities related to international students in Canada. Like the federal government's goal to double the number of international students by 2022 (Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada, 2014), the provinces and territories through their various tertiary institutions, have also set targets to align with the broad federal government national strategy. For instance, the Government of Saskatchewan intends to increase the number of international students studying in Saskatchewan by 75 percent over the

2011 baseline by 2020 (Government of Saskatchewan 2016: Ministry of Advanced Education Plan 2016/2017).

In a similar development, Ontario universities from 2015, gave 25% of their Ph.D. spaces allocated through the Strategic Mandate Agreement process to international students who paid domestic tuition fees (Government of Ontario: Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, 2016). Recently, the University of Ottawa planned to “double the number of international graduate students (from 700 to 1,400) and increase the number of international undergraduate students by 50% (from 1,500 to 2,250), for a total of 3650 international students, or 9% of the entire student body” (University of Ottawa, n.d. p. 8). These figures point to the fact that most designated higher institutions in Canada are seriously involved in the recruitment of international students, and such movement has given impetus to much research on the experiences of this category of students.

International Students and Supports: The University of Saskatchewan Experience

The University of Saskatchewan (U of S) is a provincial institution situated in the western part of Canada, known as the prairies. Canadian provinces are responsible for education, and that is in a reflection of the country’s federal system of governance, as prescribed in the *British North American Act of 1867* (Axelrod, 1997). The U of S is also a research-intensive university, and among the prominent fifteen Canadian universities (U15, n.d.). Like other universities, the U of S had sought to increase the level of inter-cultural exchange and internationalization in the campus, by engaging in global partnerships and embarking on the higher recruitment of international students and faculty (U of S: Third Integrated Plan, 2012). Presently, the university’s website (www.usask.ca) on student services indicates a support unit known as International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC) (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.). The center has an easy to navigate website detailing its services, location, programs, names of officers and hours of operation, and primarily provides support for three groups of students namely: international students, inbound exchange students, and those going for study abroad programs (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.).

Other services provided by the center include picking up new international students from the airport and giving hotel lodging for the first night of arrival, continuous advising and referring students to other support service units for all matters of concern (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.). Individual advisory meetings, workshops, and orientations are also provided on issues like access

to health services, grocery stores, childcare centers, financial institutions, housing, immigration, career, and post-graduate life transitions (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.). ISSAC also runs bridging programs for inter-cultural bonding among the international, domestic, and Aboriginal students of the university (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.). Finally, ISSAC organizes periodic events to enlighten students about global issues and developments like reporting travel bans, bringing news about nations at war, or risk of a natural disaster, available study abroad programs and opportunities. In a word, it could be readily understood that ISSAC is created to operationalize inclusiveness, internationalization, collaboration, and community engagement, as expressed in the existing regulations and guiding principles of the university (University of Saskatchewan's Learning Charter, 2010; U of S: Our Mission, n.d.). Although the ISSAC has zero direct involvement in actual teaching and learning activities of students on campus, it does its best to provide out-of-the-classroom supports to international students, and thus, contributes significantly in helping international students achieve success.

In summary, the University of Saskatchewan has shown eagerness in internationalization, and ambition to recruit and support international students by the numbers and activities of international students on the campus.

Needs of International Students in Canadian Universities

The following section will elaborate on needs according to demographics and identities, teaching and learning (classroom) needs, transitions, and adjustment experiences of international students.

Demographic Composition of International Students in Canada

Recruitment of international students into Canadian universities has brought a shift in the Canadian post-secondary students' composition. Hitherto, the essence of Canadian post-secondary education was to provide vocational and technical competencies for the locals across different provinces (CICIC, 2015). However, the past two decades have continued to witness the increasing presence of international and other students in Canadian campuses, such that researchers have continued to call for greater awareness and adjustments to the changing students' population distribution (Grayson, 2008; Kirby, 2009; Mori, 2000). For instance, it was reported in 2014, that 60% of international students in Canada were from Asia, 10% came from Europe, and 10% from the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa). Another 7% each, came from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, while the US, comes in at 4% (ICEF,

2014). Precisely, the ICEF Monitor gave the number of international students enrolled in Canadian post-secondary institutions in 2014, as 268,659 students (ICEF, 2015), accounting for 79% of the entire international students' population. Similarly, Statistics Canada (2016) reported that international students on Canadian university campuses increased from 7% of all students in 2004-2005 to 11% in 2013-2014. As of 2015, there were 187 countries represented by international students in Canadian post-secondary schools (CBIE, 2016).

The above numbers indicated that Canada is currently hosting a mixture of students from different parts of the world, and these students represent different cultures and learning orientations. International students from different cultures and nations differ in ways they are engaged in learning (Zhao et al., 2005). Hence, obtaining knowledge of the differences in cultural orientations and learning styles of international students could be useful for providing excellent support. Researchers agree that teaching or supporting students with consideration to individual needs or national peculiarities is a unique recipe for success (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kirby, 2009; Kolb, 1983; Perkins, Perkins, Guglieimino & Reiff, 1977). Such an assertion holds more sway for international students than others because of their diverse backgrounds, culture, and level of previous educational preparedness (Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000). Although Thomas and Althen (1989) posited that international students share specific characteristics, irrespective of diverse cultural, social, religious, and political backgrounds, there is a growing consensus among researchers that international students experience learning differently and adapt quickly to cultures or patterns tantamount to their native traditions (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Olaniran, 1996).

As the present-day student mix continues to bring concerns and challenges, experts have tasked universities to be proactive, and show more resourcefulness in dealing with the current situation (Christie, Metcalfe & Fortowsky, 2011; Kirby, 2009; Sullivan, 2010; Toope, 2014). In proffering a solution, Leary et al. (2016) suggested personal and individualized counseling as one way of knowing international students' needs and corresponding services. However, other researchers have suggested studying international students by ethnic, racial, or national clusters to understand their different experiences regarding academic and social involvements (Ippolito, 2007; Kommers & Pham, 2016; Zhao et al., 2005). Thus, there is a tacit indication that international students from different backgrounds hold unique learning identities and

experiences. Hence, the following discussions shall consider learning distinctions of international students by nationalities and races, in tertiary institutions.

Needs According to Different National Groups, or Identities, Among International Students

Findings and suggestions supposing variations in the way international students experience learning based on cultural orientation and previous educational backgrounds have called for full attention here. For example, there are empirical and scholarly works on international students' academic experiences or learning outcomes, and language concerns at the post-secondary education level (Abdullah, Aziz & Ibrahim, 2014; Baik & Greig, 2009; Grayson, 2008). Some have studied transitional and adjustment issues (Leary et al., 2016; Ramsay, Barker & Jones, 1999). Others have examined curricula and pedagogical matters (Ippolito, 2007; Ryan, 2011), and socio-cultural and psychological issues (Coles & Swami, 2012; Marlina, 2009; Mori, 2000). Strikingly, the multi-ethnic orientation or regional education dynamics of international students has not received significant attention in the literature. For instance, in Grayson's (2008) comparative study of experiences and outcomes of domestic and international students in four Canadian universities, international students were categorized as a group and compared collectively to local students. Among the students surveyed, there was a higher percentage of Asians than other international students (Grayson, 2008). Unfortunately, Grayson (2008), unlike other researchers (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Mori, 2000; Kommers & Pham, 2016; Zhao et al., 2005), did not consider that international students experience learning and interaction differently. International students learn differently, and values and experiences from prior education in their home countries influence their expectations and performances in classrooms (Beykont & Daiute, 2002).

Researchers have identified distinctions in the way students from different regions of the globe experience learning, especially in the post-secondary. For example, European international students were more likely to adopt bicultural attitudes than Africans, Asians, and South Americans who hold firmly to their fundamental beliefs (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Another study found that European and non-European students differ in adaptation, and European international students studying abroad experience higher learning satisfaction than others (Sam, 2001). Findings from that single study in a Norwegian university may have posed generalizability questions considering other variables, one of which has to do with the

concentration of European international students in Europe and North America (OECD, 2014). Apart from geographical nearness, other arguments support that cultural proximity, ease of communication, and access to social support have given European overseas students the edge over others (Grayson, 2008; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Olaniran, 1996). Undoubtedly, those are enough pieces of evidence to suggest that students from European countries have peculiarities that reflect the high education and standard of living obtainable in the region. Conversely, these environmental and social factors such as better education and economic opportunities serve simultaneously, as pull factors luring international students from less developed nations to Europe and North America (OECD, 2014). Thus, the overarching idea is that students from different regions across the globe, have unique strengths and could leverage their advantages, and peculiarities to excel in learning, notwithstanding the environment.

Similarly, there are other studies consistent with differences of international students as related to regional uniqueness and educational background. Aubrey (1991) noted that Asian, Middle Eastern, and African students had been taught to sit quietly in the class and learn passively for mid or end-of-the-year tests. In the same vein, examining the experiences of Hong Kong students at the University of Toronto, Mickle (1984) found that Hong Kong students did not actively take part in class discussions. According to Thomas and Althen (1989), such kind of inactive participatory learning approach or style, and foreign accents put students from those regions in greater difficulty as they try to navigate the American education system. Furthermore, in a different study, Kommers and Pham (2016) found that Asian and non-Asian students differed in the way academic and social integration were related to persistence, depending on their year of study. Their findings pointed to the importance of considering cultural backgrounds, amongst other things, when planning support programs for students. Some other experts on students' retention and involvement have also suggested that international students prioritize academic success and professional development over cultural assimilation (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Zhao et al., 2005). Going further, Robinson (1992), claimed that Asian students thrive in collaborations rather than individuality; they value communal living over self-dependence. Perhaps, such orientation accounts for their uneasiness in social integration with other ethnicities, especially the independent Americans, and might have given answers to their holding back tendencies in multi-racial classroom spaces (Robinson, 1992; Zhao et al., 2005).

Table 2.1: Some Learning and Social Adjustment Characteristics Attributed to Students from Different Regions of the World

| Region | Characteristics/Peculiarities |
|--------------------------|--|
| Africa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive learners – taught to sit in class silently, take verbatim notes, memorize, and reproduce in exams or papers - Aubrey, 1991 • Learns in communal orientation – Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002 • Modern curriculum and pedagogy engrossed in western ideologies and culture – Achebe, 1958; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003; Fafunwa, 1974 • More confident in English language skills than Asians because of the influence of western education – Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986 |
| Asia and the Middle East | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive learners like Africans - Aubrey 1991; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Robinson, 1992 • Students thrive in a group and communal living rather than self-reliance - Robinson, 1992 • Not typically groomed in participatory or group discussion instructional method - Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Mickle, 1984; Thomas & Althen, 1989 |
| Europe and North America | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to adopt bicultural attitudes and different ideologies more quickly than others - Sodowsky & Plake, 1992 • Encourages active participation in classes – Aubrey, 1991 • Tends to experience higher learning satisfaction than the others – Grayson, 2001; Sam, 2001 • Less mobile - typically study in their regions - OECD, 2014 • Values independence, individualism, and pragmatism – Aubrey, 1991; Robinson 1992; Zhao et al., 2005 |

On the other hand, Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2002) identified African traditional education as communal and functional in structure and content, but vague in pedagogy. Hitherto, because of colonization, African culture was awash with European ideologies and did not reflect the real identity and aspiration of the natives (Achebe, 1958; Adeyemi & Adeyinka 2003; Fafunwa, 1974). Perhaps, the effect of the European mirrored education system in most African countries plays out in the way African international students integrate easily into western education and culture. For instance, in a study on international students attending Guelph University in Ontario, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) found that African students were more confident in their English than were Asians because African students studied English in secondary and undergraduate education levels. Although the study was meant to examine the adaptation challenges of international students, it also reveals how European-immersed African education was. However, the researchers did not suggest by their findings that African students do not encounter adaptation challenges like other international students studying abroad. To sum it up, an online survey about mapping behaviors of the United States prospective international students between October 2011 and March 2012, revealed that international students are a heterogeneous population. In groups, the researchers described as strivers, strugglers, explorers, and highfliers, US-bound international students from different regions in the world varied based on their levels of academic preparedness and financial resources (Choudaha et al., 2012). The finding of the study revealed that top of the list of motivations for Asian students seeking foreign education is career fulfillment, while students from the Middle East go for schools that provide adequate support services as well as guarantee their safety (Choudaha et al., 2012). This observation reminds tertiary institutions to reconsider their strategies and capabilities in recruiting students and providing needed support.

Teaching and Learning (Academic) Needs of International Graduate Students

International students bring lots of potential to the host institution and country, as well as face several struggles in negotiating a different academic environment and societal norm. Researchers agree that international students face more significant struggles than domestic students because of transition and adaptation problems (Andrade, 2006; Leary et al., 2016). Frequently identified difficulties of international students encompass language, academic, financial, social, and psychological issues (Grayson, 2008; Ramsay et al., 1999; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995; Thomas & Althen, 1989). Besides, among international students, researchers

have found that graduate cohorts require more help in educational issues, especially in public speaking and writing skills (Fatima, 2001; Reid, 1997). Others argue that international graduate students appear established enough to handle academic and professional assignments independently (Fatima, 2001).

Notwithstanding, amidst the literature dealing with issues of international graduate students, language and communication difficulties occupy the front burners (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Mori, 2000). Communication concerns for international graduate students include, but are not limited to, issues of fluency in spoken English, graduate-level writing, and interpersonal communication skills (Fatima, 2001; Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Trice, 2003). Furthermore, international graduate students experience other academic challenges like adjusting to different grading systems, adapting to collaborative classroom methods, academic advising, use of virtual learning tools, student-instructor or student-supervisor relations, and understanding institutional dynamics (Aubrey, 1991; Leary et al., 2016; Thomas & Althen, 1989). To all these concerns, higher education institutions have demonstrated great determination in providing support to help international students fit into the abroad university they came to study.

University Support Programs and Services for International Graduate Students

This section describes university supports with an emphasis on nature, type, the manner of access, programs, service units, and personnel.

Nature, Type, Access to Support Programs, and Reservations

Universities recognize their role to help students discover and fine-tune their potential and to ensure that students meet their life and academic expectations. They also conceive the breadth of student success as transcending recruitment to program completion or graduation, and beyond. According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) (2011), today's jobs require higher competencies, and more youths are seeking higher education for enhanced career paths. Higher education arms the present-day workforce with greater capacity to execute tasks better than can be done with high school diplomas (Frenette & Frank, 2017). Hence, as universities age in experience, a plausible argument follows that most challenges encountered in the early days of recruitment, retention, and promoting the success of international students, should have become traditional.

On the contrary, there has been increasing diversity in student population distribution (Grayson, 2008), and a more significant push for higher education by hitherto non-traditional

groups like first-generation students (Kirby, 2009). Such massive access to schooling poses a substantial challenge to the provision, and access to student services in universities (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2016). Researchers define first-generation students as first in their families to attend a college or university (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Non-traditional is a term broadly used to refer to a wide range of students, like older than the average age undergraduates, working, married, parenting, ethnically under-represented, or low-income students (Bowl, 2001; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004).

Separately, each of these groups has peculiar needs or faces enough distinct sets of challenges domestically. For example, first-generation students are known to be lacking in social support (Pascarella et al., 2004). Social support, such as parental guides and counseling about the choice of school, program, or courses are an ingredient for student success (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Research supports that access to social support contributes to a higher academic outcome for domestic rather than international students (Grayson, 2008). Put differently, non-access to social backing could easily result in loss of interest in studies or drop out by international students. Although the literature is considerably silent about first-generation international students, it is likely they are among underserved groups in tertiary institutions. Given this circumstance, there is a need for higher education institutions to be more concerned with issues affecting underserved student groups like the first-generation to a host country's international students. To ensure equity in student services meant that higher education institutions must seek an understanding of this student population and build support programs that tally with their uniqueness and needs.

Programs, Service Units, and Personnel

Amongst student services, support programs for international students are considered very important in most Canadian universities. Essential items like immigration, travel advisory services, settlement/housing support, academic advising, social engagements, and career, or professional development programs are standard features in the portfolios of international student units of various colleges (Leary et al., 2016). Institutions require trained student affairs personnel to design and administer services that meet the needs of this category, given their peculiarities in language, culture, and learning styles (Leary et al., 2016). The essence of creating student support units and programs is to ensure students are meaningfully engaged, and ultimately succeed (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Put differently, seeking student engagement

entails fostering persistence (Tinto, 2015), and that is achievable when students are made to feel like valued members of the university community. In addition to feeling belonged, students persist when they perceive learning as meaningful and believe in their ability to succeed (Tinto, 2015).

Furthermore, students seek higher education to be adequately equipped to navigate through life transitions and discover inherent abilities (Strange, 2010). All these needs and aspirations add to explain what students expect of university programs and support services. Student support units create opportunities for students to develop self-efficacy through programs that connect and integrate them into university learning communities (Strange & Banning, 2001). However, acquiring a new culture, adapting to a new climate, or joining a learning community is more needed by the newly arrived international student than the domestic counterpart (Heikinheimo, & Shute, 1986; Leary et al, 2016; Mori, 2000; Ramsay et al, 1999) and any failure by the host university in such an obligation undermines institutional support towards student success (Strange, 2010). Hence, students support programs such as peer matching, bridging programs, and other social engagements should provide international students with much-needed learning communities and cultural accommodation. These kinds of support might make learning more engaging and increase students' propensity to persevere through studies.

Lastly, some universities engage agents or consultants for recruiting international students, while others engage directly (Choudaha et al., 2012). Notwithstanding the strategy adopted in recruitment, it is expedient for universities to continue to provide services to support these students throughout their studies. Consequently, the unique needs and pattern of providing services to international students have called for knowledge in student success, foreign policies, cultural and higher education dynamics (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2016; Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Strange, 2010). In partnership with other student service units, international students' support teams provide services in academic advising, study workshops, career, work or professional development programs and immigration/travel education to students (Leary et al., 2016). The unit also collaborates with provincial and federal immigration offices to monitor activities of international students in Canadian universities (Strange, 2010), a regulatory practice that helps to keep the authorities informed of the goings-on of international students, and at the same time, provides reports on the quality of Canadian post-secondary education.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

This study sought to promote international students' success by raising awareness towards tying support programs and interventions to their learning needs. Because student success is a vast and highly researched topic, evidence that deals with understanding the learner and circumstances that make learning easy were sought for and adapted to guide this study. I looked at the literature to determine the critical variables and built on Strange's (2010) *Theoretical Foundations of Student Success*, Tinto's (2015) work on students' persistence, and Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) *Principles and Strategies of Good Practice in Student Services*, as models for knowing students, and providing efficient services. I considered these principles and theories as applicable and relevant to the essence of this research, which ultimately centers on understanding the student and giving the right support. Hence, I applied these theoretical frameworks in chapter five to explain the findings of this study on Nigerian graduate students' learning identities, needs, and experiences vis-à-vis learning support programs at the U of S.

First, Strange's (2010) *Theoretical Foundation of Student Success* identified two significant components of student success. Success means different things to the student and learning institution but at the heart of success is the fulfillment or achievement of a set goal for either party. To the student, success could mean completing or passing a course or obtaining a degree, while post-secondary institutions reckon success as satisfactory student enrolment or retention or degree completion numbers (Strange, 2010). Other researchers have described student success as a product of positive interaction amongst factors such as the dexterity of an instructor, conditions of the classroom or learning environment, developments or attributes of the learner, and family or social circumstances of the learner (Bain, 2004; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 2016; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tinto, 2012). However, Strange (2010) summarized the concepts of student success in two broad categories at post-secondary education, namely: the nature of student development and campus environment factors. Strange (2010) had further classified the student development piece of student success into three parts. First, the theory demanded that courses or instructions and support programs should reflect students' growth and psychosocial identities such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. The second aspect of this theory incorporated students' cognitive-structural developmental characteristics, which include competencies for critical reasoning and comprehending abstracts and concepts, such as are required for post-secondary studies. The third piece embraced features of students' personal

preferences and styles. This feature underscored students' behaviors in various facets, such as vocational interests, personal styles, and learning orientations.

The campus environment component recognizes the influence of the university or college's physical features, human aggregates, organizational designs, and socio-cultural elements on students' learning and development (Strange, 2010). Primarily, this component seeks to achieve inclusion, safety, involvement, and integration of students into the learning community of higher education (Strange & Banning, 2001). The underlying idea in Strange's (2010) theory is to establish that support programs and practices ought to be designed and executed with knowledge of students' development and the dynamics of campus environments.

Secondly, Tinto's (2015) *Through the Eyes of Students* is useful in this study for its contribution to students' retention. Knowledge of students' background and transitions could be critical for fostering retention of students, especially, non-traditional cohorts such as first-generation, international students, and their likes at the post-secondary. Typically, theories and practices on students' retention frame around standard practices for traditional students. Even though retention of non-traditional students in post-secondary education institutions is a primarily researched topic (Pascarella et al., 2004; Soria & Stebleton, 2012), little or no knowledge exists on particulars of international students and how they are supported in Canadian universities (Leary et al., 2016). However, Tinto's (2015) conceptual framework was notable because it examined retention through the students' perspective. Tinto (2015) claimed that past studies on student retention and success have similar perspectives on how tertiary institutions seek to engage students and argued that students never seek to be engaged, they seek to persist. "While the institution's interest is to increase the proportion of their students who graduate from the institution, the student's interest is to complete a degree often without regard to the institution in which it is earned" (Tinto, 2015, p.1). This assertion implied that what support institutions offer, might be at variance with what students seek, and suggested that universities seek ways to boost students' persistence. Tinto (2015) identified factors that universities could influence to boost students' persistence, and these factors included students' goals, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perception of the curriculum.

In their bids to promote and sustain students' persistence, post-secondary education institutions must first, help students to clarify their goals and guide them to achieve those goals through relevant curricula and strategies that reinforce self-efficacy and sense of belonging

(Tinto, 2015). Tinto (2015) argued that students are primarily motivated or driven by the goals that had brought them to the university and not necessarily impressed with self-promoting university programs. These goals could mean schooling for essential benefits such as to advance in learning, affiliate, develop, and gain autonomy. They could also be for extrinsic reasons such as to earn income, find a job, and achieve further education (Tinto, 2015). Often, the periods for achieving or seeking these goals intersect stages of students' lifespan development or formation of psychosocial identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and such stages usually happen during post-secondary school years (Strange, 2010). As Strange (2010) explained, "from assignments and examinations in the curriculum to opportunities for involvement and leadership beyond the classroom, the whole of this experience has great potential for contributing to the achievement of these developmental goals in students' lives" (p. 22). Unfortunately, some students embark on post-secondary educations without clear reasons, while others who had begun with pre-defined purposes might still be distracted (Tinto, 2015). By implication, the quality of learning experiences at school helps to shape students' propensity to persist. Because of the possibilities to influence students' motivations to persist, Tinto (2015) had advised tertiary institutions to help their students to define their goals, develop self-efficacy, and have a sense of belonging in campus communities and see value in the curricula. This model suits persistence attitudes of domestic students and might as well apply to international students in planning and administering instructions and support programs.

Thirdly, this study also drew from Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) *Principles and Strategies of Good Practice in Student Services* as templates for reviewing university support programs. The following eight key points are basic principles/strategies:

1. Centering practices in student needs
2. Expecting individual differences
3. Being flexible in approach
4. Responding to needs appropriately and on time
5. Anticipating needs rather than reacting to them
6. Applying resources efficiently and sustainably
7. Focusing on outcomes and results
8. Designing and implementing services jointly

In conclusion, I relied on the above theories and principles, and other extant literature to explore experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students to verify how fitting are learning services and programs tied to students' needs. I applied these conceptual frameworks extensively to discuss findings from this study in Chapter five.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This study explored the learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) and ascertained how support services had matched their needs and expectations. Underpinning the choice of research method and approaches in this study was the exploratory nature of the problem (Mills & Gay, 2016; Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996), and advocacy for inclusion of target beneficiaries in executing projects (Stringer, 1999). Stringer (1999) noted that “an army of experts is unlikely to be able to meet people’s needs if the people themselves remain merely passive recipients of services” (p. 37). Therefore, the researcher engaged with first-generation Nigerian graduate students to elicit a deeper understanding of the learning needs of international graduate students, describing their ways of handling learning adjustment challenges and exploring their perceptions of university support programs. Secondly, I sought viewpoints of volunteer student services personnel who identified available services and programs relative to these students’ perceived needs and expectations at the U of S.

This chapter presents the research methods and procedures used in conducting the study. It provides explanations for the choice of sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods. It also captures decisions, rationales, and the links amongst the purpose of the study, research questions, and methods selected. Lastly, the chapter also describes the trustworthiness and rigor of the research, together with the ethical considerations involved.

Method and Designs

I used qualitative approaches to conduct this study. The design consisted of individual interviews, one focus group, and another focus group adapted as an interpretation panel. Qualitative research is useful when a researcher seeks to understand how students in various university settings experience the world around them (Glesne, 1999). Qualitative research is essential for studying and making sense of phenomena experienced by individuals (Creswell, 2015; Mills & Gay, 2016). Qualitative approaches also help to comprehend peoples’ experiences and viewpoints as related to specific contexts and give proper interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Because the study sought to create knowledge about Nigerian graduate students’ educational background, transition experiences, and perceptions of the U of S student

services, I chose qualitative methods. In the end, the qualitative approaches used in this study yielded fruitful results in gathering and analyzing data.

While it is not always feasible for qualitative researchers to set out a rigidly structured research design, “they do not enter a research setting without any idea of what they intend to study” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 7). Based on this consideration, I devised a research plan that suited the purpose of the study and helped to answer the research questions. I used individual interviews to gather initial data from the participants and focus group and interpretation panel for generating shared understanding, deepening knowledge and analyzing (interpreting) the data (Creswell, 2015; Hollander, 2004; Noonan, 2002). Ultimately the qualitative design helped to explain what meanings the participants attach to their experiences. The following sections provide detailed explanations about individual interviews, focus group, and interpretation panel, together with the rationales for combining data collection methods in this study.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are considered the most widely used data collection strategy in qualitative research (Nunkoosing, 2005; Sandelowski, 2002). Interviews are characteristically used to collect detailed accounts of participants’ thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about a given phenomenon (Fielding, 1994; Glesne, 1999; Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Also, through interviews, researchers can “explore and probe participants’ responses to gather in-depth data about participants’ experiences and feelings” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 550). Mills and Gay (2016) further noted that interviews might be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. In other words, interview questions and structures may be thoroughly planned before a given study, or allowed to happen, impromptu. Hence, using semi-structured interviews, I hoped to generate quality data to identify educational background, transitions, and access to learning services experiences of Nigerian graduate students at the U of S.

I used pre-designed questions to elicit individual participant’s responses and views, and unstructured follow-up questions followed each answer to obtain in-depth information. However, there were some identified shortcomings in the use of interviews in research. These include but not limited to the assumption that words accurately and adequately explain participant’s inner experiences, problems of leading interview questions, and researcher interferences during interviews (Fielding, 1994; Lambert & Loisel, 2008; Mills & Gay, 2016). Other problems included the ability of participants to express their views in clear and articulate manners, and

how the researcher makes sense of expressed opinions and protects the confidentiality of interviewees' personal information (Fielding, 1994; Lambert & Loisel, 2008; Mills & Gay, 2016). Hence, I painstakingly followed known methodological steps for qualitative research and observed optimum ethical considerations during the data collection stages to eliminate or minimize these highlighted issues. I discussed these steps at length in the sections on data collection and procedure and ethical considerations.

Focus Groups

Focus groups use the advantage of group interactions or discussions to explore a range of phenomena (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). According to Creswell (2015), focus groups are particularly useful when one is trying to gather shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people. Vaughn et al., (1996) suggested that studies using focus groups should include at least two to four of them for a thorough investigation of the phenomena, and to allow for themed coding while being mindful of time and resources. Focus groups could emphasize similarities and differences and give information about a range of perspectives and experiences (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). Focus group facilitators probe for details or in-depth knowledge within the context of a given phenomenon or subject (Hollander, 2004). However, some researchers view focus groups as easy and cheap alternatives to individual interviews which do not pay attention to the intricacies of group interaction when used (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). Others disapprove of the method for its potentially subtle ways of censoring (withholding comments) information and tendency towards conformity (Carey & Asbury, 2012). Based on the arguments against the use of focus groups, Carey (2016) suggested that planning to have homogeneous members, possessing adequate leadership skills, building trust and rapport by carefully introducing the topic and providing information on confidentiality in handling data, are ways to reduce such problems. Accordingly, I relied on the strengths of focus group while guarding against possible shortcomings, to generate the best possible data for this study. I discussed the considerations and measures for optimizing the use of focus group in this study in the following section.

Combination of Individual Interviews and Focus Group

Intuitively, it may be that individual interviews will generate the most meaningful data for this study. However, triangulation of methods could reveal congruence or discrepancies in perspectives and help to create more profound insights regarding the subject of inquiry (Mills &

Gay, 2016; Morse, 1999; Patton, 2002). I considered that a two-pronged approach might help to collect as much data as possible to reasonably describe the experiences of the group under study. The individual interviews delivered in capturing personal experiences of the participants and the focus groups helped to elicit their shared views or experiences.

Secondly, a combination of methods provides options for target participants to choose either individual interviews or opt for a focus group. Therefore, I offered alternatives in this study to increase the opportunities for recruiting participants and promote convenience or flexibility in data collection. Lambert and Loisel (2008) highlighted the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods more than a mixture of qualitative techniques in a study and noted that not many studies address the implications of integrating qualitative data collection methods. They further argued that such combinations appear illogical to the average researcher for epistemological reasons. Other researchers have supported the combination of multiple qualitative methods within a single study and within a program of research (Barbour, 1998; Morse, 1999, 2003, Vaughn et al., 1996). However, users are advised to demonstrate competence in choosing or mixing methods and be careful not to compromise the reliability of findings (Barbour, 1998; Morse, 1999). Specifically, users must be cautious about making claims such as the superiority of a method over the other, asserting that those agreeing findings validated the methods used in a study, or claiming that strengths of a research method resolve lapses of another (Massey, 1999).

Notwithstanding, there are occasions for combining methods like individual interviews and focus groups based on practical, or parallel, or confirmatory reasons (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). Lambert and Loisel (2008) emphasized that pragmatic or practical purpose serves for situations when interviews, perhaps, are offered to participants unable to attend a focus group. They argued that such use helps to accommodate participants' convenience and reduce withdrawals or refusals. Furthermore, Lambert and Loisel (2008) also noted that researchers do use focus groups and individual interviews in parallel to explore phenomena of interest. Ideally, the parallel strategy engages different methods with different groups of participants, and data from one process do not influence the implementation of the other (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). Confirmatory considerations connote combining individual interviews and focus groups for data completeness, and such is especially crucial given the supposition that both methods individually reveal different aspects of a given phenomenon (Lambert & Loisel, 2008).

In contrast, Noonan (2002) suggested the use of a focus group as an interpretation panel to enhance data interpretation in collaborative research. “Interpretation panels are organized in the same way as a focus group; the difference is that they are used after data are collected and subjected to the preliminary analysis” (Noonan, 2002, p. 92). Arguments against the use of focus groups including interpretation panels span from issues related to member audits and interpretation biases in the analysis of qualitative research findings (Glesne, & Peshkin, 1992; Shank, 2006; Shenton, 2004). Likewise, member checks and interpretation biases were critical considerations in planning this study, such that I included most individuals who produced the initial data in the interpretation panel discussion. That way, participants took part in data collection and helped to interpret or analyze the same data. This strategy helped to curtail the misconception of facts and added objectivity to the data analysis part of this study. Secondly, leaning on Noonan’s (2002) focus group model and Vaughn et al.’s (1996) recommendation of two or more focus group sessions in a study, I combined a focus group and an interpretation panel to collect not only sufficient data but also to engage a better analysis procedure. The process involved an initial collection of data through individual interviews followed by a focus group and an interpretation panel. These processes were discussed in detail in the sections for data collection and data analysis.

In summary, given that qualitative research allows use of multiple methods to enhance the exploration of a phenomenon and broaden conceptualization (Barbour, 1998; Morse, 1999, 2003; Vaughn et al., 1996), I used individual interviews, a focus group, and an interpretation panel to seek participants’ perspectives related to the three research questions:

1. How do first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan describe their academic background, against their perceptions of prior experiences when studying in Nigeria?
2. What are the teaching and learning challenges Nigerian students have encountered when making transitions to the University of Saskatchewan? How have these students identified and navigated these challenges as they have adapted to the University of Saskatchewan?
3. What are the perceived supports available at the University of Saskatchewan, and how have these helped students to navigate through identified challenges? What do they perceive are missing or adjustable?

Selection of Participants

I used purposeful sampling to select participants for this study. Mills and Gay (2016) described purposive sampling as a “process of selecting a sample that is believed to be a representative of a given population...the researcher selects the sample using his experience and knowledge of the group to be sampled” (p. 149). Being a first-generation to Canada, Nigerian graduate student too, I leveraged my shared identity with the study group to select appropriate participants. I sought out participants who were able and willing to contribute to the topic of this study. According to Mills and Gay (2016), such participants should be able to think deeply, communicate effectively, and comfortably share their experiences freely. Indeed, there are no fixed rules on the number of participants required for qualitative research (Mills & Gay, 2016). However, I chose a substantial number of participants who could produce data to contribute to my ability to respond to the study research questions.

Based on the above considerations, 11 Nigerian graduate students from across colleges and levels of study at the U of S, were chosen as participants for individual interviews. I considered that these students whose affairs were central to this study should describe their prior academic backgrounds, transitions, and adjustments, and dealings with learning services at the U of S. I chose the participants for individual interviews on the following criteria:

1. The person must be a first-generation to Canada, Nigerian graduate student
2. The person must have international student status (i.e., holds a valid study permit at the time of this study)
3. Typically, the best candidates must have studied only in Nigeria before coming to the U of S and should not have had a close family member or friend who gave them the kind of teaching and learning supports the university offers at the beginning of their studies
4. Such students must have come primarily to the University of Saskatchewan for graduate studies, and had supposedly, depended solely on the university’s services during moments of adjusting to learning in the university
5. Lastly, such students must have used services from ISSAC or other learning support units on campus

Other participants for individual interviews included four staff who were from the U of S Student Learning Services (SLS) and Library units, and one person from the International

Students and Study Abroad (ISSAC). I selected a participant from the ISSAC office because of its various involvements in international students' matters (U of S: ISSAC, n.d.), and participants from SLS and Library for the direct learning services they offer to students. This university personnel separately explained type, nature, availability, and trends in access to services. Overall, I recruited 16 participants through person-to-person contacts, phone calls, and emails for individual interviews. In the end, the size and pattern of sampling engaged in the interviews yielded data that were presented later to a focus group for further deliberations.

In like manner, I selected participants for the focus group and the interpretation panel discussion from among Nigerian graduate students and the U of S student services units who produced the initial data. This strategy was critical because focus groups are used to explore an in-depth understanding of phenomena or to interpret existing data (Noonan, 2002; Vaughn et al., 1996). In this case, I used the first focus group which comprised of students only, to seek an extension of knowledge, and the second one, christened as an interpretation panel, served for interpretative purposes. For the latter uses, convention requires researchers to select participants from the same individuals who generated the original data to avoid conflicts or misconceptions (Noonan, 2002). Based on such consideration, I selected six participants from among Nigerian graduate students for the first focus group, and nine participants from both the students and university student services personnel for the interpretation panel sort.

Data Collection and Procedures

For the individual interviews, I designed sixteen (16) open-ended questions for the first phase of the data collection using Seidman's (2013) model. According to Seidman (2013), in-depth interviewing should consist of three separate interviews with each participant. Seidman (2013) postulated a three-pronged interview approach, where the first should explore the participant's life history. The second deals with the participant's experiences about the topic of study, and the third guides the participant to reflect on meanings of these experiences. Therefore, I designed these interview questions in a fashion consistent with the Seidman's (2013) model. Some of the items border on the history or educational background of these Nigerian students, while the others explore their teaching and learning transitions and adjustment experiences, and perceptions about support services at the U of S. However, instead of three interviews per participant, only one was conducted. The limited time frame and the cost of funding this project

were reasons for doing one interview per participant. I attached the template for the interview questions used for this study in Appendix E.

The first phase of the interview process was to make preliminary contacts to familiarize prospective participants with relevant intricacies of the study and address whatever concerns they may have. The qualitative researcher is an observer or interviewer (Mills & Gay, 2016); therefore, developing a relationship and building trust are amongst necessary steps to be taken to win participants' confidence (Glesne, 1999; Seidman, 2013). I obtained the participants' consents by signing the forms (See Appendix D for a sample of the consent form) and handed or sent a copy of the interview questions ahead of scheduled interviews to enable them to prepare and contribute meaningfully. The next stage featured the actual interviews, which lasted approximately for one hour each and were audio-recorded. The interviews held from the second to the twentieth day of July 2018. I interviewed the student-participants before the student support staff-participants and transcribed the audio records four weeks after the interviews. Afterward, I sent the transcripts which numbered between three to 19 pages to the various participants for audit to ensure I printed their statements correctly.

Subsequently, I categorized data from the interviews, along with the three research questions of this study to form data for the focus group. The first focus group comprised of only students, and it sought for extension of ideas from the interviews (Hollander, 2004; Vaughn et al., 1996). This focus group session held on August 31, 2018, and I transcribed the near one and half hour video-recorded session, which numbered 28 pages in two weeks. However, poor video quality and background noise in the recording made it difficult to capture every word from the participants. Overarching insights from the focus group discussion, especially subjects denoting aggregate learning needs or expectations of the students and issues of learning services formed aggregate data for the interpretation panel focus group. The interpretation panel sat on Monday, September 24, 2018, and lasted for one hour and nine minutes. The interpretation panel discussion was also video recorded to allow for easy transcribing.

In summary, I took care and followed extensive rigor in the data collection processes to ensure that I generated enough and reliable the data for this study. Secondly, I included some participants of the interviews in the focus and panel interpretation discussions to avoid or minimize possibilities for misconstruing facts. Table 3:1 shows the data collection and analysis pattern.

Table 3:1 Flow of Data Collection and Analysis

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Phase One | Data Collection: Individual interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students• Student Services Personnel |
| | Data Analysis: Preliminary <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coding – sought for common themes• Constructed categories by grouping interview responses from both groups along with the three research questions of this study |
| Phase Two | Data Collection: Focus group discussion (Members – Students only) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presented aggregate data from the interviews to focus group members• Focus group discussed the data for depth and extension of knowledge |
| | Second Data Analysis - The researcher conducted: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thematic analysis of data from the focus group• Cross-case analysis and triangulation of data from the individual interviews and focus group |
| Phase Three | Data Analysis: Interpretation panel focus group (Members – students and student service personnel) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presented harmonized data to the interpretation panel (IP)• The IP discussed and interpreted or made sense of the data |
| Final Phase | Final Analysis - The researcher: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examined all data through the theoretical frameworks of the study• Presented this final report |

As illustrated in Table 3.1, I intertwined the data collection with the analysis procedures. This mixed pattern and flow were necessary because of the exploratory and evolving nature of this study. Overall, I followed a systematic investigation of the participants’ experiences through a pattern of building on emerging ideas.

Data Analysis

I followed a variety of strategies in analyzing data for this study. Upon the conclusion of the interviews and transcribing the audio records, I identified keywords and recurring themes, or illustrations used by the participants to describe their experiences and grouped them – a technique popularly described as coding (Lincoln & Guba, 1987; Patton, 2002). After that, I organized these related ideas under separate headings to aggregate features depicting the

participants' educational background or learning identity or history, transitioning and adjustments experiences, and perceptions about support programs. This phase followed Merriam's (1998) model of creating data categories and subcategories through constant comparison of data from different sources. In this context, the sources were interview responses from the 16 participants, which included, Nigerian students and student services personnel. I matched the data from the Nigerian students' description of their prior education and perception of academic (learning) needs along with data from the university staff about learning services in some form of cross-case analysis (Babbie, 2002). The process allowed the researcher to review the information gathered and helped to identify gaps in the initial responses that needed clarification in subsequent stages.

Afterward, results from this preliminary analysis formed data for the focus group discussions. The first focus group that involved only students was used to expand knowledge from the original data. The focus group probed if, and where identified needs of the students converged with or diverged from the university's learning services or programs. Data from this focus group discussion were merged with the interviews to create a harmonized data for panel interpretation. This sort of triangulation data served well because of its simplicity and relevance in producing fuller knowledge about the phenomena under study (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008), which in this case, were Nigerian students and U of S learning services. I used the interpretation panel focus group to make sense of the aggregate data from the previous stages. The interpretation panel brought significant insights and inputs that helped to lessen possible misinterpretation of facts and biases in interpreting findings.

Upon conclusion of the panel interpretation phase, I applied the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter two of this study: foundations of student success, students' persistence theory, and principles of good practice in student services to examine their applicability in each context. Hence, the final analysis involved data and reports from the individual interviews, first focus group, interpretation panel, and my (the researcher's) views as presented in the last chapter of this thesis. Altogether, the data analysis pattern engaged in this study contributed in eliciting an understanding of the educational background, transitions and adjustments, and access to learning services experiences of Nigerian graduate students at the U of S. This also aided my explanation of how the participants' experiences connected with extant literature.

Elements of Trustworthiness

I took measures to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study. According to Mills and Gay (2016), “trustworthiness features consist of any efforts by the researcher to address the more traditional quantitative issues of validity...and reliability” (p. 127). Shenton, (2004) has suggested that “the trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is often questioned by positivists, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work” (p. 63). In contrast to that logic, qualitative researchers have argued that they can ensure the trustworthiness of studies by demonstrating care and rigor in data collection and analysis procedures of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). In line with this consideration, I adopted Guba’s (1981) constructs for gauging the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. These constructs are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). I outlined these constructs and their applicability to the trustworthiness of this study in the following section.

The first is credibility. Researchers are concerned about issues of internal validity - how to ensure that studies measure or test what is intended (Shenton, 2004). In qualitative research, matters of internal validity refer to the credibility of studies (Merriam, 1998). The credibility of studies can be achieved or enhanced by ensuring, among other things that the data collection and analysis processes follow reliable methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1987; Patton, 2002). Given this requirement, I followed the methodological rigors of conducting interviews and leading group discussions. For example, on securing ethics approval, I made initial contacts with participants to gain their confidence and trust before scheduling the actual interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Then, following the interviews, I sent back the transcribed copies to the participants to audit and release to me before embarking on the data analysis.

Besides, Tracy (2010) postulated that one of the ways to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative studies is by explaining the processes used in transforming raw data into the final reports. For this cause, I provided details of the data collection and analysis processes in this report. These details included information like the purpose of the study, types of questions asked, the steps taken to ensure transcript accuracy, and the number of pages of interview transcripts. Also, I added to the credibility of this study through triangulation of methods in data collection, and interpretation such as the individual interviews, first focus group, and the interpretation panel. Besides, triangulation of methods allowed participants to participate in the interpretation

process to check interpretations of their words, and this process also enhanced the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1987; Noonan, 2002). Furthermore, I interpreted and appraised data generated in the study through some theoretical frameworks from extant literature to validate findings. This process helped the researcher to compare and test findings or conclusions from this study using established yardsticks from research.

Another measure of trustworthiness in qualitative research, according to Guba (1981) is transferability. Merriam (1998) noted that external validity referred to the extent which findings of one study can apply to other situations. Transferability is not usually the primary motivation for qualitative studies because of its massive contextual leanings and small sampling patterns (Shenton, 2004). However, Lincoln and Guba (1987) argued that qualitative researchers have the responsibility to provide enough data that could make transferable judgments possible. Thus, adequate care was taken to avoid or minimize potential threats and errors in data collection and analysis procedures. Apart from the rigors and cares taken during recruitment of participants and collection of data highlighted earlier, the researcher used clear and lucid narratives to present contexts, illustrations, assumptions, and findings of this study. The underlying reason for such an approach was that results could be transferable.

Dependability is another feature of a good qualitative study (Guba, 1981). It relates to the concern for the reliability of findings (Shenton, 2004). Dependability in qualitative research denotes that, should the work be repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1987). Shenton (2004) stated that this quality of qualitative research is achievable through a combination of steps such as ensuring to describe the planning and execution stages of a study. Other measures include addressing the intricacies of the fieldwork and doing a reflective appraisal of the project (Shenton, 2004). Based on these suggestions, I adopted a process of continuous description and analysis of procedures for this study. In the end, I evaluated findings in the light of decisions made in every stage of the study. Moreover, I included thoughts and experiences doing this research at the concluding part of this thesis.

The last piece in Guba's (1981) model of gauging the trustworthiness of qualitative research is confirmability. Shenton (2004) described confirmability as the "concept of the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (p. 72). Shenton (2004) also noted that qualitative researchers could address the issues of confirmability by taking steps such as

triangulation to reduce the effect of investigator bias. Other measures to enhance confirmability include but not limited to, admission of the researcher's beliefs and assumptions, recognition of shortcomings in a study's methods and their potential effects and in-depth description of the research methods to allow scrutiny of the integrity of research results (Shenton, 2004). To address these concerns, I approached this study with an awareness of the possibility of making unfair judgments of the participants' experiences and reactions to specific situations.

Although the aim of this research was not to criticize nor draw unwarranted conclusions about the current state of student learning services at the University of Saskatchewan, however, given my shared identity with the participants as a first-generation to Canada, Nigerian international graduate student and awareness for possible biases in data analysis, informed caution to avoid them. Hence, I ensured that participants confirm understanding and accuracy of transcribed interview responses before reporting the same. Besides, I structured and involved the panel interpretation focus group made up of students and student services personnel as part of the data analysis procedures to check undue inferences in this study. Moreover, I spelled out my research boundaries before setting out and identified problems encountered in the course of the study. Lastly, I interpreted the findings of this study, drawing considerably from several established theoretical frameworks and literature to boost the trustworthiness of this research.

In summary, the methodological rigor and steps followed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study contributed to the understanding of the subjects under review, and practices and suitability of support programs to students' unique needs at the U of S.

Ethical Considerations

Given that this study involved interactions with human subjects, and the ensuing data were reported both in aggregate form and by direct quotations, I sought and obtained ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Following the ethics approval, I included a message in the recruitment letters to notify potential participants as such. The ethics approval certificate, ethics course certificate of completion, and participants' recruitment poster are attached in the appendices part of this thesis. Throughout the study, I strictly adhered to all matters relating to non-disclosure of identifiable material by storing participants' personal information and other data separately in secure online files. I kept issues of confidentiality by not including participants' names in reporting the findings of this study. Not only that, efforts were made at eliminating any piece of information that might lead to the

identification of participants. Lastly, in line with the ethical requirements, all data recordings from this study would be stored and retained at the University of Saskatchewan for five years following the submission of the final report.

Summary

In the preceding chapter, I presented the research methodology for this study. The methods were individual interviews, focus group, and interpretation panel. I used open-ended questions as instruments to elicit responses from participants and analyzed resulting data thematically. I followed a pattern of constant comparisons and cross-case analysis along with theoretical frameworks to make meanings of data from the study. I deployed these methods to explore learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students, including their prior educational backgrounds, transitions, and adjustments, access to learning services at the University of Saskatchewan. I chose this qualitative student-centered approach because the beneficiaries of a project stand the best chance to explain how it works, rather than the executors (Stringer, 1999). I used purposive sampling to select individuals who presumably depended solely on university services during their periods of adjusting to studies, and the service providers themselves. Lastly, I addressed issues of trustworthiness through the triangulation of methods and paying close attention to procedural rigors and ethical considerations in collecting and analyzing data for this study.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Data

As described in the previous chapter, I collected these data through individual interviews, focus group, and an interpretation panel. These methods generated sufficient data to explore the learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S). Hence, this chapter presents the demographics of participants, data referencing pattern, and aggregate data gathered in the study. I grouped the data into three segments according to the research questions stated in chapter 2. Thus, aggregate data presented in this study report the following: how first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the U of S described their Nigerian educational background, or their perceptions of previous learning in Nigeria, what issues they faced as they navigate through transitions and adjustments to the U of S, and the supports they had obtained at the university.

Participants Demographics

Below is a brief description of participants for individual interviews, focus group, and interpretation panel.

Participants for Individual Interviews

The interview participants comprised 11 Nigerian graduate students, and five learning support personnel of the university. Ten out of the 11 students identified themselves as first-generation international students from their families to Canada. Also, one person identified himself as a second-generation student because his brother had already graduated from the U of S. All the selected students had completed various levels of education: secondary school diplomas, undergraduate, and post-graduate degrees in Nigeria, and there were at different stages of graduate studies at the U of S by the time of these interviews. Four of the students were females and seven males; four were pursuing PhDs, and the other seven working towards different master's degrees from across colleges at the university. I also selected participants selected from different learning support units of the university, including three employees from the Student Learning Services (SLS), one from Library, and one from the International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC). The students answered questions concerning their past educational experiences in Nigeria, transitional and adjustments experiences at the U of S and access to the university's learning support services, while the support personnel answered questions regarding nature, operation, trends, and challenges related to the provision of these

support programs. In total, responses from the 16 participants provided data for a focus group consideration.

Participants for Focus Group

The focus group aimed at probing for details and extending knowledge from the individual interviews. During initial recruitments, I gave all the interview participants the option of volunteering for a focus group as well. In the end, only six Nigerian graduate students volunteered, five of whom were from the 11 who had participated in individual interviews, and one new student brought fresh perspectives.

Participants for Interpretation Panel

Identified patterns and themes from the interviews and focus group were sorted and merged in some preliminary cross-case analysis to form harmonized data for an interpretation panel. Eight people volunteered for this concluding group discussion structured for interpretative purposes. Amongst the eight participants were four Nigerian graduate students and four learning support personnel of the university, and all but one person, participated in the interviews that produced the original data. The new participant was added to bring more unique ideas and views to existing data. The interpretation panel aimed at analyzing data from the interviews and focus group, and so, increase objectivity in the data analysis.

Data Referencing

References made to quotes from interview transcripts in this thesis use the following format: (IN #1 – 02/07/18), where: “IN” represents interview excerpts, followed by an assigned serial number for each of the sixteen participants, followed by day, month, and year the interview was conducted. References made to excerpts from the focus group transcripts use the following format: (FG #1, 2, 3...6). “FG” represents the focus group excerpt, followed by a serial number assigned to participants or speakers in each line of dialogue. Lastly, references made to excerpts from the interpretation panel use the following format: (IP #1,2,3...8); also followed by a serial number assigned to participants or speakers in each line of dialogue. Moreover, the participants opted to be referenced by self-identified genders using words such as he or she in place of names for confidentiality reasons.

Data from Individual Interviews: Nigerian Graduate Students

Below is the presentation of data from interviews of selected Nigerian graduate students according to the three components of this study: Educational backgrounds, transitions and adjustments, and support services.

Educational Background

In the analysis of narratives from the Nigerian graduate students regarding their educational backgrounds, three overarching themes emerged. These themes related to classroom experiences, condition, school facilities and supports, and curricula and course workloads. Below are data on the three overarching topics, which portray what these individuals perceived as their schooling experiences in Nigeria.

Classroom Experiences

With interview questions, 1 – 4 (Appendix E), data collected about the academic background of these students revealed variations on what constituted classroom learning experiences as per a Nigerian university. Prominent words or expressions used by most of these participants connote large class sizes. The participants described an average class size as ranging from 80 students upwards. Two participants gave the figures as, “...back home (Nigeria), you can have like hundreds in a classroom...it looks like a graduation hall” (IN#2 – 03/07/18), and “In my department, for example, the classes were like 80 students in the class” (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Another student acknowledged the trend as a major problem in Nigerian education. He stated accordingly, “one of the main challenges of learning in Nigeria is that the universities have a huge student audience. Usually, we have a huge hall of students with some sitting and others, standing” (IN#4 – 03/07/18). Overall, most of the participants affirmed that they were taught in large class sizes and did not perceive such conditions as pleasant.

In addition to class sizes, the lecture teaching method was an issue. Several participants explained that due to the large of the number of students in classes, instructors could not effectively adopt other teaching methods except lecture. A participant painted a clear picture of the situation in her narrative as “you can ask questions, not necessarily argue with the professor, but given the large size of the classes, some might not have the opportunity to ask their questions” (IN#4 – 03/07/18). Another participant put it this way,

Student participation was minimal, mainly, to the extent that was determined by the lecturer or the instructor involved; so, some instructors could make it interactive by

getting people to talk, but that would be, maybe, one out of five lecturers. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

These students mostly reported that instructors devised means to handle their massive workloads by adopting a measure of minimum engagement where the lecturer does most, if not all the talking. Instructors resorted to repeating lessons, giving lesson hand-outs, and repetitive test or examination questions. Some participants echoed such experiences in this fashion: “I would not describe it as engaging. It was like, take as many notes as one can, and it was mostly theoretical” (IN#8 – 03/07/18); “so, there is no room for interactive sessions or maybe, very few. I cannot even remember one session where we had a very detailed or an interactive session” (IN#9 – 04/07/18). In a more detailed account, another participant described the prevailing instructional approach as thus,

The style of teaching is more or less like; the teachers have these notes that they have used for maybe, 20 years or God knows how long they have used it. So, that is what they do every year. They do not bring fresh ideas. So, it is like going to class and not learning anything new. That is why most people do not attend classes, especially if they have gotten notes or materials from the previous class; they will see no need for attending classes. The only reason some people will attend classes is when the professor marks attendance. (IN#8 – 03/07/18)

This overused lecture method, according to the participants, made learning dull and unenterprising. However, a few students had experiences for which they believed instructors and lectures were somewhat engaging. For instance, one of the participants who was a medical student in Nigeria claimed that “students’ engagement was superb, but at times, students stressed out because instructors involve them in all the academic and clinical activities” (IN#11 – 04/07/18). However, aggregate accounts from the majority of the participants favoured minimal participation between students and instructors during classroom engagements. This limited interaction was seemingly the standard of classroom engagement in most Nigerian universities. Several participants noted that students go to school to receive information from their instructors; relationships were far from collegial. For example,

It is like a master-servant relationship. We see the teachers as masters...they have control over one as a student; they direct your movement and everything. So, the relationship is

more like an autocratic kind of relationship where one has to obey every rule without making their own decisions. (IN#1 – 02/07/18)

Another participant said, “The teachers were the higher authorities. They looked down on us; infringe on our rights. This huge barrier made learning difficult. The teachers were not easily accessible to guide us when we encountered difficulties while studying” (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

Virtually, all responses to questions on student-instructor relationships had contents of highhandedness, lack of academic freedom, and dictatorial tendencies of faculties when dealing with students. Some participants linked causes of the undesirable student-instructor relationships to factors such as a large number of students assigned to a professor for classroom instruction and supervision, the personality of the instructor, absence of institutional audits, and a reflection of the people’s culture of respect to people in authority. The following excerpts supported those assumptions:

The lecturer to student ratio is not very good – one can say a professor is to maybe, 180 students. Again, it varies with the personality of the professor or lecturer involved: some lecturers were just not approachable, and some were approachable; one of the primary reasons for that is, there has not been a standard check and balance: it’s time to check some of these things in Nigeria – getting feedback from students. (IN#6 – 03/07/18)

The funny part of my home (Nigerian) system is just the fact that it is a selective piece, such that you are close to one lecturer; you are not close to all. It is just like that: some lecturers give such a solid barrier due to probably, cultural aspect, but one has to give them certain kind of respect, and without that, you cannot even come close. (IN#9 – 04/07/18)

In summary, prior classroom experiences according to the participants ranged from large class sizes, predominant lecture teaching methods, repetitive lessons and tests, and instructors’ callousness in dealing with students. So apparently, these features were notably different from what the participants have observed at the U of S.

School Facilities and Student Services

Another significant description of the educational background of the Nigerian student was on the availability or access to school facilities and student support. Interview questions 1 – 4 (Appendix E), helped to elicit responses denoting the state of learning facilities and equipment in the participants’ prior learning experiences. Most prominent remarks about the study or

learning facilities included those of classroom spaces, instructional technology and equipment, and condition of libraries.

Starting with learning spaces, some participants adjudged classroom spaces in their previous universities as small vis-à-vis existing number of students, and such was one of the conditions that made teaching and learning difficult. A participant declared, “We have more students to the space...you have to get to school early enough so that you can sit in front of the class to be able to hear (as) the lecturer speaks or teaches” (IN#1 - 02/07/18). Other participants, however, held different views about available learning amenities in their previous universities. These few considered learning facilities in Nigeria to be up-to-date. For instance, a male participant affirmed that his former university was the premier post-secondary institution in the country and was known for its state-of-the-art facilities (IN#11 – 04/07/18). Overall, there were different accounts of what represented the actual state of learning facilities in Nigerian universities.

Other aspects of school facilities in the experiences of the students were instructional tools and aids. Some participants gave images of much reliance on physical textbooks and traditional libraries. One of them declared:

In terms of textbooks in the library, as at the time I was schooling in Nigeria, the internet had not developed to the level it has now. So, for the most part, one has to go to the library to get books. However, most of the libraries were not well furnished. (IN#4 – 03/07/2018)

Another also intimated that his former university stocks libraries with books, but there was no linkage to the internet (IN#5 – 03/07/18). Because of the lack of internet or online resources, students relied on physical textbooks, and often, buy all required textbooks from out-of-pocket. Lending support to the issue of textbooks and libraries, a female participant recounted her experience as “we rely mostly on our textbooks...Even the libraries, they do not usually have the up-to-date textbooks, so one needs to buy every single textbook and study” (IN#1 – 02/07/18).

On the contrary, other participants declared they had access to online libraries and resources in their former universities, but also hinted that those were not always operational. As one participant put it, “The only thing we had was access to online resources that the University subscribed to, and it was not very effective” (IN#6 – 03/07/18); another said “We had both paper and e-libraries. There was a time the e-library was out of service for many months, but the times

it was operational, it was excellent” (IN#10 – 04/07/18). There were also a few participants who considered the condition of libraries in their Nigerian universities as sublime. One of those few recollected, “I would say that the library played an integral role and many times one would go to the library to get books, and you had people who were willing to support you” (IN#7 – 03/07/18).

Furthermore, participants described the condition of instructional technologies and equipment in their Nigerian universities; notably, those in critical practical or science disciplines portrayed the learning equipment in their previous universities in a bad light. All their statements reflected negative experiences with learning facilities from classroom instructional and communication gadgets to laboratory equipment. Here are a few excerpts from the interviews in that regards, beginning with a male computer studies student who stated,

The public address system (PAS), sometimes, it might exist, but it might not be working.

Even though there is electricity, the PAS may be faulty. So, then, professor or lecturer has to use his natural voice. As such, everybody would not hear well, especially those at the back.

(IN#4 – 03/07/18)

A female computer student also voiced her experience as “We have few computers in the lab...we do not have light (constant power supply), or do not have fuel...Because even if one has a computer in Nigeria, where is the light?” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). According to these participants, basic learning amenities were non-existent, and should any be available; it was usually not in good working condition or outdated. Several participants buttressed, “What we usually have in most classes were basically the whiteboards and the markers, and nothing like projectors and computers” (IN#5 – 03/07/18), and “Most of the equipment we use for practical sessions were old – So, we were taught with old technological equipment” (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

Aside from learning facilities, participants added comments regarding student learning services in their Nigerian universities. The most remarkable descriptions were on the provision of extra-tutorial services for students lagging in some courses or subject areas. This kind of support was received predominantly from senior and brighter colleagues or friends either for free or paid, and usually directly from out-of-pocket. A participant reported the situation accordingly:

Back in Nigeria, if somebody does not know something, the person can talk to a friend to put you through. Besides, there are tutorial services, but for the most part, they are commercial. For example, some senior students who are very good at specific courses

and realize that some other students are having challenges in those courses might decide to teach them and get paid for their services. Moreover, good course mates teach others who are not very good for free. (IN#4 – 03/07/18)

In their separate interviews, several participants reaffirmed having received this kind of support. Some also suggested that these informal supports mirrored the communal life of Nigerians transferred to academic spaces. In other words, learning support services were not institutionalized in universities because they were readily obtainable through personal relationships. Such was the view held by a participant who said,

Well, the communal nature of life back in Nigeria meant that one could get some level of support to an extent. Now, this level of support cannot be defined as institutional, especially since there were no formal structures dedicated to supporting students, but a level of personal interactions as well as communal interventions among students. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

Although it was not clear why Nigerian universities would not provide learning support services, a participant's explanations suggested that large course loads or funding could be the issue. As the participant expressed, "for the support services, we have minimal of that as well. Because students are there looking for how to cope with their courses or maybe, they are finding it hard to pay their tuition." (IN#2 – 03/07/18)

Overall, overarching themes about learning facilities and support in the participants' Nigerian experiences displayed in imageries such as learning spaces or classrooms, libraries, state of instructional technology and equipment, and access to learning supports.

Curriculum and Course Workloads

As stated earlier, interview questions 1 – 4 (Appendix E) sought to elicit responses identifying the educational background of the participants. Aggregate data indicated the nature of the curriculum and course workloads as another feature of the participants' past education. Several participants considered their previous universities' syllabi as broad, vague, and rigid. Virtually, all the participants recounted that too many classes or courses than necessary fused into programs, and most of those courses were more academic than practical. For instance, in describing her lessons, a computer student reported: "we do much academic work in Nigeria, but those academic works do not connect to physical experience" (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Also, another participant concurred,

Concerning hands-on, it lacks when it comes to the university system in Nigeria. So, most lecturers, all they do is teach the theory most of the time. So, let us take computer science, for example, it is not just enough to learn theory, you do hands-on in terms of the programming, and require computer systems. (IN#4 – 03/07/18)

Also, a participant who studied engineering commented on volume, ambiguity, and rigidity of the Nigerian curriculum. He emphasized:

You know the number of classes to plan for or do, but in Nigeria, we do not have that. We take everything, and do not have a chance or opportunity to say I do not want to do this or that – you have to do everything. (IN#6 – 03/07/18)

Interestingly, this engineering student viewed the rigid and ambitious curriculum as positive, because of its perceived contributions in his adjustment to learning in Canada. He reported, “we generally talked about basic electrical engineering principles which cut across all fields in electrical engineering. So, that gave a good background to fit into any electrical engineering field here in Canada” (IN#6 – 03/07/18). On the other hand, one of the participants who was a medical student would not count the enormous coursework loads as an advantage, arguing that there was no corresponding learning supports to do those courses in most Nigerian universities. (IN#11 – 04/07/18)

Beside course workloads, participants highlighted pictures of their former universities in the aspects of research orientations. Responses from the participants about the volume, depth, and quality of academic writing and research were indicative of more teaching than research in their former universities. Most of the participants, including those with previous post-graduate degrees from Nigeria, reported that a substantial amount of classroom activities or course works, and programs conspicuously depicted evidence of passive learning than intensive research. As this participant elaborated,

You are not encouraged to write papers as is the case here (U of S) both at the undergraduate and the graduate level. Even those students that might be research-driven, for lack of resources they might not be able to do well because you need tools and materials. For example, when writing papers, you need to ground the paper in the previous literature. Most of the academic papers are bought; in Nigeria, I do not think most universities subscribe to journals. Also, there is limited research and funding to

encourage students to engage in research. Even though there are people doing research, I do think most of the professors and lecturers do more of teaching. (IN#4 – 03/07/18)

Another participant corroborated, “we never wrote individual papers, but I know that there was one class that we had group works (assignments) to do” (IN#8 – 03/07/18).

Other participants made statements to typify the vast teaching cultures and contexts of their prior universities. Remarks like “there (Nigeria), you take in what your teacher gives you. You are not even sure if it is up to date curriculum, and who are you to question it? If you question it, you are ready to fail” (IN#9 – 04/07/18), and “the basic thing was transmission...a hierarchical structure...whoever was doing the teaching basically had to transmit whatever he knew to students who were all too satisfied just to receive such knowledge in a sender-receiver model” (IN#7 – 03/07/18) were recurrent in all the interviews.

Several participants felt the official teaching stance of their former universities made teaching and learning, and critical reasoning less appealing. These participants reported that the lesser emphasis on research caused the unchecked reliance on lecture teaching methods and contributed immensely in suppressing creativity in students. For instance, when asked of his perspectives about the quality of teaching and research in his former university, a participant reported “Back home (Nigeria), it is not critical: they do not engage your cognitive domain. They want to see answers, but not necessarily how you question what you answered” (IN#10 – 04/07/18). Another participant made a similar assertion on comparing her Nigerian and Canadian learning experiences. She said, “But back home (Nigeria), you can even plagiarize someone without knowing it, because the way they (instructors) just want it, is ‘Oh, I have given this assignment, then return it to me’” (IN#2 – 03/07/18). Aside from these two individuals, the most remarkable response to the same question was from a participant who stated:

If I have my way, I will go to the library and pull back my thesis because, when I remember those things that I kept in there, it is disgraceful; it is funny because, even our lecturers fall victims. So, if the lecturers plagiarize, how do you guide the student? So, we do not have a system that helps guide both the student and the lecturer to understand the concept of plagiarism. (IN#9 – 04/07/18)

Overall, aggregate comments created images of universities with dominant teaching orientations and apparent minimal interest or support for students doing research.

Summary of the Participants' Perceived Educational Background

The participants' portrayals of their prior schoolings from Nigeria embedded in comments suggesting kinds of classroom experiences like class sizes, instructors' teaching styles and methods, and instructor or supervisor-student relationships. Other aspects were related to school facilities and learning support programs. These individuals described their former school facilities and student learning supports in the form of learning spaces and libraries, instructional technologies and equipment, and student learning support services. Lastly, matters relating to curriculum and course workloads formed the other piece of the participants' previous learning context. They described their curriculum and course works as broad, depth in theory or less practical, and a sort that placed much emphasis on teaching than research.

Transitions and Adjustments

This section comprised the transitioning and adjustment experiences of the participants, as they encounter learning at the U of S. Interview questions 5 – 9 (Appendix E), sought to elicit responses that picture the participants' earliest and continuing learning experiences as they navigated transitions at the university. Common themes from the interviews were grouped in overarching topics, namely: Motivations for the choice of the University of Saskatchewan as a place of study and participants' perception about the quality of teaching and learning at the University of Saskatchewan. Other headings highlighted under this section include the participants' arrival, settlement, and economic pressures, teaching and learning (academic) and communication issues, and coping strategies at the U of S.

The Participants' Motivations for Choosing the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) as Their Place of Study

Before delving into core transitional and adjustment experiences of the participants, a preliminary question was asked to understand why these individuals choose to study at the U of S. See interview question 5 (Appendix E). The question sought to identify the driving factors for their coming to study at the U of S amidst other universities in Canada, and the world. Below is the aggregate data representing rationales for their choices.

Some participants disclosed that they had chosen to study at the U of S to update their career skills and gain international experience. For instance, one of the participants reported, "Well, I want to have international experience; I want to compete with international students. Because in Nigeria, one might think you are an expert until when you go out and meet other

people” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Other participants selected the University because of the perceived availability of desired programs and supervisors in prospective research areas. Several participants concurred with this assertion with the following quotations: “I got the opportunity to do research under my present supervisor, and it was an opportunity of a lifetime, that’s just it” (IN#6 – 03/07/18); “The U of S had an excellent program in New Media and Digital Humanities; that was a major attraction. I saw that somebody was willing to work with me in that area of specialization” (IN#7 – 03/07/18); “While searching for schools, U of S caught my eyes because it combines population health with epidemiology. I was also intrigued by the pedigree of the faculty members, especially my present supervisor” (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

In addition to the above factors, the participants based their choices on the availability of perceived better learning opportunities. Better opportunities in the words of this cohorts, indicated comparatively lower tuitions, availability of better school facilities, funding, and opportunities for experiential learning. For instance, one of the participants explained, “Well, I picked the U of S, first of all, because of the low tuition...to develop better in terms of the facilities, textbooks, and materials that can make you picture yourself in that situation” (IN#2 – 03/07/18). Moreover, another participant corroborated:

My main reason for applying to the University of Saskatchewan was because of fees – Saskatchewan offered comparatively one of the cheapest tuitions that one can take; I got full funding from the University of Saskatchewan which finally made me decide that it was the place for me. (IN#5 – 03/07/18)

However, other participants professed that they had chosen to study at the U of S because of mere referrals from family members and related factors. A female participant narrated how protracted workers’ strikes in her former university coincided with her family’s decision to move to Canada, and so, she transferred to the U of S. She articulated, “my family moved here (Saskatchewan, Canada). So, there was this strike action that lasted about a year, and so that was why I transferred here” (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Also, another participant added, “The first reason was that of my brother, he convinced me to come here” (IN#10 – 04/07/18).

These participants made choices to study at the U of S because of reasons such as self-improvement, international exposure, and perceived availability of desired programs and faculty. Other factors were the perceived availability of better educational opportunities like low tuition, funding, and quality learning experience, and family influences.

The Participants' Perceptions about Quality of Teaching and Learning at the U of S

To provide context to what the participants considered as their transitioning and adjustment difficulties, questions 5 and 6 of the interview questions (See Appendix E) also sought to elicit responses that would describe their initial and perhaps, continuing experiences and perceptions to the nature or quality of instruction at the University of Saskatchewan. I reasoned that such information helped to identify the differences between the participants' Nigerian experiences and present studies. Below is a presentation of data from the participants' accounts of their learning experiences at the U of S.

Participants reported that there is greater collaboration between students and instructors at the University of Saskatchewan. This collaboration was evident in the manner instructors, or supervisors teach, interact, guide, and solicit student involvement and participation in various stages and forms of instructions and projects. Virtually, all the participants saw learning at the U of S as, unlike their previous Nigerian experiences. They appraised the U of S milieu as developmental in that there was the promotion of better research competence, collegiality, and opportunities for self-enhancement. Responding to questions on their learning experiences, participants used images of satisfactory student engagement, the zero tolerance for victimization, and the provision of useful feedback from instructors to describe their experiences. Some participants recounted their experiences in the following quotations: "I think what they do here in the University of Saskatchewan is more engaging. You interact more, research more, so it gives the opportunity to develop oneself as an individual" (IN#2 – 03/07/18); "I would say they are engaging...you are a bit freer. That is if you talk to them (instructors), they will respond, and you will not be victimized" (IN#3 – 03/07/18), and "Giving feedback even when you think a student is wrong is the real deal here" (IN#9 – 04/07/18).

Other participants viewed collaboration through instructors' openness and sincere commitment to students' success. This cohort stated that most professors at the U of S demonstrated a genuine passion for student learning and were usually open and accessible to students. A male Ph.D. student acknowledged, "What stood out for me here, is the fact that professors want you to learn, and they are happy that you come to ask questions" (IN#9 – 04/07/18), and a female participant supported him with this remark "...You can walk up to a lecturer and say anything you want to say or express your mind the way you feel" (IN#3 –

03/07/18). The latter also backed up her claim with the perceived advantage of learning in such an interactive environment, as she asserted:

Each student gives a presentation, so, it is like students are teaching students, and the lecturer is the guide. You are being groomed to real-life experience because, in the real world, you have to stand and defend yourself. (IN#3 – 03/07/18)

Other participants used collegiality and academic freedom to buttress what seemed like their preference for the U of S model of classroom instruction and student-instructor relationship. A participant stated that “the class is interactive...there’s even freedom of asking questions and disagreeing with your supervisor” (IN#6 – 03/07/18). Another Ph.D. student coined it differently as, “the faculties are easily accessible...my teachers in the U of S see me as their working partner. Hence, they accord me respect as a student” (IN#11 – 04/07/18). In fact, in all responses related to how these participants experienced teaching and learning at the U of S, hardly anyone failed to make comments suggesting collegiality, academic freedom, and satisfaction in the quality of classroom instruction and activities witnessed at the U of S.

Besides, there were remarks on experiential learning and volume of research. Participants observed a high level of expected graduate writing and research at the U of S. Some of these participants had already reckoned the top research and pragmatic learning orientation of the university as a very alien experience as compared to their prior education. This observation embodied in refrains denoting the amount and quality of assignments, projects, and hands-on knowledge and skills seen at the university. A participant observed that at the “U of S... you do all your research yourself; the aspect of no plagiarism... helps one to do well in assignments” (IN#2 – 03/07/18). Another participant reechoed the same remark as “Here (U of S). You have to do much research and practical” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). One more different participant supported the same idea with an emphasis on experiential learning as,

I like the fact that the university here is encouraging graduate students to learn the art of teaching by providing teaching fellowships and scholarships, so, when you graduate and go into the academic industry, with this hands-on experience, you can easily fit into the new university environment you find yourself. (IN#4 – 03/07/18)

Aside from comments on research and pragmatic curriculum, participants expressed their views on the state of learning facilities at the U of S. They acknowledged available learning facilities as adequate and expressed satisfaction with the quality of instructional technology at

the university. Most frequently cited facilities for participants were computers and the internet, which they indicated gave easy access to online articles, and the provision of office spaces for meaningful and uninterrupted studies. For instance, relishing her current learning experiences, a computer student remarked “As a graduate student, I have my own office, I have my computer, and I have internet” (IN#3 – 03/07/18), and another participant corroborated, “first, I noticed that here (U of S), it was much practical use of the computers. But back in Nigeria, I did not use computers a lot – it was more of taking notes manually” (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Other participants recounted, “In terms of academic materials and resources, we have a lot online... I am okay because I have access to journals” (IN#4 – 03/07/18), and “They (U of S) teach with projectors and computers in the class” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Remarkably, in all the separate interviews, there were no contrary views to what and how participants perceive the state of facilities at the U of S.

Furthermore, participants made observations about curricula, duration of lectures, and the diversity in the U of S classrooms. Participants noted that programs at the U of S offered students with opportunities to choose courses or programs freely. That way, students were not mandated to hold onto courses or classes when the odds of passing was against them. One of the participants viewed such flexibility as beneficial to students studying in Canada. As he clearly stated that “Here (U of S), students have the opportunity of dropping a course in which they are not doing well; that is something I would say favours the student when it comes to the Canadian system” (IN#4 – 03/07/18). Another participant remarked that lectures are shorter at the U of S than his former university. This individual did not mention the exact duration of lectures in his previous Nigerian school but argued that shorter classes help students gain optimally. He reported that “length of lectures at the U of S is short, and you gain maximally” (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

Participants also considered diversity in U of S classrooms as noteworthy. They underscored such a development as helpful to the quality of instruction at the institution. For instance, a participant remarked that at the U of S, “classes comprise a mix of international students from different backgrounds, ...students are exposed to global perspectives in learning” (IN#11 – 04/07/18). In general, comments on subjects like collaborations between instructors and students, quality of instruction and research, amenities, curriculum, and diversity in classroom indicated that these participants had witnessed schooling differently at the U of S.

Arrival, Settlement, and Economic Pressures

As in every human endeavour, arrival, settlement, and economic challenges of participants differ significantly. Their narratives showed variations in transition and adjustment experiences such as were peculiar to each person's level of study, exposure, time of arrival, and resources at the beginning of their studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Overall, there were notable features which depicted what arrival pressures these participants had faced, and that the most significant were problems related to the visa delays and late arrival. Some participants recollected that delays in securing study visas had made it challenging to make gradual adjustments to learning at the U of S. A master's degree student traced his problems to an arrival period. He narrated "we had visas approved very close to resumption – so, it was tedious trying to prepare and get your flight ticket and all that...I was not fully settled when the program started" (IN#5 – 03/07/18).

Furthermore, participants alleged that late comings cost them opportunities to attend newcomer info events and learn in time about the workings of their programs, colleges, and the university. One participant reported, "for the ISSAC orientations; I did not attend...you know, when coming into a new system, you have to settle down at that point" (IN#5 – 03/07/18). Another participant added, "I did not participate... I started in January; there was no orientation for January students" (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Aggregate comments suggested that their late arrivals had robbed these individuals the opportunities to obtain helpful settlement information for quick transitions into their studies. Some of these students indicated that it took a long time to figure out how the university or colleges operated, and even to understand basics like course selection. This participant explained, "I did not know where the library was until we got to the middle of the first term (Fall), I just discovered the library and I went there for the first time and studied" (IN#5 – 03/07/18). Such was also the situation another participant found himself in, and he identified it as a challenge to his transition. The latter recounted:

There are different course offerings for different sessions, and I did not know that when I arrived here. So, it means a graduate student can spend a whole lot of time on their program because a particular course they want and need to be successful in their program is not offered in a year; they have to wait till when it is offered. But that is not the problem. The problem was that I did not know that some courses existed. So, that was a major challenge. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

In addition to lateness and related settlement issues, was the impact that funding had on some participants in their transitions to the U of S. Statements suggested that participants, especially those without bursaries or research grants, faced tremendous financial difficulties throughout their studies. One of the participants reported,

...the way I've been pressured in the past three weeks now, trying to look for the cheapest daycare for my daughter, it is really annoying because I don't even know how I'm going to go about the funds...they should provide more ways that can help self-funded students, and reduce this pressure that can affect our academic performance.

(IN#2 – 03/07/18)

A male master's degree student also buttressed that insufficient funding was his major setback. As he reminisced, "if the school had probably guaranteed the full-funding into the second year, most students would have finished their projects much faster than what obtains" (IN#5 – 03/07/18). Several participants' comments resonated on themes of arrival, settlement, and economic difficulties during transitions.

However, a few participants announced that they had come on time and had accessed the required resources and supports; these students did not experience many financial problems. Perhaps, this group came better prepared than the others. For instance, a participant said, "For me, it has been enlightening, livening, challenging..." (IN#10 – 04/07/18). Moreover, further probing into this participant's transition challenges, yielded the following answer: "It was academic, if it were financial, that would not have been a big deal." This participant's situation suggests that these students may have had different individual experiences as they navigated transitions at the U of S. The following section is a presentation of data on the teaching and learning (academic) transitional experiences of the participants.

Teaching and Learning (Academic) and Communication Issues

The participants encountered some academic and communication problems during transitions, and these issues were relative to their prior levels of study, exposure, and social skills. Every participant reported at least one significant academic or learning struggle at the U of S. Chief among these was the difficulty of switching to an online or electronic learning environment. Some of the participants recalled that prior education had not prepared them for a sophisticated learning environment. They narrated how difficult it had been managing such changes. As one participant noted, "It was very difficult for me to access the library online or to

get access to materials, to get access to documents because, of course, I did not know how to do all those” (IN#1 – 02/07/18). Other participants reported, “When I came here, everything was on the computer” (IN#10 – 04/07/18);

Coming from the Nigerian context where the online environment was not very active, to an environment where everything was online, I seemed a bit lost at the beginning. I had to ask questions, and I had to adjust in a very difficult way. I was used to talking to people, and now, I had to trust technology. (IN#7 – 03/07/2018)

Participants recounted adjusting to the expected graduate-level writing and research in Canada. They blamed their past education for present research struggles. For instance, a female participant averred, “I still need help, based on the fact that...back home (Nigeria), research was not so strong; how to research and write was not so strong” (IN#1 – 02/07/18). Because of weak research and graduate writing proficiencies, this participant had struggled through the early stages of her studies. She added, “when I came over here, I noticed that...I was always falling behind in assignments and papers because of my writing methods.” When responding to questions on their transitions and adjustment experiences, several participants made similar responses, including: “Yeah, initially it was tough...the annotations that were used in class and a lot of other things, looked a little bit different from what I used to know back there (Nigeria)” (IN#5 – 03/07/18); “It was manual, but here (U of S), it is electronic...So, I struggled with typing, research, referencing, and writing. So, those were the big challenges for me – transitioning to Canada” (IN#8 – 03/07/18).

Other participants noted the shift from hitherto “transmission” (lecture) methods to a setting that required constant critical reasoning and active participation in classes. A participant presented this concern in some comparative way, “That critical reasoning, we don’t have it because we are just on the receiving end back home (Nigeria), but coming here (Canada)...:you have to criticize...to evaluate, you have to do your work from the basis” (IN#1 - 02/07/18). Also, another participant reiterated the same problem elaborately as,

Back home (Nigeria), it is not critical: they do not engage your cognitive domain. They want to see answers, but not necessarily how you questioned what you have answered. So, they want to see how one can reproduce what they gave you, which is very bad; which is a massive challenge for me here (Canada). Because every time, to everything I

did, they (U of S instructors) will try to know why: ‘Did you think through?’ ‘How can you translate this into something else?’ It is a hassle for me. (IN#10 – 04/07/18)

Furthermore, participants testified that acquired values from their prior educations contrasted with the practice of academic freedom and collegiality prevalent at the U of S. They studied in environments where academic freedom was non-existent or at best, censored. A male participant recalled his prior classroom as, “Well, you had freedom of speech, but freedom after the speech, you were not guaranteed” (IN#10 – 04/07/18). For greater emphasis, he asked rhetorically, “How can you be free when the lecturer is like a god in the class?” Such was a sample of descriptions showing the kind of academic climate these participants passed through, and a refrain maintained by not less than 90% of them in their separate interviews. Participants noted that it was usually difficult to handle prevailing collegial and collaborative teaching and learning culture of the U of S because such was not the norm in their previous universities. For example, a participant gave the following justification for not meeting regularly with her supervisor, “back home in Nigeria, we usually see our lecturers as mini-gods over us...because...that experience we have from home, we still have that kind of restrictions when we come here (U of S)” (IN#1 – 02/07/18).

Finally, some participants reported communication problems during adjustments to U of S classrooms. All the participants learned the English language in Nigeria. However, a few had difficulties understanding the Canadian English accent at the beginning of their studies. Two participants mentioned their inability to understand speeches from instructors and course mates during class discussions. As they reported separately, “I have to cope with their intonation too; they are trying to cope with my own. I always sit in the front aisle; I keep telling them that I do not understand what you are saying” (IN#3 – 03/07/18), and “I think the mode of communication, the language, and the accent: it took me some time to adjust and be able to understand fully what the teacher is saying in class” (IN#6 – 03/07/18). The former further insinuated that her colleagues often misconstrued her accent in classes, as she recounted,

All I was doing is to write a project for each course...part of it is to stand and defend it before the lecturer and the class. So, you will be rated by the way you defended it. At times, they check your accent too! (IN#3 – 03/07/18)

This participant also explained that some instructors had not made learning easy by having high communication expectations from international students. She voiced her view that “the lecturer

assumed that everybody was on the same level...not knowing that there were some people from different background” and blamed international students for not speaking up about their communication difficulties. She stressed some international students have “too much respect, and do not know how to call a lecturer’s attention or say I do not understand, rather, we (international students) will be dying in silence” (IN#3 – 03/07/18).

In summary, the participants’ teaching and learning, and communication struggles varied tremendously, and they characterized their experiences as dealing with shifts to an innovative learning environment. Other experiences included dealing with higher-level graduate writing and research, coping with instructional methods that required active participation and metacognitive skills, adapting to a collegial culture, and managing communication challenges.

Coping Strategies of the Participants

Interview question number 8 (Appendix E) sought to elicit responses on how these students dealt with their perceived transitioning struggles. Aggregate remarks indicated that they had resorted to numerous strategies to adapt correctly to the demands of the new learning environment. These strategies included self-effort, supports from colleagues and course mates, guides from supervisors, and access to university workshops and other resources.

Topmost on the list of these survival strategies was self-effort. Through online tools like YouTube videos, some participants sorted out their problems, especially in issues related to graduate-level writing and research. After rushing into and almost failing an introductory course, a master’s degree student recollected, “...I finally settled down and decided I was going to dedicate a lot more time to my studies” (IN#5 – 03/07/18). Another participant reported, “...I made use of the software. In terms of references, mostly, it was self-help: I watched many videos; there is pretty much everything one can find on YouTube” (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Whereas, a Ph.D. student who was a medical doctor declared, “Maybe, because of my field: it is more of independent learning. So, I do not have to depend heavily on most of the facilities. I see my supervisor when it is extremely important to do so” (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

Next to individual self-efforts were mentorships or peer supports from colleagues or course mates. Participants reported receiving help from more informed colleagues to solve their problems. These supports came in the form of personal coaching and group studies. Describing her coping tactics, a female student averred, “I had to meet other people for help” (IN#2 – 03/07/18). Other students reinforced the same fact with expressions denoting utmost satisfaction

from both the mentors and mentees. For instance, a Ph.D. student narrated, “The way I coped was to talk to other graduate students who had been here before me, and quite a few of them were available and happy to help” (IN#7 – 03/07/18). Other participants recounted, “I was so favoured to have friends: most of them have studied here, and they knew those things; they were helpful, they taught me” (IN#10 – 04/07/18); “I had very good classmates... We did much studying together – we shared many ideas. I also had a very good senior colleague who supplied us with the information” (IN#5 – 03/07/18).

Apart from fellow students, supervisors were another source of tremendous support to these participants. Several participants stated that instructors or supervisors were instrumental in overcoming their initial adjustment challenges and subsequent successes. According to some participants, supervisors provided timely information about university resources and were always accessible and willing to offer useful study tips and advice. Some participants showered encomiums on their supervisors with words like:

One of the persons that played a key role in my transition is my supervisor. I think, if there is going to be anyone who will succeed in graduate studies, the professor or supervisor has a very significant role to play. So, sometimes, my supervisor sends me links to some of the available workshops to help my writing. (IN#9 – 04/07/18)
“Yeah, my supervisor is one of the best supervisors in the world! I could talk to my prof any time” (IN#10 – 04/07/18); “Well, my experience, contrary to some of my colleagues, has been fantastic. I have a good working relationship with my supervisor, and he has been helpful” (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

Participants received support from the university administered workshops and resources. Most of these workshops and resources were in the form of drop-in programs, group coaching, info sessions, and orientation events. Several participants noted they received tutoring in various subjects, including study, reading, writing, math, and research skills, and use of online and library tools. For instance, one participant reported, “I had to meet other people for help...and attend workshops on how to quote” (IN#2 – 03/07/18). These narratives indicated that participants adopted strategies like self-effort, supports from peers and instructors or supervisors, and access to university workshops and resources to deal with initial and continuing adjustment challenges.

Summary of the Participants' Transition and Adjustment Experiences at the U of S

First, this section on transitioning and adjustments comprised data on the motivations underlying the participants' choices to study at the U of S, followed by the participants' perception of the quality of teaching and learning at the university, and then, the arrival, settlement, and economic pressures the participants encountered at the beginning of their studies. Also presented were data on the participants' teaching and learning (academic) and communication challenges and their coping strategies at the university.

Student Learning Services and Programs

All 11 student-participants answered questions relating to learning support services obtained during transitioning and adjustments to the U of S, while five support-personnel-participants gave insights about existing services and trends in access to support from their various units. Therefore, this section started with data from the student participants. Interview questions 10 – 16 (Appendix E) sought to elicit responses regarding perceived awareness and access, efficacy, and reservations to support programs and services. The second part presented data from support personnel.

Students' Perspectives

The participants used refrains suggesting their sources of awareness to support services and programs, forms and effects of these supports to their transitions, and reservations and recommendations to describe learning support services. Below is a presentation of data from students' perspectives of learning support services and programs at the U of S.

Sources of Awareness

Some participants directly reported that they were unaware of existing learning support services at the university, and they blamed lateness and other initial settlement pressures for their ignorance. However, a few participants gained knowledge of available services through the university's website, friends and family networks, college or departmental secretaries, and supervisor's referrals. Explicitly, two participants acknowledged they received information about support services on the university's PAWS newsletters and emails, and library website. They voiced their sources as, "Through the help of PAWS, I saw notifications about workshops and...announcements from the library workshops as well" (IN#5 – 03/07/18); "Yeah, I get to know from the PAWS, like the adverts from the university. Sometimes, they even send it like personal emails" (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

Two other participants cited their sources as departmental secretaries: “The department does very well in terms of disseminating information via email - I think the department is very good when it comes to dissemination of information in general” (IN#4 – 03/07/18) and “From the department, through the departmental secretary who would send regular emails” (IN#7 – 03/07/18). An exception was a participant who had gained knowledge of available services from her relative (IN#3 – 03/07/18); the rest became aware of programs through their various supervisors or academic advisors. They declared, “if I have issues on how to get access to anything...I ask my supervisor” (IN#3 – 03/07/18); “My academic advisor would refer me” (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Perhaps, participants who knew about available supports were the early comers or individuals who merely knew to seek help over difficult situations. Whatever the case, participants knew about support services through a variety of sources, and perhaps, at different periods or stages of their studies.

Forms and Effects of Services and Programs

Several participants attested to receiving supports like study, reading, and writing workshops, drop-in programs, newcomer orientation and info sessions from individuals and support units, including professors or supervisors, departments or colleges, the university library, Student Learning Services (SLS), and International Students and Study Abroad Center (ISSAC). Amongst these sources, participants received the most exceptional support from the SLS and library units. They confirmed to have received supports like library series, and SLS workshops and seminars. Excerpts like “...the workshops, the seminars, the graduate writing workshops here, have been so much help to me” (IN#1 – 02/07/18), and “I’ve been to this one in the Library where they can help you check your stuff, to know how to reference” (IN#2 – 03/07/18) were common themes in all interviews. Some participants were particular about what program had served them the most, like this individual who reported, “I attended some of the peer mentorship workshops when I came here newly, and thesis writing and English” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Another participant added, “Yeah, the one that has been very instrumental is the plagiarism workshops I attended; it just made a whole lot of difference” (IN#6 – 03/07/18). Moreover, two Ph.D. students plainly emphasized which and why these support programs were critical to their successes. Their statements read:

Student learning service programs and workshops are usually very helpful in learning more about grammar and punctuation, writing and research, and topic thesis. I think most

of them were satisfactory and helped me learn better. Coming from an environment in which those opportunities were not always available, I would say those services could potentially be the game-changer, especially in the sense that they give a strong motivation for success. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

Take, for instance, I attended workshops on the citation, referencing, plagiarism, and I even attended one that tells about where one can get financial support...one of the workshops I appreciate... is the aspect of plagiarism. Because I never knew anything, and writing is not what I could do without. So, it was interesting to learn that, even my work, if I do not cite it, I have plagiarized it. That was eye-opening at the time. (IN#9 – 04/07/18)

Aside from SLS and library programs, other notable supports came from professors and university online resources. A male participant recalled how a professor in his college held a yearly workshop to train new students on how to use some online tools for writing papers (IN#4 – 03/07/18). He also added, “the best resource is the free access to academic material online. I do not have to pay for any paper I need for my research.” All the above narratives indicated that participants gained significantly from a vast array of supports available on campus. However, participants equally expressed misgivings about the effectiveness of these services. The following section is a presentation of data on those reservations and general suggestions from the participants.

Participants’ Reservations over Learning Support programs, and Recommendations

In as much as participants reported having gotten satisfaction from most services simultaneously, a few expressed concerns over some aspects of supports. For any problem highlighted by a participant, a follow-up question was posed to find solutions or recommendations to the situation. These reservations encompassed issues of awareness or publicity, contents, mode of delivery, or organizations of these support services. Below is a fuller presentation of these issues.

Issues of awareness or publicity. Participants alleged that many new students are not aware of existing learning supports. Some of the participants reported they were unaware of most learning supports on campus until participating in this study, and they blamed their ignorance on inadequate publicity. For instance, a participant stated,

Well, I do not know – I am just new. I do not know most of the available support, but I think there are advisory services available; those advisory services should be made known to the students so that they can use it. Some of them are just there, and nobody is using it because students are not aware (of them). Awareness should be created for those services. (IN#3 – 03/07/18)

Other participants acknowledged the University’s International Students and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC) as very strategic in providing information to new international students. They asserted that ISSAC helped to educate them about existing services, but aggregate remarks suggested ISSAC’s functions were primarily on arrival and settlement supports. Participants made little references to ISSAC regarding teaching and learning (academic) supports. Some of them recalled, “I would say that ISSAC was very helpful in my settling down... ISSAC... brought Scotia Bank which helped to open accounts for students, especially international students that are just coming in” (IN#5 – 03/07/18); “They gave us the opportunity to stay in a hotel on our first day, and encouraged various countries to come together as a community” (IN#4 – 03/07/18).

However, several participants gave suggestions on how to promote support services effectively. They suggested that learning support units should keep program ads like emails and newsletters precise and straightforward, and chiefly pass through College or Department secretaries to get messages across to graduate students. These recommendations read:

...if they put everything in one email containing all those library series. I do not think we would appreciate it. Well, they should contact graduate secretaries, that is all. Graduate secretaries will always reach us...it could be also be included in the package they gave us when we come. (IN#10 – 04/07/18)

The second option was to have individual departments or colleges provide academic supports directly to their new students. As this participant noted, “Each department should try as much as possible to do, in terms of orientation, supports, educational support for international students; I think it should be more local than the general” (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

In summary, participants felt there were still some unknown programs, and solicited more considerable publicity for existing learning support services.

Perceived lack of depth and focus in programs. Participants also expressed doubts on the effectiveness of some services based on what they identified as the general contents of

programs or workshops. Participants pointed out this problem with words like general, non-detailed, and non-specific programs. They used those terms to convey dissatisfactions with some learning support workshops and programs. They built those allegations on perceived vagueness of some workshops towards areas of need or research focus. These individuals presumed that most workshops had not targeted specific audiences. Notable among those narratives was this statement from an engineering student:

Yeah, there are a couple of workshops that have been helpful. The only challenge with that is, they are general workshops. They are not streamlined to meet some specific needs. For, example, they are not tailor-made to my research area...it would be suitable for departments to have something like that to be streamlined down to departmental because what might be relevant to someone in mechanical might not be relevant to someone in electrical...but if we can streamline it down to maybe, departments, each department has its peculiarities. (IN#6 – 03/07/18)

Another participant added, “Though, after the workshop, they send slides. The slides are not detailed. They are not like notes. If you have not taken notes during the workshops, it will be hard to remember” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). A male Ph.D. English student also supported the idea of administering supports through the departments, as he recollected,

At the beginning of every session late in August to early September, you have orientation activities for every graduate student. The beautiful thing about it is that the department gets the university support for this orientation. So, you see somebody from the library come to talk about the resources one can get as a graduate in English; it means the resources and facilities available at the university were made known to people in the department. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

Altogether, these participants’ explanations denoted perceived lack of satisfaction in the depth and organization of learning workshops. Thus, they suggested that programs should be specific and possibly, administered to graduate students through departments or colleges.

Perceived neglect of students’ peculiarities in designing and administering programs. Participants also expressed concerns that learning support programs had not adequately addressed the academic needs of students with no prior Canadian foundation. They stressed that some students’ past education had had no resemblance to the Canadian context, and they had doubted the effectiveness of programs against the multiplicity of students’

demographics. When responding to questions on perceived neglect of students' differences in administering support programs, some participants suggested that learning service personnel had not adequately surveyed students' needs to know what might be required by international students to make smoother transitions to studying in Canada. A female participant declared "I feel that they (workshops) were not tailored to meet my needs, because these (service personnel) are people that have probably, lived here all their lives or most of their lives" (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Her remarks seemed to suggest that support programs were not appropriate because service providers had not understood international students enough to meet their needs. Her standpoint resonated with another student's comment. Referring to Library and SLS workshops or programs, a Ph.D. student stated,

I believe the university should do more to understand what the students need, rather than just coming up with what they think they need. What they think the student needs might not be precisely what the student needs. So, they need to find what really, especially since it is a university with students from different backgrounds. What one thinks is a severe issue for me is not my problem. Take, for instance, some of the things they organize to help students are gearing towards more Caucasians, and most of the immigrants are not interested in them. (IN#9 – 04/07/18)

Participants pointed to areas of preferred supports concerning graduate-level writing. They used buzzwords like Canadian style of writing and plagiarism to describe their areas of interest. A participant made the following observation:

When I got here, I saw there was an institutional commitment to the need to avoid plagiarism, that institutional commitment might have been missing back home (Nigeria)." Here at the U of S, it is part of the core syllabus. The core syllabus is like a contract paper between the instructor and the student; instructors commit themselves to it, and part of the content of the syllabus is a section on the need to avoid plagiarism. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

Other participants typified needs or desired supports in the form of recommendations for providing useful supports to international students. One person advised, "...maybe a week course that can teach students, especially international students that have just come here (U of S). So, they can take it as a mandatory course on how to understand the plagiarism concepts...how to understand writing" (IN#2 – 03/07/18), and another added,

...if there can be a way of meeting international students' needs of writing mostly. It is not as if we do not know how to write, but I am sure the Canadian way of writing or the way of writing here (U of S), is different from ours. So, if there can be workshops that can address that need for international students, it is going to go a long way to improve our academic experiences here. (IN#1 – 02/07/18)

Furthermore, participants suggested that support units should place more emphasis on supervisor-student relationships for new students. Underlying that recommendation were the perceived differences in the participants' Nigerian and Canadian (U of S) schoolings, mainly, as per social transactions. Some participants held the notion that supervisors had played critical roles in graduate students' overall success. A master's degree student stated,

Much emphasis should be made on supervisor-student relationship because the supervisor determines many things for students researching at the graduate level. Because we came with a particular orientation on how to relate with a supervisor and then, coming here (U of S), it is a different ball game. Sometimes, one can objectively and respectfully not agree with a supervisor; I think it gives room for more innovations and creativity, but where we came from, whatever the supervisor says is final, and people should know that is not okay. (IN#6 – 03/07/18)

A Ph.D. student reiterated a similar view, "I think supervisors are crucial, and in fact, they are just like the middle man between the university and the student; I hope the university can focus or pay attention to supervisor-student relationships" (IN#9 – 04/07/18).

Aside from comments on student-supervisor relationships, other participants encouraged the university to work towards eliminating any traces of prejudice in all facets of its support trajectory – program design to delivery. Participants recommended an environment that promotes an understanding of different cultures and encourages every student to come forward for assistance, boldly. These participants had the consideration that students seek help in spaces that cultivate acceptance and trust. Their remarks were coated in words connoting sheer uneasiness in seeking help because of fears of being misunderstood or humiliated. For instance, a male participant stated his primary concern in obtaining supports as,

A less judgmental academic environment and institutional commitment to the provision of these services that is not biased would help. Sometimes, in a bid to reach out and help, we lose sight of contexts: we lose sight of differences, and we forget to see the possibly

biased and racist undertones of some of the things we do. So, let us say a system that shows more alertness to differences and cultural contexts; the whole idea of decolonizing the university space has to be taken seriously. We need to be more alert to differences – those are the kind of things the university will have to pay attention to. (IN#7 – 03/07/18)

A similar observation was in a female participant's narrative. She affirmed that background differentials could inhibit dealings between students and support persons and suggested one way to build trust and make students more receptive to supports. Her recommendation encapsulated a peer mentorship approach where volunteering senior or more experienced students are paired with newer colleagues of similar nationalities to tutor them on ways to handle learning issues or choices in their studies. Her justification was that individuals are more likely to take counsels from somebody that shares a similar background than an unfamiliar person. Parts of her statement read,

If the university can find a way in addressing the barrier of differences in cultures, then, that would make the programs more effective; one way of doing that is through the mentorship model because it is easier to listen to somebody of the same nationality as you...it would be more effective if students are paired with somebody of their nationality. That way, students are gaining volunteering experience, and at the same time mentoring somebody. (IN#8 – 03/07/18)

Another female student proposed a different mentorship approach to bridging perceived cultural or relational barriers in obtaining supports. Her brand was a periodic instructor or academic advisor-initiated meeting with assigned students. She supposed that if such meetings were frequent and convivial, it could enable students to discuss their concerns freely. She stated, "I want to believe if there are follow-ups from the instructors and academic advisors, then maybe, the students, the same way they are open to fellow students...can open up to instructors as well" (IN#2 – 03/07/18). However, there were no corroborations to either of these mentorship proposals as both were suggestions from two different participants.

Lastly, participants pointed to worries about some programs because of the timing of such events. They affirmed that arrival and settlement pressures like securing a residence, child daycare, and other daily necessities compete with time for seeking appropriate learning supports. One of the participants emphatically reported, "I got notifications about the library workshops, but I would say that I did not even have enough time to consider attending some of those

workshops. It was tough; it was like a marathon” (IN#5 – 03/07/18). So, in order to elicit greater access to services, a female participant suggested learning support workshops be incorporated into regular syllabuses and administered at the onset of studies for new students. Her comments read,

I want to believe that if it is like a non-paid course, definitely at the start of the program. So, they take you for like a week or two weeks...I’m saying if it is something that was incorporated into programs as they are entering, so, they take it even before they are mixed up with every other activity in school or activities outside in terms of paying bills and all – getting busy. However, if they quickly take it in the first five days, and then, maybe the second week they started the course, so they are 50% equipped for any assignment. (IN#2 – 03/07/18)

Overall, participants indicated that building support programs on graduate-level writing and elements of student-supervisor relationships in the Canadian context and adjusting contents and timing of programs and promoting a learning environment free from ignorance through structured mentorships would serve better.

Support Personnel’s Perspectives

A different set of questions numbering 1 – 7 (Appendix F) was posed to selected student support workers to elicit responses about existing programs. The questions yielded responses describing available supports concerning organization and features of programs, beneficiaries, sources of publicity, trends in access, and challenges in the provision of services. Below is a presentation of data from student support workers.

Organization and Features of Programs

Participants declared that available services cover aspects of the library, numeracy, reading, writing, and study supports for both undergraduate and graduate students of the university. They emphasized that programs were offered through drop-in supports or by appointments. There were other programs such as workshops, orientations, and online supports; appointed specialists or graduate-student volunteers administered these services. A participant introduced SLS services as, “We also offer drop-in writing support, both in the Murray Library and at the Aboriginal Students’ Centre...students can drop in any time that we are open and get one to one help from a tutor” (IN#12 – 19/07/18). Another participant reported, “My main role is to give workshops on writing. So, I think that is because this is where we see the main need for

graduate students” (IN#13 – 19/07/18). Likewise, in a separate interview, another participant presented more comprehensive imagery of existing programs and the mode of delivery in the following statement:

In general, services are academic, and they include help with numeracy, reading, writing, and study skills. For graduate students, there is writing help – quite an extensive program for writing help, and Grad Help, which provides workshops and materials for graduate students. Many of the people providing help are graduate peer mentors. These are senior graduate students who want to help their fellow graduate students. Apart from the writing aspect, sample areas of need are on topics such as student-supervisor relationship, conferences, poster presentations, and reading at the graduate level. Some graduate students also go for math and stats help. The math and stats help center is where students who are working on math and stats can go and do their work or get help from tutors. It is very much like the writing center, but math-related, and stats-related. (IN#14 – 20/07/18)

Another participant reported library services as, “we provide resources and assistance in connecting students with relevant resources, and...teach them how to, not only to find them but to use them responsibly and ethically as well” (IN#15 – 20/07/18). The above narratives briefly described all available programs; full descriptions of learning supports were on the university’s website (<https://library.usask.ca/studentlearning/>).

In addition to SLS and library services, the U of S’s International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC) unit provided a range of pre-arrival and arrival supports to students, especially, international students. ISSAC recognized its role as the first place of call for international students and leveraged the position to provide support, including referrals on some academic-related questions. One of the participants concisely described ISSAC’s role in the following words:

Often time the first place they (international students) go is just to the International Student Office, because we are a point of contact that is familiar with their engagement with the campus community, and perhaps what their blind spots might be. However, a lot of what we do, we direct them to the appropriate resource. If they have academic concerns, directing them to their college to get their classes registered. If they want to develop study skills, direct them to Student Learning Services. So, a lot of it is referral services. (IN#16 – 20/07/18)

ISSAC's services were engaged in students' arrival, settlement, academics, social, and intercultural matters. ISSAC administered these services through various platforms known as, Peer Support Program, The Welcome Centre, Drop-in Advising, International Students' Welcome Day, and Intercultural Events. A detailed description of ISSAC services was also on the university website at <https://students.usask.ca/international/issac.php>.

In summary, there were numerous learning support services available for students at the U of S, but the above data represented the characteristics and organization of programs offered by the SLS, libraries, and ISSAC units.

Perceived Trends in Access, and Challenges in Administration of Programs

Participants made statements about observed trends in provision and access to services at the university. These statements portrayed the nature of programs and demography of beneficiaries, and challenges encountered in delivering these support services.

First, aggregate responses suggested that there were general programs for all students, irrespective of whatever differences in prior learning or orientation. In other words, services were not targeted for or meant to serve students based on study background or ethnicity. Programs were intended to address the learning needs of domestic and international students alike. Therefore, student support persons designed and administered programs to all students without necessarily tying them to specific audiences or recipients. One of the participants noted, "Our mandate is not just to serve international students, and because of that, then, many of my workshops to date have not been directed just to international students" (IN#13 – 19/07/18).

Secondly, participants also observed variations in the level of academic preparedness and the needs of students requiring supports. They believed that students come with varying degrees of exposure and consequently, require different levels of assistance. For instance, one participant explicitly professed that "students who came from Europe...do know how to organize a piece of writing" (IN#13 – 19/07/18), while other participants suggested that students have similar academic struggles regardless of their places of origin. This cohort broadly identified students seeking help as mostly, international students of all backgrounds. One of them reported, "Well, it is difficult to generalize it, and a lot of these students have entered the North American system at different stages, and so, have different bundles of knowledge by the time they get to graduate school" (IN#12 – 19/07/18). Also, others separately corroborated,

There is great variability, so it is very difficult to identify particular needs. Although, I have dealt with students from Nigeria...they are not used to a lot of group work; not used too much writing, they are more used to large classes and exams, and so, they are not used to organizing large pieces of writing. However, I must say that is true of a lot of international students. I think here in North America, we put a lot more emphasis on the writing context and communication skills, especially in writing; (IN#13 – 19/07/18)

“I have noticed that the graduate students who partake in the programs are overwhelmingly international students” (IN#14 – 20/07/18). Two other participants described their experiences with international students seeking help in the following remarks: “I did notice that...they have a huge range of experience with research. Some extremely skilled, however, some just have not had the experience, or perhaps they did not have the resources, so, they are starting here” (IN#15 – 20/07/18); and “Certain students bring higher levels of understanding and higher levels of international experience” (IN#16 – 20/07/18).

Notwithstanding, some participants noted that it had been difficult to monitor trends to services or aspects of students’ needs because of the high turnover of volunteers. The frequent turnover of student-volunteers who served as facilitators or tutors for events and workshops had made it difficult to keep track of patterns and aspects of needed supports. As one support officer voiced, “From what my tutors have communicated over the years, they cannot comment on what it was like before and what it is like now, because they have only worked for one or two years: they are students” (IN#12 – 19/07/18). Other participants notified that they do not inquire about students’ ethnicities or collective peculiarities when administering supports. Comments from the latter group implied that such knowledge might not serve for effective service delivery. As one of them reported, “I do not think we have had those discussions about focused ethnicity or country of origin, and whether or not there are particular issues...I have heard of certain students being taken advantage of, but this is hearsay” (IN#14 – 20/07/18).

Moreover, a male participant held similar perceptions as he elaborately stated, ...there are differences for students...We do not have data on which students from which country, or country of origin. I do believe that if the data could be accurately recorded (and not just anecdotal), understanding how students from specific regions/nations access our office would be beneficial in developing future programming. (IN#16 – 20/07/18)

Thirdly, participants had witnessed increased access, and use of services like study, writing, and grammar supports by international students. Individually, they made comments suggesting that some programs attract more international students than others. These were some of the remarks: “A paraphrasing course and that is one that connects to academic integrity, and that is popular” (IN#12 – 19/07/18); “80% of those students who come to those classes are international students, maybe, 85%. And the workshop registration, I’d say again, probably, 75 – 80% of the students who come to the workshops are international” (IN#13 – 19/07/18). Seemingly, some of these courses aimed at educating international graduate students on how to acclimatize to Canadian academic context. A participant cheerfully declared,

I enjoy doing these courses, and I see students from all around the world in the courses. Of course, in the workshops. And then, the other main course that I teach is called GPS 981, and it is an introduction to academic culture for new international students. (IN#13 – 19/07/18)

However, another participant noted that international students’ attendance in most learning support workshops had remained considerably low. This participant reported that “not nearly enough graduate students know about us, despite attempts to communicate through various channels...We also see quite a few international graduate students in the writing center, that has always been the case” (IN#12 – 19/07/18).

Several comments indicated that international students do not sufficiently patronize services due to issues with publicity, limited budgetary allocation, and wrong timing of some support programs. As this participant notified, there were “programs emphasizing writing and helping students out...Sometimes, there is a struggle over who is going to pay for it. Should the university be paying for it, or should the program be paying for it” (IN#12 – 19/07/18)? Also, the GPS 981 Instructor reported that the course is “a three-week intensive course in August all day, every day and we have our enrolment usually between 40 and 50, and supervisors have to nominate students and then, Grad Studies pays for the course” (IN#13 – 19/07/18). Whereas the GPS 981 course holds in August, the traditional academic year begins in September and such defines the expected arrival period for most international students. Apart from that, likely early comers were not guaranteed access to such critical supports due to bottlenecks like a supervisor’s nomination and limited budgets.

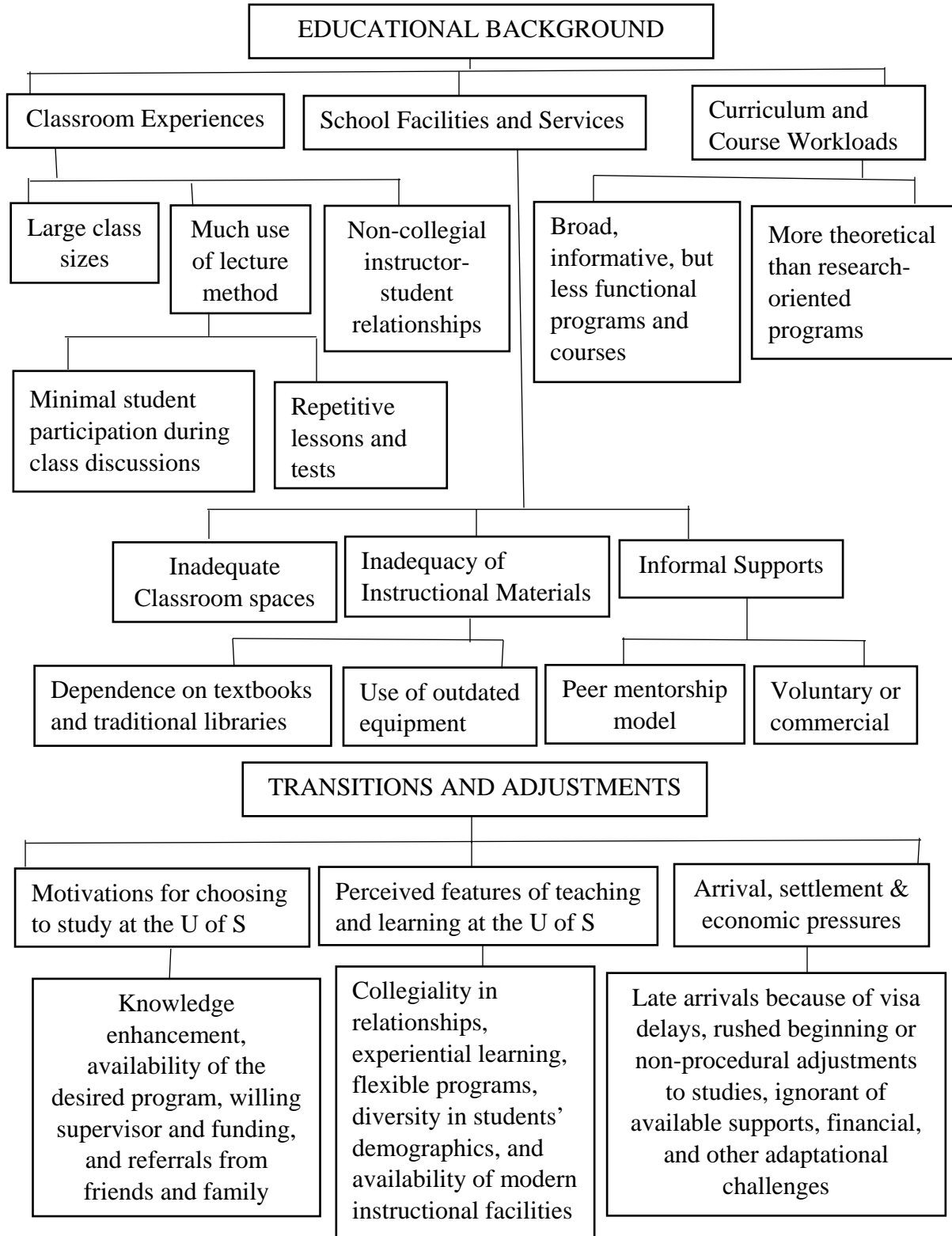
Participants also made remarks about seeking intercultural awareness for effective communication of supports to students. One of the participants perceived that it requires higher tact to introduce services to non-domestic students because of nuances in languages and cultures. This participant suggested that students from different cultures have been told things in specific ways, and so, captions to events or programs could mean different things to them. Because of such awareness, the participant urged support persons to embrace intercultural enlightenments to provide meaningful assistance to the diverse student body. The participant cautioned,

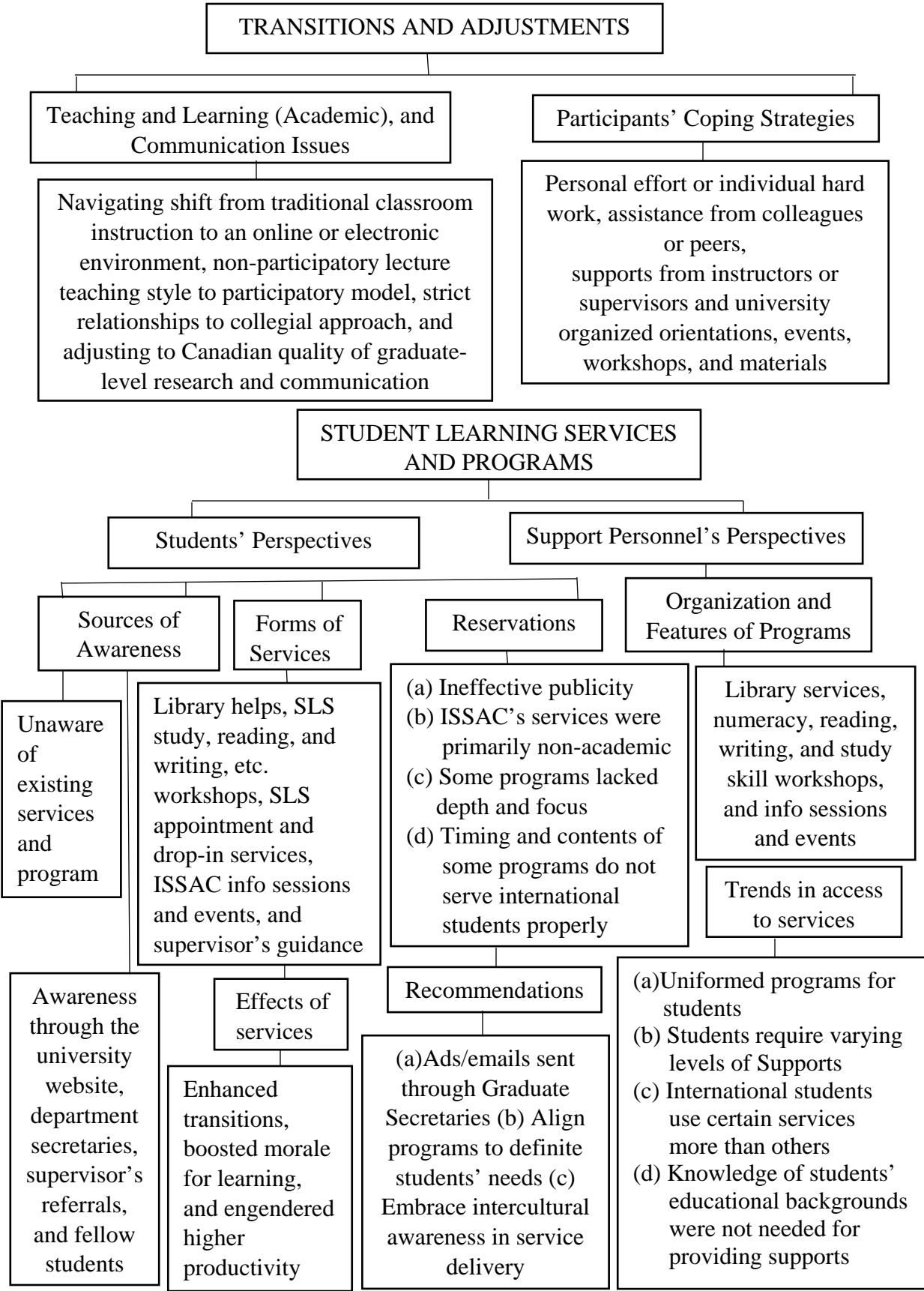
Do not assume that when you are with an international student, they understand it the same way you do. You might have to take a step back and make sure the definitions and understandings are clear for everyone. That when you have an audience with them, do not jump in too much and assume that they are just like any other Canadian student. Again, cracking that open where it is, how are international students being told things? (IN#16 – 20/07/18)

Altogether, aggregate data on trends and challenges to provision and access to support programs suggested that domestic and international students, irrespective of ethnic or study background, seek learning helps alike. Programs have been designed to meet students' needs without necessarily tying them to ethnic learning patterns or study backgrounds, but specific workshops or programs have become more attractive to international students. Despite attempts to advertise existing programs, international graduate students' participation has not been encouraging. Also, timing, publicity, and budgetary issues, and strict admission into some courses and programs and intercultural communication issues have stood as impediments to provision and access for these supports.

Table 4.1 presents a brief synthesis of data from individual interviews.

Table 4.1: Summary of Data and Findings from Individual Interviews: Educational Background, Transition and Adjustments, and Student Learning Services





Summary of Data and Findings from the Individual Interviews

As illustrated in table 4.1 above, aggregate responses from selected participants described Nigerian education in the contexts of perceived classroom experiences, school facilities and student learning services, and curriculums and course work. According to the participants, Nigerian classrooms comprised large class sizes, much use of the lecture methods that led to minimal student participation in classes and repetitive lessons, and unpleasant instructor-student relationships. The participants further reported that school facilities such as classrooms, textbooks, libraries, and other instructional materials and equipment were inadequate and old-fashioned. These individuals intimated that students, for the most part, had privately obtained learning supports from peers for free or paid and that their Nigerian curricula and course works were merely theoretical. The participants also highlighted their experiences with transitions and adjustments to the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) which included the motivations for choosing to study at the university, perceived features of teaching and learning, and their arrival, settlement and economic challenges at the university. Some of the factors that attracted these individuals to the U of S included the need to advance in learning and career, availability of desired discipline, a willing supervisor and funding, and family influences.

Moreover, these individuals reported that they had witnessed learning at the University of Saskatchewan in contexts that were different from their Nigerian ways. These differences included collegial dealings between professors and students, learning in experiential situations, ability to choose and change classes and programs, students' diversity, and availability of modern facilities. The participants met several transition challenges as a result of their coming to study at the U of S, and they identified these challenges with descriptions such as the problems of visa delays and late arrivals, rushed beginning or non-procedural adjustment to studies, ignorance of support services, financial struggles, and other adaptational issues. The participants also reported learning and communication difficulties such as making shifts from their Nigerian traditional classroom methods to an online or electronic driven environment, teacher-centered instructional approaches to a student-centered model, strict instructor-student dealings to a collegial culture, and adjusting to the U of S (Canadian) standard of graduate-level research and communication. The participants declared that they had coped with these challenges using strategies such as putting in extra personal efforts, seeking help from peers, colleagues, instructors, and university organized support programs and resources. They further described

their experiences with learning support services by particularly referring to the sources of awareness, forms of services, and reservations held against those services at the university.

Likewise, learning support personnel-participants described the services available for students, including organization, features, and trends and observations in the provision of and access to student learning services at the University of Saskatchewan.

Data and Findings from Focus Group

A focus group (FG) was used to discuss data from the individual interviews, and the discussion aimed to probe for more in-depth knowledge and seek fresher insights. The discussion yielded data that were categorized according to existing headings from individual interviews and presented summarily below.

Educational Background

When presented with data on the perceived educational background of Nigerian graduate students, some FG participants confirmed that past education did not adequately arm the students with relevant skills and competencies required for smooth transitions to the U of S. These participants conveyed this idea during exchanges on prior learning experiences of Nigerian students. They reckoned passive learning or minimal participation in classes and instructors' highhandedness to these students as very problematic. An excerpt from the dialogue read as follows:

FG#1: In Nigeria, when I was doing my first-degree program, ...we do not usually do presentations in classes, whether on a group or individual basis...I was not just used to that. So, it affected me at the initial stage until I started to adjust

FG#2: Well, I think mine is the opposite of what he said...Back in Nigeria, you do not have a say in whatever the lecturer or the professor wants to do with the class - one is expected to follow instructions without asking questions. So, when I moved here (U of S - Canada), I saw that students could freely bare their minds.

However, one FG member noted that Nigerian students had seen learning in different ways in Nigeria. This individual felt it was wrong to generalize personal experiences. The individual argued, "there is no universal experience of the Nigerian student...Because, of course, they attended different universities with different academic and intellectual cultures. What obtains in many state universities in Nigeria is not usually what obtains in federal universities."

He further stressed that standard modes of instruction and transactions in Nigerian universities reflected the people's values and culture. As he put it,

So, irrespective of the differences in the universities we attended, there is this overarching African culture that informs most of our social transactions in the educational spaces. In Nigeria, because we respect elders – we respect the father-figure, and we respect the guy who is older than we are. That informs the way we go into the classroom space.

FG members also supported the notion that Nigerian universities had too broad curricula and had not given the students opportunities to explore learning beyond boundaries set by their instructors. One female member of the focus group who had studied nursing in Nigeria acknowledged that students “did so many other courses that were not part of the nursing curriculum” in Nigeria. She also explained that students were usually at the receiving end and took whatever the instructor gave. She said, “You do not question whatever is given to you, and we had handouts that one has to stick to it. We were not taught to explore beyond the perspectives of the lecturer or do more research on your own.”

FG Participants seemingly upheld the view that prior education differed tremendously to Nigerian students at the U of S because their comments resonated with data from individual interviews. Their statements implied that transitions could not have been smoother for Nigerians students due to perceived disparities in past and present schooling contexts.

Transition and Adjustments

FG participants scarcely added any new understandings to existing data on Nigerian graduate students' adjustment experiences at the U of S. Instead, they unanimously corroborated narratives in the original data with a few new additions. Newer insights aligned towards difficulty in adjusting to using modern instructional technologies and participatory teaching methods at the U of S. For instance, a female FG participant recounted how she had taken some online classes from Nigeria but found it challenging to access materials and participate in class discussions via the internet. She felt it was an unpleasant experience and regretted taking the online class without support. She narrated her plight as,

The Nursing graduate program is more like an online program because they want to get as many students as they can from across Canada and beyond. So, I started this program from Nigeria, and it was very strange. I started in Nigeria before moving here, because I

did not get a study permit to come on time. So, accessing the library and connecting to other students – I was like an island...nobody to communicate to and even in the discussion groups. When I connected to the instructor, he will tell me to go to the library. Then, how will I get to the online library since I do not know the way around it? So, even when I moved over, I failed that course.

Other comments mirrored the above, as another FG participant pointed to the effect of gaps in technology and curricula on Nigerian students during transitions. The latter student, who was studying engineering at the U of S, also recalled, "...by the time I started specializing in my current field; there were many courses I needed to cover and to catch up with the trends here." This male participant stated some contrasts between his prior and present studies, as he recounted, "For instance, I was taught about transistors and the kind used in the 80s. However, now I have to start learning the recent technologies that are in vogue – it was difficult."

Secondly, there were perceptions that these students experience interpersonal problems during transitions because of their Nigerian culture that inhibits social interactions with seniors or people in authority. These difficulties, according to an FG participant, manifested in the reserved or timid manner some students related to Canadian professors in social spaces. This female participant alleged that the average Nigerian student is too focused on academics and has minimal or no time for social interaction. As she elaborated,

I do not know about others, professors, apart from academic work, they want this social relationship with students. Nigerians are very religious people; the Nigerian educational system does not encourage gatherings with instructors. But here (U of S), things are very different. I am not saying we (Nigerian students) should not focus on their studies, but we should not neglect that social aspect.

Overall, FG comments and inputs mostly ratified existing knowledge about the transitional experiences of Nigerian students.

Student Learning Services

Most FG participants confirmed availability and attested to having accessed supports like graduate writing workshops and peer-assisted learning (PAL) programs. However, some participants argued that the publicity of these services remained an issue. As one participant put it, "some students are not aware of those services." Participants who were ignorant of support services resorted to self-effort, except for two who relied on social networks to get through

adjustment challenges. These last two participants reported, “Well, my brother played a huge role in my transitioning,” and “I met one Italian lady in my department and told her ‘you have been where I want to go; so, tell me what I need to know.’”

Remarks, such as the last two, resonated with common refrains used by participants during individual interviews to describe survival strategies. Initial data had indicated that students preferred help from colleagues of cultural affinity or related departments. An FG participant buttressed this view by asserting that students of close cultures or educational goals ought to be made to support each other in a coordinated mentorship style. This female participant voiced,

It will be good if they will have a mentor-mentee relationship where students may be, from the same department or culture are matched together - such will be more relatable – such will make it more effective than if it was just general.

She stressed her view that “people are usually more willing to learn from somebody of similar identity – it might not be the same nationality, maybe, somebody of the same department or somebody who has gone through the same paths.” Her postulations made sense, as other participants supported the idea based on its perceived gains for both mentor and mentee, as can be seen in the excerpts below:

FG#1: And these people should be student-volunteers because I am pretty sure that students are always willing to do this – students like to have volunteering experience – they want to build their resumes

FG#2: So, it is for mutual benefit, you mean?

FG#3: So, if it is like a volunteer thing – that is mutual – both sides will benefit from it. So, I think that will make it more effective than if it is just the general approach.

FG#4: Yeah, I agree with what she has just said, and also want to add that the starting point matters a lot, and it varies for everybody.

Another participant supported the idea with a narrative about how a fellow student had assisted him in selecting and registering courses. Because of that single encounter, this participant felt that a modified peer mentorship for students of similar educational background or nationality would be most helpful for new students. The participant’s words read,

If you have someone to advise or direct you, even in terms of registration of classes, such helps it matters a lot for a new student. Because we know ourselves and (our particular)

education background(s), we stand (in) a better position to advise another(s) on the best path to go.

Furthermore, FG participants unanimously ratified that most workshops were too broad. They argued that supports should be tailored to meet specific needs and administered through colleges and departments. They alleged that generally designed workshops or programs were not very efficient because these workshops do not explain jargon and writing patterns of various departments or colleges. As one FG participant put it, “Those programs are usually broad in scope; I think these programs need to be streamlined down to specifics...it is very important that I understand or know about issues relating to my program or department.” Supporters of this notion argued that general study, reading, and writing workshops for graduate students were not wrong, but just insufficient. Another FG participant stressed, “I mean, general learning workshops are good, but these programs should be extended to be more departmentally... We are talking about how to improve these programs to cater to students’ needs and yield more results.”

Aside from streamlining support programs, some FG participants backed up the claim that most international students are ignorant of learning services because they arrived late at the university. They had blamed international students’ lateness on visa delays and issues beyond their control and queried the lack of support for this cohort, as can be seen in the excerpts below:

FG#1: I did not get study permit early enough to come here. So, I missed the orientation, and even in my departmental orientation. I came not knowing about any student learning support service or program.

FG#2: But that was also because of not arriving here on time, right? Because there are orientations usually meant for new students at the beginning of the school year.

FG#3: Yes. But most students – for example, I am sure, the Fall Term begins next week, right? Most of the international students beginning their programs for the first time have not arrived and will likely not be present during the orientation days. So, what happens to these?

FG#4: And that is usually the case.

Moreover, these participants felt that enough had not been done to publicize learning support services. So, one of them suggested that the University’s Fall Orientation and ISSAC’s newcomer info sessions or orientation events be repeated or staggered for some periods to accommodate late arriving students. The fellow stated, “...what they are doing this week

(Orientation Event), can they repeat it a month later, and just add if you are an international student who did not arrive on time, this orientation is for you?” Similarly, another participant suggested that colleges or departments could also repeat information sessions for new international students. This individual expressed, “And even in the departments, such should be repeated.” Also, another participant endorsed this peer mentorship brand as an efficient way of encouraging students to support colleagues. The fellow buttressed,

Mentorship is something most senior students will willingly do. So, if there is a place where one can register if you want to volunteer to mentor a new student because you will be building friendships – the mentor and the mentee will mutually benefit from it. I mean, this should be a one on one kind of personal – pairing only two people; not the full classroom lecture.

Besides, when asked about other possible ways to boost awareness of learning supports, participants intimated that learning support units should explore options away from the University PAWS announcements and newsletters. They argued that those channels, perhaps, do not work well for graduate students, and they made two recommendations. One recommendation was to include information about learning supports in new students’ admission letters to create initial awareness. As this individual stated, “Maybe, the university should start adding more info in the admission letters or that long email they send to tell one about your starting requirements because I have never heard of these things.” The other option was that support personnel might partner with students’ national associations like the Nigerian Students Association (NSA) in administering these support programs. These participants said:

FG#1: I guess, going through the cultural associations of some of these student groups may work...

FG#2: Yes, it will.

FG#3: Because there is the Nigerian Students Association...

However, the concern with the last option was in its practicality. According to some FG participants, concerns over the practicality of the second option were genuine; considering that these associations paid more considerable attention to socials. Moreover, and seemingly, graduate students gave the most of their time to actual academic studies rather than social functions. One of the participants expressed,

The National Cultural Associations should go to the SLS Centre to get all the information – all the services they provide and bring them to the group...but all that I saw were socials; graduate students would not leave their labs, libraries, and other more essential engagements to come for dancing.

Secondly, there were reservations over the willingness of the university to accept to offer learning supports through students' national associations based on the likelihood that such practice could breed segregations among students. Some participants argued that the university worked to promote inclusion and diversity and may not have wanted to focus its resources on individual student groups or association. As a participant queried, "is it possible that the university may not allow associations that have to do with peculiar cultures to exist among students?"

Altogether, participants maintained that learning supports deserve better publicity, and encouraged service personnel to seek other ways of reaching graduate students, effectively.

Table 4.2: Data and Findings from Focus Group (FG). The Participants’ Perception of their Nigerian Educational Background, and Transitions and Access to Learning Services at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S)

| Participants’ (Nigerian) Educational Background | Participants’ Transition Experiences at the U of S | Participants’ Access to Support Programs at the U of S |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Passive learning or minimal students’ participation in class discussions 2. Strictness or highhandedness in lecturer-student dealings 3. Variations in teaching and learning cultures of state (provincial) and federal owned universities 4. Values and practices of these universities mirrored the Nigerian (African) peoples’ way of life and manner of showing respect to elders or people in authority 5. Broad curricula and teacher-centered instructional approaches | <p>The participants encountered difficulties in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of modern instructional technologies 2. Participatory learning methods 3. Bridging perceived gaps in their Nigerian curricular and learning methods to match the U of S model 4. Handling interpersonal relationships and issues occasioned by their unbending religious and cultural leanings | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Programs</u> Graduate writing workshops and peer assisted learning support 2. <u>Reservations over support programs</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Inadequate publicity ii. Broad or unspecific workshops iii. Ignorance about programs and events due to late coming or visa delays vi. Tendency of <p>of ethnically structured peer mentorship programs to breed segregations among students</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. <u>Recommendations for improvement of services</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Run lengthier and staggered newcomer info sessions and orientations to accommodate all students ii. Narrow down learning services to departments or colleges iii. Design platforms for supporting new students through volunteer peer mentorship iv. Deploy peer mentors to support students of similar educational background or department v. Include learning support messages in new students’ offer of admission letters vi. Partner with students’ national associations in administering services |

Summary of Data and Findings from the Focus Group

As illustrated in table 4.2 above, the focus group participants agreed that Nigerian graduate students had witnessed learning in ways different from experiences at the U of S, especially, about classroom instruction and student-instructor relationship. They buttressed that Nigerian students' prior education and standard of interpersonal dealings in classroom spaces mirrored acquired values and beliefs. They also argued that perceived disparities in prior learning and culture have led to rough transitioning and adjustment experiences for most Nigerian graduate students at the university. These transitioning challenges included: adapting to participatory teaching and learning methods, handling modern instructional technologies, and struggling to make up for gaps in previous curriculums. Besides, participants confirmed the availability of learning support and raised some reservations over publicity, structure, and administration of these support services and programs.

Report from the Interpretation Panel

As stated earlier in this chapter, the objective of this interpretation panel (IP) was to help the researcher make sense of all the data generated in this study. The interpretation panel comprised selected Nigerian graduate students and learning support personnel of the U of S. These individuals collectively, made inputs on various aspects of data from the preliminary interviews and focus group, but chiefly on learning support services. They made interpretations of data and proffered solutions to issues vis-à-vis serving international students more appropriately. Below is a presentation of data from the interpretation panel.

The Condition of Student Learning Support Programs

When presented with data on educational background and transitioning experiences of the selected Nigerian graduate students at the U of S, IP members acknowledged that these individuals had distinctive experiences. IP members also affirmed that the university support programs do not serve a particular group of students. As one IP member put it, "a lot of our grad help programming...has not been targeted to international students or a cohort of students or Nigerian students." Instead, programs were designed broadly to meet the learning needs of all graduate students. This IP member also clarified,

We have not necessarily designed them that way or focused them like that; they have been designed for all graduate students. But maybe, part of the challenge and some of

what is missing is that we should be more focused sometimes, not all the time because sometimes, some of the topics are just broad topics.

Another IP member upheld that effective learning support programs ought to consider different students' experiences or prior training. This IP member argued that broadly designed programs could serve all students well if appropriately delivered. The fellow said, "I would think in terms of the delivery that we can get the same programs to address the specifics of different groups." Moreover, "broadly designed programs are nice, but regarding execution or delivery, it is possible to get specific people to reach specific populations."

Also, IP members gave explanations regarding the condition of supports for off-campus students or students accessing the library and other services remotely. They affirmed that some students had no prior access to online facilities and resources, and so, could find transitions tougher than others. For instance, an IP member remarked, "it is difficult for somebody who does not even have this previous constant engagement with an online space that offers so much complexity...to navigate the type of internet technology here (Canada)." Other IP members felt there were minimal learning supports for students struggling with online resources or materials at the university. They suggested the reasons behind this kind of negligence, including:

- Lack of human resources. "I know we do not do a very good job in creating online tools for students remotely...because it is a difficult thing, and we actually do not have a person who is dedicated to creating online tools."
- Poor coordination. "...there is not a well thought out cumulative approach to building one's research goals when you are off-campus... The only thing we have that would be useful is called, ask the librarian online. It is not ideal."
- Unrealistic goal - Students were expected to participate during info sessions physically. "...you set up your orientation, and you are assuming that most students can attend that...So, I think our model puts the onus on the students to come in and ask."

Although IP members upheld higher support for distant graduate students, especially those from less technological environments, there were no clarifications on how to achieve such.

Interpretation Panel members clarified that no single office coordinated learning supports for graduate students, but that programs scattered among various units like the College of Graduate Studies and Post Doctorate (CGPS), Student Learning Services (SLS), International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC), and the Language Centre of the university. An IP

member reported that Graduate Studies do not mandate support programs and workshops; however, SLS, which seemed the preeminent learning support unit of the university, “administers some of its supports to graduate students through what is known as Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program.” The SLS unit adopted this approach based on the understanding that some students prefer peer to peer learning. As one IP member explained, “they like that interaction with their peers to learn about some of the untold kinds of relationships.” Also, IP members acknowledged that for the most part, these supports were in the form of workshops and individual drop-in programs whose frequencies depend on the availability of volunteering peer mentors at a given period. Two IP members reported:

IP#1: We have graduate students peer mentors who are volunteers, and they are trained to deliver workshops mostly but seem to do one on one with students.

IP#2: But it is kind of depends on year-to-year, and the cohorts of peer mentors that we have – whether it is delivered more often.

All IP members did not agree on the efficacy of the SLS peer mentorship model that hires and place student volunteers to assist whoever comes for help. Some student members of the IP objected to the usefulness of this model because they felt that an average peer mentor did not understand different students’ context and adaption challenges, and so, might not provide sufficient support. Instead, they opted for an informal peer mentorship model where students can connect on personal terms with preferred mentors. Precisely, these IP members endorsed the sort where students of similar disciplines or cultural affiliations are paired to support each other. Two student-IP-members noted the following:

IP#1: I mean, it is easier to look to somebody that shares the same nationality as one or one in the same discipline...for the orientation programs, it will be good to match students with somebody of the same nationality or discipline. That way, it is more personal, and I feel that it will be more effective that way.

IP#2: I do not think that the national background is the focus. It is more of a somebody - who shares a similar educational background or probably, something cultural.

Based on these arguments, some IP members clarified that the SLS had in the past recruited students of diverse backgrounds and cultures as mentors but identified a need to make more intentional emphasis on intercultural awareness and learning distinctiveness when training volunteer mentors. These IP members also disclosed that there were usually a few students

volunteering for peer mentorship roles, and such development have not given them many options on whom to choose. As one IP member put it, “we do tend to have a pretty international cohort of graduate peer mentors...they each brings their kind of educational background...But maybe, having a more intentional conversation about that during training.” Another member corroborated,

When we recruit. We are at the mercies of whoever wants to participate. We cannot sort of pick or choose. So, some years, we might have a nice range of people with different disciplines and backgrounds and education. One would hope that there are a variety of educational backgrounds or a variety of folks with experiences, but it depends on the kind of who comes and likes to volunteer.

Moreover, the proposal of pairing students to preferred peer mentors and its trust on willing volunteers led to discussions on the publicity of services and ways to attract more volunteers. Hence, the following section presented data on publicity and administration of learning support services.

Publicity and Administration of Learning Support Services

On the issue of publicity for services and attracting volunteers, IP members considered and adopted several suggestions, including:

- Listing peer mentorship positions for co-curricular credits to encourage volunteers: “...the Peer Assisted Learning program within our unit has been included in a co-curricular record...we are hoping that it is certainly a valuable thing.”
- Using posters to supplement other support services ads: “...to have volunteers wear something like t-shirts...imagine just walking into the school and see someone in a t-shirt about a workshop or something – you will quickly grasp that something is going on.”
- Including information about existing supports in new students’ offer of admission or acceptance letter: “Put a paragraph in the acceptance letter that reads something like there is a learning service unit on campus that can do this or that. Because I read my acceptance letter very dutifully - I was excited.”
- Giving material incentives to volunteers: “...it will be a program where at the end of the whole event, the older students can get a certificate, or maybe, an honorarium.”
- Partnering with student cultural associations: “That is one definite approach, especially when we talk about cultural familiarity being something that students have

highlighted...When it comes to students' associations, some of them have different mandates. So, I think there will be opportunities with that.”

- Seeking greater collaboration among the various student service units: “We need to improve our partnerships and collaborations with other units...One of our strategic commitments for the library this year is to structure our programming and relationships with student service units better.”

Buttressing the last of these recommendations, some IP members maintained that there were lapses in communication or collaboration among various student support units. As one student-service IP member confirmed, “we are continually trying to struggle with how we send reports outwards...We know our communication, and our integration is not as consistent and tight as it should be.” Also, another IP member corroborated, “it is something that SLS has reported to our office that there is not enough academic support information that passes through our office - the collaborative pieces that offer those point of needs.” Most IP members supported a proposal for SLS officers to talk directly to students about existing services during events like International Students' Welcome Day. They supposed that such could be one way of reaching a handful of international students who would not know these services exist in the university.

The Timing of Programs and Events

IP members remarked on perceived unsuitable timing of some programs like the workshops, GPS 981 – the introduction to academic culture course for new international graduate students offered in August, and new-comer orientation events. Some IP members suggested that orientation programs be administered at the beginning of academic terms to prepare students before taking actual classes, while others argued that early programs might not suit international students. The latter contended that some international students arrive late on campus for legitimate reasons, and so, should be put into consideration in planning programs. These individuals argued as:

IP#1: Maybe it will be good to... start the workshops between the 15th and 23rd of the resumption month – these are what to learn ahead of actual classes.

IP#2: But the problem with that idea is that the majority of international students usually arrive late.

1P#3: But I was not late, and I know a couple of people that were not late too. I am sure if people know that it is something that will benefit them, especially when one is coming from a different background, they will want to access these services.

1P#4: I am not saying that they do come late on purpose; it is usually because of situations beyond their control. So, we also had a problem with doing the new-comers orientation at the very beginning of the term because international students are needed in the orientations too.

Some IP members acknowledged the issue of poor timing or scheduling and blamed it on lack of coordination in the administration of support programs. For instance, referring to new-comer orientation events, explicitly, an IP member acknowledged,

Graduate students do not have the standard kind of arrival time like undergraduate students since the classes start in the Fall...graduate students have this a bit of staggered start. Truly we have the main one (International students' welcome day) where we try and catch as many students as possible, but what do we do to follow up? We have seen in other universities where they have done subsequent pieces and additional orientations.

Moreover, other IP members corroborated with references to the issues with admission and timing of one of the support courses for new international graduate students.

IP#1: That 981 class is hot potatoes right now. It is a credit course out of Graduate Studies through the Language Centre. I do not know how they determine which student gets into that course. It should be something that might be open and available for all international graduate students. I think it is a three-week course offered in August.

IP#2: Yeah, I think they have changed the date.

Although most IP members acknowledged problems with admissions and timings of some support programs, especially, for international students, they did not proffer real alternatives going forward.

Table 4.3 summarizes the interpretation panel's (IP) explanations of data from the preliminary interviews and focus group that described the participants' educational background, transitions, and access to learning services.

Table 4.3: Report of the Interpretation Panel (IP) on the Participants' Educational Background, Transitions, and Adjustments and Access to Learning Support

Educational Background, Transitions, and Adjustments

- Interpretation Panel (IP) members agreed that the participants had a distinctive prior educational background in Nigeria, and challenging transitioning experiences at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S)
-

Student Learning Services

Condition of Learning Support Programs: The interpretation panel (IP) members explained that:

1. Programs were not solely built for international students but broadly designed to serve all students (domestic and international)
2. These broad programs including workshops and orientations could be used to address the specifics of different student groups
3. Some international students had no prior access to online facilities and resources and may have had rougher transitions than others
4. There was minimal support through the U of S's libraries for students struggling with online resources or materials because of factors such as dearth of human resources, poor coordination of services, and librarians' unrealistic expectations that all students will physically attend orientations and info sessions
5. There was a need for more significant library support to graduate students, particularly, those that were less engaged in technology from their past education
6. No single office run learning services for graduate students, and that the Student Learning Services (SLS) unit had served graduate students through its Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) programs
7. The SLS volunteer, peer mentors, lacked intercultural awareness or were ignorant of differences in students' learning situations and adaptation challenges
8. There was a preference for an informal peer mentorship model where students connect on personal terms with peers of similar disciplines or cultural affiliations
9. There was a need to sensitize volunteer peer mentors on intercultural awareness and learning distinctiveness of students

Publicity and Administration of Programs: The interpretation panel (IP) members adopted the following strategies:

1. Listing peer mentorship positions for co-curricular credits to attract student volunteers
2. Using posters to supplement other learning services announcements
3. Including information about learning services in new students' offer of admission letters
4. Giving material incentives to peer mentors (student volunteers)
5. Partnering with the various students' national or cultural associations to deliver services
6. Seeking greater collaboration among student service units in providing services

The Timing of Programs and Events: The interpretation panel (IP) members disagreed over the most appropriate timing for administering programs and events. Their arguments varied between whether to offer programs at the beginning of terms to prepare students before taking on actual classes or midway when most students must have arrived on campus.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has presented data and findings from individual interviews, focus group, and interpretation panel. The interview participants were selected first-generation Nigerian graduate students and learning support personnel from various units at the University of Saskatchewan. The students gave descriptions of their educational backgrounds that included themes on perceived classroom experiences, school facilities, and support services, and curriculum and course workloads witnessed in Nigeria. Their classroom experiences comprised imageries of large class sizes, the use of lecture teaching methods, and non-collegial instructor-student relationships. While talking about school facilities and supports, the students reported small classroom spaces, outdated instructional technologies and equipment, and private or informal learning supports from peers. Also, referring to curriculum and course workloads, the students described them as ambitious and mostly theoretical.

For the most part, the participants described their transitions and adjustments to the university as challenging because of perceived disparities in the context and aspirations of their prior and present education. These disparities included navigating shifts to participatory, experiential, technological, and collegial learning ethos of their current training. Moreover, the students claimed to have coped with the earliest adjustment challenges at the U of S, because of personal determination and drive, help from peers, and university resources. Most prominent amongst these helpful resources were the university SLS and library workshops, and ISSAC's orientation programs and events. However, these students also held reservations with some support services because of certain organizational shortcomings. On the other hand, support personnel explained intricacies of available supports to students and disclosed recent trends to provision and access to most support services.

Lastly, a focus group comprising of only Nigerian graduate students discussed the aggregate data from the individual interviews. The focus group probed available data for depth and brought fresher perspectives, while an interpretation panel comprising of selected Nigerian graduate students and support personnel discussed and made sense of combined data from the individual interviews and focus groups.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Summary, and Conclusion

This chapter presents interpretations of the participants' responses and answers to each of the research questions guiding the study. I (the researcher) built my analysis on selected theoretical foundations of student success, students' persistence, and good practices in student services. I began with the summaries of the purpose of the study, the problem statement, and the research questions and methods. I followed with a discussion of findings together with implications for theory, practice, policy, and make suggestions for further studies and provide concluding remarks.

Review of Purpose of the Study

As indicated in chapter one, this study was designed to examine the learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan to ascertain the extent to which learning services matched the perceived students' needs and expectations. The premise of the study was that international students come in different academic backgrounds and often encounter difficulties navigating the transitions associated with new places of education. During shifts and adjustments, international students experience learning in unfamiliar ways, and the extent of these perceived differences will depend on the congruences between prior and present educational contexts (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Grayson, 2008; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Leary et al., 2016; Olaniran, 1996; Sam, 2001; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). International students need fitting supports to make up for attendant deficits (Leary et al., 2016). Providing such supports or services pose administrative and programming challenges to universities across the globe.

Universities and colleges, including the University of Saskatchewan (U of S), have created programs and interventions and adopted approaches to assist these students to adapt to current teaching and learning cultures and to succeed. The essence of this research was to identify these programs and understand how such programs tie to students' peculiarities. I investigated the educational background, transitions and adjustment challenges, provision, awareness, and access to learning services of selected first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the U of S. Thus, I chose student participants and student learning support employees to take part in the study.

Review of Statement of Problem

The increasing presence of international students in Canadian universities has generated the need to seek knowledge that will assist universities in supporting and unleashing the potentials of these students. Although, there is no dearth of research on how international students fare in Canadian universities, there are very few studies which highlight the issues related to learning services. Specifically, research is scanty in the aspects of tying learning support services to international students' peculiarities and learning distinctiveness. Experts have continuously called for awareness and review of strategies engaged in the provision of supports and retention of this cohort of students (Kirby, 2009; Kommers & Pham, 2016; Leary et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2005), and such calls align with the aspirations of this study. The study drew from extant literature on students' affairs and feedback from selected participants to elicit an understanding of students' needs and appraise learning services provided for international students. At the outset, this study promised to report students' level of awareness of the university learning supports and consider the suitability of these services to their learning and living needs. I hoped that the study might encourage the study of other international students' educational backgrounds as a means to ascertain how prior academic preparation might play a part in transitions and adjustments.

Review of Research Questions

The three research questions used for data collection and data analysis in this study included:

1. How do first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan describe their academic background, against their perceptions of prior experiences when studying in Nigeria?
2. What are the teaching and learning challenges Nigerian students have encountered when making transitions to the University of Saskatchewan? How have these students identified and navigated these challenges as they have adapted to the University of Saskatchewan?
3. What are the perceived supports available at the University of Saskatchewan, and how have these helped students to navigate through identified challenges? What do they perceive are missing or adjustable?

Review of Research Methods

I chose qualitative methods as a suitable methodology to explore the learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan. I collected initial data through individual interviews of purposively selected participants. Altogether, 11 graduate students described their Nigerian post-secondary schooling experiences, their transitions and adjustment experiences at the U of S, and their access to the university student learning support programs and events. The five staff member participants, selected from among U of S student support units such as the Student Learning Services (SLS), Library, and International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC) described nature of services and trends or observations in the provision and access to those services.

Responses and themes from all 16 individual interviews were coded and categorized accordingly. I presented these original findings (coded and categorized data) to a focus group of six participants, also selected from among Nigerian graduate students, to discuss or extend knowledge and add fresh perspectives. In the end, the researcher engaged another focus group for analyzing aggregate data from the initial interviews and focus group. This second focus group christened as an interpretation panel consisted of nine participants, including five Nigerian graduate students and four student support personnel of the U of S. Altogether, they discussed combined data from the individual interviews and focus group and made meanings or gave interpretations that provided further insights.

Discussion of Findings and Literature

As the researcher, I sought to establish knowledge about the prior educational background of the student participants – Nigerian graduate students, and their transitions and adjustment experiences, and access to learning support at the University of Saskatchewan. My goal was to heighten awareness of international students' prior learning backgrounds and transition and adjustment challenges so that learning support services can be aligned appropriately with their needs. Thus, I drew from the findings of this study and the literature to present explanations of the participants' Nigerian educational background and their transitioning experiences and the academic needs or issues they encountered at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S). I also presented explanations about their dealings with learning support services at the U of S. I applied the theoretical frameworks introduced in chapter two to discuss

my views for matching support services to students' needs, and concluded this section with a summary of the participants' responses to each of the three research questions for this study.

Understanding the Educational Context of the Nigerian Graduate Student

Findings from this study agreed with past literature to indicate variations in learning attitudes and cultures among international students, and their expectations and challenges while studying abroad. Such was a significant discovery because as universities continue to witness an upsurge in enrolment of international students, part of the discussions has centered on programs or services that are designed to help these students adapt to new academic settings and ultimately succeed in their chosen disciplines. These discussions concern the University of Saskatchewan because of the significant number of international students at the university. The participants described their prior education in terms that indicated Nigerian students had been taught or learned in opposing contexts to the U of S. Some participants argued that there were differences in the way Nigerian students had been trained citing reasons such as personal preferences and abilities and peculiarities of individual Nigerian universities. Just as an FG participant correctly pointed out that Nigerian students do not have universal experience because they had attended universities with different missions and sizes. This individual had implied that some Nigerian students' prior educational experiences might not have differed from the U of S situation. Notwithstanding this opposing viewpoint, many participants' descriptions of their Nigerian education bore evidence of profound similarity.

Several participants perceived that a "transmission" instructional style had characterized Nigerian classrooms in their past experiences. These participants agreed that in Nigeria, students typically are in the role of receiving knowledge from instructors. They illustrated a hierarchical teaching picture where the professor like a sage, basically passes information to students. The participants tagged the prevailing Nigerian teaching culture as passive with limited student participation in classes. Aubrey (1991) had argued that Africans learn submissively from instructors. In like manner, participants in this study were not encouraged to participate or engage in healthy class discussions with instructors. Several of them maintained that most professors in Nigeria had not effectively engaged their students' metacognitive abilities. They felt lessons were rarely thought-provoking, and lecturers wanted to see answers without students questioning procedures. Altogether, the participants' explanations confirmed Aubrey's (1991)

theory about African students' passive learning style and supported Beykont and Daiute's (2002) findings on the teacher-centered approach in some international students' country of origin.

Moreover, as cited by some participants, other retrospective features of Nigerian post-secondary education were the broad and ambiguous curricula with deep theoretical underpinnings. Some of these individuals referred to past syllabi as not related to local contexts and too general, and others felt their classes were merely academic or abstract. For the most part, instructors repeated lessons, and in some instances, did not have the equipment or training to make learning functional. One of the participants recounted that some Nigerian universities do not give students the opportunities for hands-on experiences (IN#4 – 03/07/18), and another considered classroom equipment and lessons as dull and lacking in innovation and creativity (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Altogether, available data implied that lecturers merely communicated concepts without corresponding research and innovation, and such factors had informed the participants' perception of Nigerian education. This participants' perspective about their past education corroborated with the literature that had delineated the Nigerian curricula and pedagogics as foreign and non-functional (Achebe, 1958; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003; Fafunwa, 1974).

On the contrary, this seemingly bequeathed education system offered favourable prospects for Nigerian students pursuing studies in English speaking countries like Canada. It appeared that the British mirrored education system had probably equipped participants with sound English Language and communication competencies. This assertion looked tenable, given that most participants never mentioned communication as an issue while adjusting to their studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Moreover, it correlated with Heikinheimo and Shute's (1986) conclusions that African students were more confident in English than were students without past foundations in the language. Although, researchers have always positioned communication and language barriers as prime among challenges faced by international students (Fatima, 2001; Mori, 2000; Reid, 1997), such was not the situation in this study. Communication difficulties were somewhat rare on each participant's list of worries during transitions to studying at the U of S, except for two individuals who had encountered problems while adjusting to Canadian essay styles and English accent. One of these individuals had noted that the Canadian style of essay writing is different from the Nigerian (IN#1 – 02/07/18), and the other person was more concerned with understanding the Canadian accent (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

Furthermore, the participants indicated another remarkable feature of Nigerian education as its community-oriented configuration. Traditionally, Africans, including Nigerians, learned through community engagements and lived for such purposes, too (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2002) argued that the communal orientations of native African societies had underscored collective ownership of acquisitions, including children and their education. This principle positioned all commodities, including knowledge in pre-colonial Africa, as collective wealth willingly offered to each other by way of reciprocal kind gestures (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002). Elements of this ancient African communalism had supposedly, influenced the mode of learning, interpersonal relationships, and support such that it has affected contemporary Nigerian classrooms. The participants disclosed this trait of their Nigerian education in the context of respect and courtesy. For example, one of the FG participants held that African culture is critical to the way relationships function in Nigerian universities. He averred that Nigerians respect elders or anybody in the role of a father or position of authority. Another participant argued that these communal and interpersonal relationships had provided channels for support in classroom spaces (IN#7 – 03/07/18). These examples described what setting the participants had been schooled and had probably indicated the kind of expectations or demands they had placed on the U of S and the host community.

Altogether, the participants' descriptions of their prior educational experiences illustrated some relatively unsatisfactory context and a sort that had influenced their learning styles and whose potency has been enormously tested while they were adjusting to a setting different from their home fashion.

The Learning Needs and Issues Encountered by the Participants During Transitions

Understandably, African contexts were such that had enabled or expected students to thrive through collective efforts. As noted earlier, several participants held that their prior Nigerian education had ordinarily prepared them to receive and recycle knowledge and uphold indigenous societal virtues. These individuals argued that they had been discouraged from self-expression and engaging with professors in collegial relationships or uncensored discussions. One of them tagged this kind of student-instructor relationship, master-servant and autocratic (IN#1 – 02/07/18). Others had also disclosed that most Nigerian students and instructors were not very familiar with the concept and complexities of plagiarism. They alleged that students innocently plagiarize materials because instructors do not encourage originality in assignments

or class projects (IN#2 – 03/07/18), and instructors themselves are caught up in the web of plagiarisms too (IN#9 – 04/07/18). Their statements justified the notion that knowledge was not private but collectively owned and shared in native African contexts (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002).

However, these individuals in their bids to settle into learning at the U of S, had to adjust to a culture that necessitated objectivity and individualism in various life endeavors, including tertiary education (Aubrey, 1991; Robinson, 1992; Zhao et al., 2005). Schooling in Canada meant that these students must realign previously acquired learning ethos and practices to fit into independent thinking and private ownership of the knowledge paradigm of the Western world. Apart from arrival, settlement, and economic issues at the onset of their studies, most participants attested that they had struggled tremendously with experiences such as class participation or making contributions in classes, relating on collegial terms with instructors or supervisors, handling instructional equipment and dealing with graduate-level essay writing or issues of plagiarisms at the University of Saskatchewan. One of these individuals complained about the difficulty to engage in critical reasoning and conduct independent studies, access online library resources, and relate with instructors as colleagues at the U of S (IN#1 - 02/07/18). These findings were consistent with extant literature on adaptation issues faced by international students across the world (Aubrey, 1991; Grayson, 2008; Leary et al., 2016; Ramsay et al., 1999; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995; Thomas & Althen, 1989).

Furthermore, the participants' Nigerian education yielded positive impacts on their language and communication adjustments. Ikegulu (1999) attributed the academic success of international students to the strength of their previous schoolings. Several participants in this study had seemingly adjusted to the linguistic and communication demands of the U of S because of their prior foundations in English. Such was a development that had confirmed Ikegulu's (1999) stance on the impact of previous education towards international students' progress. A few participants had struggled with the Canadian English accent and essay writing styles, notwithstanding their prior academic preparations. Overall, it was evident that while most of the participants had met some difficult learning challenges during transitions at the U of S, their previous Nigerian education was barely helpful in dealing with communication troubles.

Learning Services: Strengths and Reservations

During transitions, the participants attested that they had survived using several strategies including, self-efforts, supports from peers and professors, and university workshops and resources. Their testimonies corresponded with known views about coping or adaptation strategies adopted by international students (Baloglu, 2000; Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000; Trice, 2003). However, this study focused mainly on university supports. University services in this context, connote programs and interventions organized or administered by designated units or professionals to assist students to learn and succeed in their studies (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Some support programs seek to help international students adapt well, and overall, succeed (Leary et al., 2016). For instance, some participants had accessed library, study, reading, math, and writing helps from units such as the U of S libraries, Student Learning Services (SLS), and International Student Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC). They explained that they had obtained services satisfactorily that met their academic needs. They made comments suggesting that some graduate writing workshops and seminars were beneficial (IN#1 – 02/07/18; IN#7 – 03/07/18) and instrumental to their successes (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

While other participants argued that some learning support programs were unhelpful to them, these student participants had perceived some programs or workshops as inappropriate in such areas as publicity, organization, contents, and scheduling. They had called on the service providers to create greater awareness for their services (IN#3 – 03/07/18) and ensure that some broad programs were narrowed down to meet specific students' needs or be made more student-centered.

Several student support personnel participants affirmed that international students had accessed particular programs more than others, and they agreed that international students should be adequately supported. According to these individuals, international students had sought more support in subjects relating to paraphrasing and academic integrity (IN#12 – 19/07/18; IN#13 – 19/07/18). Another support officer had warned his colleagues not to assume that international students understand things the same way as domestic students (IN#16 – 20/07/18). The inadequacies identified by both the student participants and support personnel participants were similar to concerns held by researchers on issues related to international students' support and adjustments (Andrade, 2006; Coles & Swami, 2012; Leary et al., 2016). Researchers have called for utmost care in providing support to international students because of their prior learning

contexts and socio-cultural differences (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006). Hence, in the following sections, I present thoughts on ways to match support programs to student needs.

Matching Support Programs to Students' Needs

From my research reading, I assumed that it was best practice to align support programs to students' needs and expectations and that this ought to follow established theories and principles. Therefore, I embedded arguments in theoretical frameworks on student success, student persistence, and student services described in chapter two of this thesis. I built upon these foundations to examine the participants' previous education in Nigeria, their transitions and adjustment experiences, as well as appraise the appropriateness of services to these individuals at the U of S. Through these theories and principles, I underscored the importance of tying supports appropriately to students' needs and discussed the yardsticks for measuring the effectiveness of support programs and interventions. These theoretical frameworks and principles include Strange's (2010) *Theoretical Foundations of Student Success*, Tinto's (2015) *Students' Persistence Conceptual Model*, and Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) *Principles and Strategies of Good Practice in Student Services*. In the end, I had hoped that these discussions would help to produce insights about the educational background of Nigerian international students, identify their transition and adjustment challenges, and help to align learning services better.

Findings Related to Strange's (2010) Theoretical Foundation of Student Success

Strange's (2010) theory of student success highlights the significance of providing services with knowledge of processes and constructions of students' learning, development, and growth and influences of educational environments. The student development piece of this theory considers and requires students to take responsibility for their learning. Accordingly, participants in this study explained that Nigerian post-secondary education differed from the University of Saskatchewan's context in the aspects of curricula, instructions, facilities, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, most of these individuals reported that hitherto, they were only familiar with the "transmission" or "received" way of knowing. These participants elaborated in chapter four that they were not used to collaborative or participatory instructional methods, independent studies, and employing metacognitive aptitudes. Besides, for the most part, the participants had described their Nigerian curricula as theoretical and instructional facilities as inadequate or obsolete.

Moreover, the participants indicated that they learned in contexts that were opposed to academic freedom and collegial relationships between students and instructors. So, they presumed that gaps and differences between their Nigerian and Canadian education had made transitioning and adjustments to the U of S (Canada) much more difficult. They had bridged these gaps and eased their transitions through amongst other things, support programs and interventions from their host university. In sum, their prior education and transitioning experiences aligned with the student's piece of Strange's (2010) theory.

In addition to the student factor, Strange (2010) bestowed on post-secondary education institutions' administrations, faculties, and student service professionals the task of creating or influencing programs and platforms or channels to promote students' success. In this case, the support programs and services accessed by the participants pointed to the campus environment aspect of Strange's (2010) theory. Findings from the study revealed areas of congruence between the participants' learning needs such as those related to writing academic papers, avoiding plagiarism, and dealing with supervisor-student relationships and the U of S student learning services including graduate writing workshops and drop-in meetings. On the contrary, the participants had described aspects of discrepancies between their needs and learning services as ranging from poor publicity, improper coordination, and problems with program contents and delivery. These participants' reservations over support programs meant that there were still gaps and unmet needs for a particular population of the U of S's student body. These gaps or mismatches validated Strange and Hardy Cox's (2016) position that "student success is not solely a matter of individual student effort, but also a function of how well the institution adapts to the needs of each student" (p. 215). On the premise of Strange's (2010) theory, those support programs should have been created with knowledge of these individuals' needs, identities, prior backgrounds, and transition or adjustment pressures. As Strange and Hardy Cox (2016) further suggested, "students can succeed only by accomplishing the tasks that lead to their goals, institutions have an equal responsibility to understand and respond to changing needs so that student success is more probable" (p.216). This success means that U of S and other student support professionals must stay aware of the increasingly diverse Canadian post-secondary students' population and its attendant problems (Rahilly & Buckley, 2016). Thus, findings from this study substantiated Strange's (2010) theory and other literatures emphasizing knowledge of students' demographics, previous academic backgrounds, and learning needs for providing

useful and fitting services to the varied post-secondary education students' body (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Ikegulu, 1999; Leary et al., 2016; Rahilly & Buckley, 2016).

In practice, support programs and interventions must match students' varying needs and demands. The University of Saskatchewan's Learning Charter pronounced that teaching and learning and supports must reflect the equality of opportunities and cultural responsiveness by providing services reminiscent of the institution's student diversity and learning needs (U of S Learning Charter: Institutional Commitment 4, June 17, 2010). Besides, the University's Blueprint on Internationalization promised to seek "increased intercultural understanding through inclusion of cross-cultural perspectives within the U of S curriculum and high impact co-curricular activities that foster intercultural understanding and enhanced feelings of belonging" (The University of Saskatchewan's International Blueprint for Action 2025 - a vision for a globally significant university). This clear vision of fostering intercultural understanding has mapped out ways to "ensure adequate resources for academic and non-academic international student advising, and for support to meet student needs and regulatory requirements" (p.5). Both the University's Learning Charter and Blueprint on Internationalization had mandated the student support personnel to ensure that programs tie to students' needs, including international cohorts. These documents added voices calling on Canadian post-secondary education institutions to adapt programs and operations to reflect students' diversity (Leary et al., 2016; Kirby, 2009). However, Strange's (2010) work laid against the participants' experiences suggested that most services were general or too broad and may have hardly reflected the learning needs, characteristics, and preferences of students from particular departments, nationalities, or any known cohorts. Programs were meant to serve all students irrespective of differences in prior learning orientations, educational backgrounds, and transitioning and adjustment experiences. This situation revealed that more work needed to be done through student services to achieve the equality of opportunities, cultural responsiveness, and inclusiveness goals and aspirations of the above U of S working documents.

Nonetheless, there have been arguments on who should adapt to the prevailing learning circumstances, the student or university? One school of thought argued that strangers, in this case, students, must embrace changes to fit into their new environments (Kim, 1995), while, the other felt that post-secondary institutions must modify programs, operations, organizational structure, and environmental designs to accommodate demographic and cultural differences

among their members (Chen, Starosta, Lin & You, 1998; Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016). Irrespective of these divides, university administrations, faculty, and student service professionals are expected to provide the enabling environments for all students to succeed. Such a mission is consistent with the fundamental goals of universities to recruit, retain, and help students to achieve success (Strange, 2010). In their bids to achieve these goals, universities could pursue knowledge of students' backgrounds, identities, behaviors, and challenges. On that premise, I hoped that this study had furnished the University of Saskatchewan and other post-secondary institutions in Canada and around the world with some insights about the learning experiences of one group of their international students' population – the Nigerian graduate students.

Findings Related to Tinto's (2015) Conceptual Model of Students' Persistence

Based on Tinto's (2015) students' persistence theory, it is pertinent to reiterate that participants the 11 interview participants and all focus group members were first from their families to study in Canada. International students are grouped alongside first-generation students as among non-traditional constituents that had found their ways into the Canadian post-education education (Leary et al., 2016; Rahilly & Buckley, 2016; Strange & Cox, 2016). These non-traditional groups have their positive sides but simultaneously, had added to the problems of managing the burgeoning varied needs of the Canadian post-secondary student population (Leary et al., 2016; Rahilly & Buckley, 2016). Likewise, the participants in this study were adults that had entered the Canadian education system at different stages of their lives to improve their knowledge, advance in a career, or obtain international exposures. Perhaps these individuals as with other international graduate students were considered mature enough to handle their learning and adjustment challenges by themselves (Fatima, 2001), but such should not be the case with first-generation students because of limited access to family or social support in their education (Pascarella et al., 2004). For instance, some participants had expressed ignorance about the workings of the university in fundamental issues such as choosing and registering classes, knowing where to obtain help, and dealing with human relationships in their new schooling environment. Even though these individuals had initially defined their goals and demonstrated confidence or determination to succeed in their studies, dealing with transitioning challenges could fizzle such confidence (Tinto, 2015). So, it had behooved the university to guide, monitor, and support them effectively to ensure that these goals were actualized.

Apart from helping students to define their goals, Tinto (2015) had suggested that tertiary institutions must seek to enhance students' persistence to completing their studies by helping students to develop self-efficacy or believe in their abilities to succeed, feel a sense of belonging in the university community, and perceive relevance in the curriculum. The participants' collective experiences connected with Tinto's (2015) propositions in the sense that:

- These individuals had had their prior education in a different context as against the U of S and had faced tough transitioning and adjustment experiences. Their narratives indicated that they had needed a matching study or learning services and interventions to build capacity and make up for learning deficits caused by their transitions. This situation necessitated that the U of S administer such support programs that could build or raise these individuals' self-efficacies, and perhaps, boost persistence.
- The participants perceived their U of S educational experiences as relevant and impactful. This perception was evident in the participants' comments that portrayed a high quality of research, teaching and learning, and utmost satisfaction with the practicality of their education at the university.
- The participants reckoned that learning or study support programs and orientations were beneficial but should have been aligned more appropriately with their needs. Their aggregate narratives indicated that they had desired to have learning support programs or workshops that were administered through departments or colleges and by peers of similar nationality or ethnicity or educational background complement the university's general or centralized services.

By implication, the participants had preferred services that conveyed a sheer understanding of their needs, trust, and a stronger sense of belonging. Tinto (2015) had argued that learning institutions could promote students' sense of belonging by possibly ensuring that the makeup of the administration, staff, and faculty are reasonably representative of all students and that there are sufficient numbers of students of similar backgrounds on campus to allow for the development of self-sustaining student communities. No student should ever find him or herself out of place or unrepresented by the interests of others on campus. (p. 8)

In other words, universities and colleges could boost students' persistence and overall success when their demographic makeups, interpersonal relations, and activities send clear messages of sense of belonging to all students. This argument suggests that the participants' desire for some

tailored or specific and decentralized learning support programs using peer mentors from among students of the same department, nationality or region in administering these services might have availed them with the opportunities of building learning communities. However, the participants had also noted that there was no guarantee that the university would accept this model of service delivery based on its tendencies to breed segregation among students, nor indications that other students will accept this brand of peer mentorship. Besides, this approach might bring increased financial obligations to the university as a result of duplicating learning services and roles in various departments or colleges, and perhaps, giving honorariums to volunteering peer mentors.

Nonetheless, any activity or effort towards helping students, especially the non-traditional cohorts such as the participants in this study requires student support professionals to be resourceful, skillful, dynamic and follow workable criteria (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Such were the considerations for using Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) principles and strategies of good practices in student services to examine the provision of and participants' access to learning support programs at the University of Saskatchewan. Building on Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) work, I had hoped to establish the effects of these learning services on the participants' transitions, persistence, and successes at the university.

Findings Related to Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) Model: Principles and Strategies of Good Practice in Student Services

As the researcher, I broadly sought to establish knowledge about prior educational background, transitioning and adjustment experiences of Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan, and ascertain how available learning support services at the University of Saskatchewan matched their needs and expectations. However, I did not intend to criticize the current state of student services at the University of Saskatchewan, nor hand-off an exclusive template on how to support students. According to Strange and Hardy Cox (2016), "In order to assist students in their success, colleges and universities must themselves be successful" (p. 216). Therefore, I adopted Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) model of good practices in student services to review the selected participants' interactions with learning services as to understand how such services aligned with their needs at the University of Saskatchewan. Also, I embedded recommendations on strategies or actions that may be taken to resolve problem areas in students' access, use, and effectiveness of learning support programs. Lastly, I structured the following analysis according to Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) sequence of the eight principles

and strategies for good practice in student services (p. 237). As earlier stated in chapter two, the principles include:

Centering practices on students' needs. Student-centered practice requires student support professionals to focus on policies and programs that will fittingly serve students' needs. The principle also tasks support persons to continuously seek to understand students' developmental processes and learning needs, and design or administer programs to enhance those processes. Testaments from several participants in this study suggested that learning supports and programs at the U of S were mostly student-driven. This student-centered approach manifested in the participants' statements that described the impacts of support programs on their transitions. Several of these statements suggested that some study workshops had helped the participants to hone their research and writing skills. Some of the participants attested that they learned to avoid or handle issues such as related to academic integrity, retrieving online scholarly journals, and connecting well with professors or supervisors. Altogether, they commended these study workshops for easing their adaptations at the U of S. Two of the classic statements on the effects of support programs read, "Yeah, the one that has been very instrumental in the plagiarism workshops I attended; it just made a whole lot of difference" (IN#6 – 03/07/18), and

Coming from an environment (Nigeria) in which those opportunities were not always available, I would say those services (U of S student services and programs) could potentially be the game-changer, especially, in the sense that they give a strong motivation for success (IN#7 – 03/07/18).

These participants' statements depicted foresightedness and dexterity of the U of S's learning services professionals in dealing with students' needs. In other words, services were reasonably student-centered.

Notwithstanding the student-centeredness of these programs, some participants also wished that the U of S had sought a better understanding of students' needs as not to build programs on unsubstantiated assumptions. For instance, a participant noted that "the university should do more to understand what the students need, rather than just coming up with what they think they need. What they think the student needs might not be precisely what the student needs" (IN#9 – 04/07/18). To solve this problem, universities including the U of S should embark on systemic or individual studies of students' demographical formations and prior academic backgrounds to understand their needs (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Ikegbulu, 1999;

Kirby, 2009; Leary et al., 2016; Rahilly & Buckley, 2016). Universities could seek knowledge on different international students' ethnic blocks regarding their intercultural orientations, and academic and social involvements (Ippolito, 2007; Kommers & Pham, 2016; Zhao et al., 2005), or cautiously obtain such information through individual and personal dealings with international students (Leary et al., 2016). The latter option seems a more feasible strategy if administered at moments following students' access to support programs or events. In that regard, this study has served such goals because of the methods used to collect data from participants. The study generated valuable insights about a group of international students through focus groups and individual interviews that engaged participants in in-depth ways to obtain stories of their learning in Nigeria and transitioning experiences at the U of S, respectively.

Recognition of individual differences. Students possess different intellectual capabilities and require varying degrees of support. Strange and Hardy Cox (2010) pointed out that “students come from so many different circumstances and with so many different expectations and preferences” (p. 239), such that adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to solving their numerous problems amounts to a disservice. Reports and claims about effects or outcomes of support programs and interventions usually come in aggregates. They are often generalized and always look impressive, but the fact remains that such descriptions come at the detriment of individuals whose experiences, abilities, or circumstances differ from dominant groups (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016). This argument does not suggest that there must be individualized programs for every student though, at the least, aligning support programs or services for cohorts such as international, first-generation, students with family, and other constituents of students' diversity, may serve more productively, as well as save time and resources.

Several participants in this study held reservations over the generic contents and administration of learning support workshops and events. However, they did not single out a program or activity. These individuals argued that the general or non-specific contents and goals of some programs made them less appealing. They pointed out that they would have preferred programs tailored for specific recipients or audiences and colleges, or rather, departments. One of the participants said, “what might be relevant to someone in mechanical might not be relevant to someone in electrical...but if we can streamline it down to maybe, departments, each department has their peculiarities” (IN#6 – 03/07/18). Apart from the student participants, student services personnel participants also disclosed that most programs do not target students

of any given designation or ethnicity. One of these individuals declared, “Our mandate is not just to serve international students, and because of that, then, many of my workshops to date have not been directed just to international students” (IN#13 – 19/07/18), and another added, “I do not think we have had those discussions about focused ethnicity or country of origin, and whether or not there are particular issues; I have heard of certain students being taken advantage of, but this is hearsay” (IN#14 – 20/07/18).

Therefore, to serve students more effectively, a blend of the general and individualized or cohort-based workshops and programs could be used to reach a higher number of students more appropriately. However, this pattern calls for a thorough understanding of the contents of general and specific or individualized programs as defined by different student groups or levels. For instance, participants in this study indicated that subjects such as dealing with the North American or Canadian instructional methods, style and volume of essay writing, academic integrity, and supervisor-student relationships were topmost in their lists of desired support programs. In the words of one of the participants,

...if there can be a way of meeting international students’ needs for writing mostly. It is not as if we do not know how to write, but I am sure the Canadian way of writing or the writing here (U of S), is different from ours. So, if there can be workshops that can address that need for international students, it is going to go a long way to improve our academic experiences here. (IN#1 – 02/07/18)

Armed with information such as the above, student support persons can structure or administer customized services or design programs targeted for specific individuals or cohorts.

Flexibility in approach. This principle requires student service persons to be flexible in executing or administering programs. Flexibility in this context means to adopt programs and procedures that suit individual students and fit unique needs or specific circumstances. This principle complements the initial two. It implies that processes and models for administering supports or programs could be adapted or tweaked when and where necessary. As Strange and Hardy Cox (2010) postulated, “rules, standards, and systems are important for consistency and accountability, but adaptability is equally important in tailoring services to support the need of students” (p. 239-240). In other words, this principle demands that student service professionals respond appropriately to daily and emergent needs using efficient methods. It requires student service persons to identify needs and align the same with services that are modified to fit each

student's situation. Equally, the participants in this study suggested that student support offices could use "general or broad workshops" to address the challenges or needs of specific student groups by engaging capable tutors that understand differences in students' educational backgrounds to facilitate programs. For example, an interpretation panel (IP) member argued that through adequate knowledge of students' prior education and excellent presentation, even broad topics could be used to address different matters. This IP member asserted that with knowledgeable facilitators and appropriate delivery methods, student service personnel could get the same broadly designed programs to address the needs of specific student populations. Such idea buttressed flexibility in administering services but most importantly, described one way to ensuring that different students or cohorts receive adequate attention when seeking help.

Responding to needs appropriately and on time. This principle requires student service providers to be good listeners to students' needs and to respond with tact and promptness. Appropriate and timely responses to students' needs are very critical to student success. However, the student services units of universities have their hands already full with workloads and deadlines on meeting students' diverse needs and expectations (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). As noted earlier, several participants commended the quality of learning services and programs at the U of S but also had identified perceived areas of neglect or lack of support. One such area was the lack of support for international students needing online library assistance from outside the university campus or at a distance. For instance, a female focus group (FG) participant stated that she could not get help searching or retrieving online articles due to presumed unavailability of established online library support protocol. She narrated how she took some online classes before arriving at the U of S (Canada) and felt there was no prescribed pathway or guides to obtaining such support remotely. Her words read,

When I connected to the instructor, he will tell me to go to the library. Then, how will I get to the online library since I do not know the way around it? So, even when I moved over, I failed that course.

In addition to this lone story, some of the interpretation panel (IP) members confirmed that there was no defined programs and channels by which the Student Learning Service and Library units had assisted international students to obtain library support from their home countries. These IP members named reasons for this shortcoming to include lack of capacity, incoherent coordination in library operations, and some unlikely expectations that all students must come to

the campus during orientations. For instance, one of the IP members said, “I know we do not do a very good job in creating online tools for students remotely...because it is a difficult thing, and we do not have a person dedicated to creating online tools”.

Apart from the lack of support or response to specific needs, participants identified other lapses such as the unbecoming timing of some introductory courses, study workshops, and orientations or info sessions. Remarks from the individual interviews and focus groups had indicated that there were discrepancies over the most suitable or convenient times to schedule programs and events. Some participants argued that more students would attend or benefit from most workshops if administered at the beginning of terms, or when students have not immersed themselves into major course activities. For instance, one of the IP members suggested that “it will be good to...start the workshops between the 15th and 23rd of the resumption month – these are what to learn ahead of actual classes”. Other participants argued that programs such as the ISSAC’s newcomer orientation day and GPS 981 (an introductory course on Canadian academic culture for international students) that holds in August were timed wrongly because some international students would not have arrived at such periods. The latter of these views corroborated with the argument that “students may not attend orientation for reasons ranging, for example, from not knowing about the opportunity in the first place to not being able to secure timely study permits or flight arrangements” (Leary et al., 2016 p.118). Overall, the participants’ arguments implied that some services had not met their learning needs and expectations.

Thus, to ensure to meet students’ needs appropriately and in reasonable time frames meant that the student support units at the U of S might consider revisiting their communication channels and program schedules to accommodate all students. According to Neuman (2010), information about support services and programs must be passed in “customized, plain-language sound bites, in a medium that current students are willing to read, and at the point in time when they need it” (p. 50). Besides, Leary et al. (2016) recommended a one-year extended orientation on topics such as “the academic system, study skills, employment, and Canadian culture” for new students (p. 119). Likewise, one of the participants in this study suggested that emails or newsletters about support services should be kept simple, and preferably, conveyed to students through their college or department’s graduate secretary or included in newcomer information booklets. In the words of this individual,

...if they put everything in one email containing all those library series, I do not think we would appreciate it. Well, they should contact graduate secretaries, that is all. Graduate secretaries will always reach us...it could be also be included in the package they gave us when we come. (IN#10 – 04/07/18)

As universities continue to grapple with the exigencies of responding appropriately and swiftly to the students' needs, the U of S and other institutions could also adopt the above practical and straightforward approach that might not add further strain to their human and financial resources to support students' learning.

Anticipating needs rather than reacting to them. This principle connotes being proactive to decipher students' needs and prepared to tackle such needs promptly. According to Strange and Hardy Cox (2010), this feature requires student service professionals always to monitor trends or keep track of events and being anticipatory. The principle also mandates student service officers to draw consistently from the knowledge base on students' development and growth and learning characteristics to make predictions about services needed by students at specified intervals during the academic year (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Good practice in students' services ought to survey students' needs and ascertain the stages or times when students require specific services. This strategy is critical because of the influx of non-traditional students such as international, first-generation, and mature or students with families into the Canadian post-secondary education. For example, support service personnel should study distinctions among international students and observe trends in their access to services to determine the programs to offer. Student support personnel participants noted that international students had differed in their prior academic exposures depending on the region they came from, and some of the students had needed assistance in their writing and communication skills more than did others. Most remarkable among such observations were these two comments: "students who came from Europe...do know how to organize a piece of writing" (IN#13 – 19/07/18), and "I did notice that...they have got a huge range of experience with research. Some extremely skilled, however, some just have not had the experience, or perhaps they did not have the resources, so, they are starting here" (IN#15 – 20/07/18).

However, other participants argued that student service units had not kept records of particulars of the students receiving supports or their previous educational information because they did not require such information to provide services. These individuals disclosed that the

Student Learning Service (SLS) unit was not set up to monitor such trends; instead, the SLS had focused on the aggregate number of contacts or attendances by students per time or event. For instance, one of the participants stated that the unit does not focus on “ethnicity or country of origin, and whether or not there are particular issues” (IN#14 – 20/07/18). Another added, “we do not have data on which students come from which country...if the data could be accurately recorded...understanding how students from specific regions/nations access our office would be beneficial in developing future programming” (IN#16 – 20/07/18). Moreover, another participant stressed that most student service front-line workers that deal directly with students were only short-term student volunteers that work for brief periods to know or make careful observations or reports about trends in the provision or access to support services. As this participant stated, these volunteers “cannot comment on what it was like before and what it is like now, because they have only worked for one or two years: they are students” (IN#12 – 19/07/18).

Knowing that some student service units do not keep data or monitor trends by the details of the recipients and type of services sought for or obtained at given intervals raised questions on how these units make decisions or the extents that data drove their choices. Secondly, the situation presented worries as to how student service units implement the equality, inclusiveness, and intercultural promises expressed in the U of S Learning Charter and Blueprint on Internationalization. Leary et al. (2016) asserted that “student service professionals working with international students also inherit – often by default – the responsibility of championing internationalization efforts of the university on behalf of students and staff” (p. 126). Student service persons can achieve the internationalization goals of their institutions through collaborations with the faculty to pursue research and develop templates that might drive global practices in providing support programs (Love & Estanek, 2004). Being proactive, therefore demands that the Student Learning Service (SLS), Library, International Student Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC), and other U of S student support units must begin to monitor and keep data on trends of services or programs and solicit comprehensive feedback from the students that had accessed these services. Otherwise, how can we assume that their efforts and resources have yielded expected results?

Applying resources efficiently and sustainably. Publicly funded universities are accountable to taxpayers for expending public funds, and good practices in providing student services demand prudence in managing these funds. As subsets of the entire university

operations, student service units are also required to live within their means. It is often incumbent on student service units to provide sustainable services with the usually meager resources at their disposal (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Scarcity of resources affects the quality and quantity of supports or programs offered to students in universities (Baker, 2010). Student service personnel participants in this study affirmed that it had been difficult to fund programs. They emphasized that the SLS and other student service units are usually willing to provide valuable support to students but sometimes unable to do so due to the inadequacy of funding. One of the participants reported that there were “programs emphasizing writing and helping students out...Sometimes, there is a struggle over who is going to pay for it. Should the university be paying for it, or should the program be paying for it?” (IN#12 – 19/07/18). The scarcity of funds led to this allocation dilemma that had constrained the opportunities to provide adequate services to students. Understandably, universities are like every logical entity that prioritizes spending amidst numerous competing obligations (Baker, 2010). So, they might not have invested fortunes to provide student services at the expense of other projects such as research, actual teaching and learning, and physical facilities or equipment. Even within the scope of student services, there could be exigencies such as are related to health and wellbeing, housing, enrolments, admissions, and registrar services, and a host of others contending for preeminence and higher financial allocation.

Moreover, the changing student demographics in Canadian universities may have introduced unfamiliar challenges to universities that had admitted a diverse students’ body without the financial capacity to afford equivalent support programs. According to Baker (2010),
As student populations enrolling in post-secondary education continue to diversify, so too do their needs, and so too must the services offered. For example, international students have different needs in terms of their funding and the regulations they must adhere to. (p. 62)

Until recently, Canadian universities and colleges saw international students as a source of generating revenue (Kunin & Associates, 2012). These higher education institutions upheld that international students should pay higher tuition fees because their parents had not contributed to the public treasury that funds education in Canada (Leary et al., 2016), giving cause for higher international students’ access to financial support than do their domestic counterparts. Baker (2010) further stated that “international students have also been found to make much broader use

of the financial aid office than do students in general” (p. 62), and with the exception of a few participants in this study, tough financial situations continue to constitute huge transitioning problems for international students.

Some participants confessed that they were self-sponsored students without external funding and had faced immense financial challenges during their transitions at the U of S. One of these individuals reported, “...I don’t even know how I’m going to go about the funds...they should provide more ways that can help self-funded students, and reduce this pressure that can affect our (international students) academic performance” (IN#2 – 03/07/18), and another said, “if the school had probably guaranteed the full-funding into the second year, most students would have finished their projects much faster than what obtains” (IN#5 – 03/07/18). These statements suggested that the participants had faced tough financial situations such that additional service charges by the U of S would have increased pressures and bore adverse effects towards their academic performances. Such circumstance underscored the need to be prudent with available funds while trying to provide the best of support to students. The U of S student service units might consider finding ways to prioritize needs and offer matching services to students at minimal costs. As one of the participants advised, “the university should do more to understand what the students need, rather than just coming up with what they think they need” (IN#9 – 04/07/18). This strategy means that student service units can relatively save costs by appraising their services or programs and eliminating redundant pieces.

Focusing on outcomes and results. Being result-oriented is an essential bedrock for good practices in student services because programs or interventions ought to be evaluated to verify efficiency. In other words, service or program inputs alone must not account for success. The effectiveness of programs or interventions as determined by the service administrators themselves or students or recipients must be measured against “its contribution to the overall learning mission of the institution” (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010 p. 241). As such, the University of Saskatchewan’s Learning Charter had already carved out broad benchmarks to guide its various units in assessing their policies, programs, and operations. To reiterate, amongst other things, the Learning Charter promised to “provide appropriate academic and other supports to students who experience various challenges to their learning, including challenges of a cultural, social, psychological, or physical nature” (U of S Learning Charter: Institutional Commitment 4, June 17, 2010, para. 1). This document sets out standards for units including the Student

Learning Service (SLS), Library, International Student Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC), and other student support units regarding the scope of services required of them.

This study was not intended to measure the effectiveness of every individual program offered by the various student service units of the University of Saskatchewan. However, it has brought insights on the perceptions of selected individuals over the efficacy and ineptness of some student learning services or programs at the U of S. The study has buttressed the need to engage in periodic and extensive reviews of the outcome of support programs and interventions. Specifically, most of the student-participants gave their perceptions about the services they had accessed as satisfactory, except for the few instances of lapses in timing, publicity, and organization of some programs. These individuals rated support programs and events based on their perceived relevance towards their transitions and abilities to doing things appropriately in their various disciplines. Some of them pointed to specific workshops on topics such as avoiding plagiarism, honing grammar and writing and research skills as very helpful in making seamless adjustments. The student support personnel-participants gave their reports mostly in input numbers such as students' attendances or enrolments. For example, one of these persons made this comment, "80% of those students who come to those classes are international students, maybe, 85%. And the workshop registration, I would say again, probably, 75 – 80% of the students who come to the workshops are international" (IN#13 – 19/07/18). Unfortunately, these attendance numbers of students that had accessed support indicated less on outcomes or achieved objectives of the programs. Consequently, the U of S student service units might consider seeking ways to periodically obtain detailed and accurate feedback about the impacts of their programs towards students' success.

Designing and implementing services jointly. This feature emphasizes the need for synergy among student service units in providing support to students. It requires student support personnel to work together to enhance students' retention and overall success (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2010). Learning or study support units alone cannot provide students with all the services required to excel in their studies or have a sublime university experience. There is the need for collaboration among the various facets of student services including enrolment management, admissions and registrar, health and wellness, counseling and special needs, learning skills, career, financial, international students, and others to achieve the common goal of supporting student success. Even within units as learning services, this collaborative formula demands all

the constituents or sub-units to work together to accomplish their mission. Otherwise, gaps in partnership could undermine effectiveness or impacts of services and programs.

Similarly, collaboration among the student service units towards students' retention and success at the U of S is of utmost priority. The Student Learning Service (SLS) unit is a subset of the University's Library that has the function of supporting and developing students' learning and academic skills (U of S: University Library, n.d.). The student service interpretation panel (IP) participants disclosed that the SLS does not solely serve graduate students, and there was no central office or coordinator dedicated to organizing learning services for graduate students. According to these individuals, graduate students' learning services scatter across the U of S's colleges and departments, and units such as the Language Centre, Student Learning Services (SLS), International Students Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC), libraries, and others. A participant from the library unit reported that the university's libraries collaborate with other support units to "provide resources and assistance in connecting students with relevant resources, and...teach them how to, not only to find them but to use them responsibly and ethically as well" (IN#15 – 20/07/18). The ISSAC supports international students through various pre-arrival and arrival services (U of S: International Student and Study Abroad Centre, n.d.). Most of the ISSAC's services were not mainly academic or directly related to learning. However, ISSAC had partnered with other student service units to address various issues concerning both the international students and domestic students embarking on abroad studies. One of the student service personnel participants explained that ISSAC's prominence as the international students' first point of contact had put them in the position of making regular referrals such as directing students to appropriate colleges, and liaising with other student support units and faculties to enlighten international students on various subjects including academics (IN#16 – 20/07/18).

Some of the student support participants' narratives indicated that units such as the SLS and ISSAC had worked together at different occasions to implement programs geared towards promoting students' success. However, some interpretation panel (IP) members felt that there were still apparent lapses in the way student service units work together. These individuals had insisted that their "integration is not as consistent and tight as it should be," and "there is not enough academic support information that passes through (their) offices - the collaborative pieces that offer those point of needs." These arguments suggested that the various U of S student service units should seek new ways to work together. As one solution, participants had

suggested an approach of inter-units' synergy where staff from maybe SLS could speak directly to international students about their services during ISSAC's newcomer orientations or info sessions. Moreover, academic advisors could partner with colleges, departments, and ISSAC at the beginning of an academic year or term to sensitize new international students on issues such as how to choose an academic major or pick the right courses. Such simple partnerships could yield more productive outcomes if adequately deployed.

Summary of Discussions

Altogether, the above eight principles of good practices in student services served as guides for determining aptness of supports to the individuals under review. Lewin, as cited by Strange (2010), noted that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 30). Consequently, I drew from the work of Strange and Hardy Cox (2010) to make arguments about the participants' perception of the condition of learning support services and proffer solutions where necessary. However, these ideas do not suggest a sole yardstick or strategy for organizing or administering student services. The principles only served as a guide for this analysis. I matched each of the principles against the participants' perception of the learning support programs accessed at the U of S. As such, I pointed out areas of congruences and mismatches in the participants' perceptions of their transitioning challenges and accessed support services. Aside from highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the services as perceived by the participants, I also offered recommendations on ways to tackle instances of mismatch in the participants' perception of needs and support programs.

Responses to the Research Questions

This study produced compelling insights into the learning experiences of the participants as related to prior educational backgrounds, transitions and adjustments, and access to learning services at the University of Saskatchewan. At the onset of this research, I had expected significant variations in the participants' perceptions of Nigerian university education given that these individuals had come from different parts of the country and attended universities of different sizes, orientations, and missions. Secondly, I had expected that transitions and adjustments to learning in Canada might differ for students that had come directly from Nigeria and supposed that these students might have handled these changes differently. Thirdly, I felt that my experience with student learning support programs at the U of S might have been peculiar, so I needed to hear from students of similar educational contexts to know if and how

these services had served them differently. Surprisingly, I found out that most of the participants' experiences and perceptions resonated with mine in all three areas of this study. Hence, in the following sections, I present the participants' responses and my thoughts to each of the research questions.

Research Question One

The participants' responses, as summarized below, confirmed my personal experiences and initial understandings about the nature and operations of a typical Nigerian university as at my period of study in Nigeria. The first research question reads: *How do first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan describe their academic background, against their perceptions of prior experiences when studying in Nigeria?*

Interview questions 1 - 4 (Appendix E) sought answers to the above overarching research question. In response to these questions, participants described their prior academic background in the following areas such as teaching and learning styles and methods, grading system, nature of supervisor/instructor-student relationships, time allotted for class/course works, projects, assignments, and examinations. I categorized aggregate data from the participants' narratives into the following headings: Classroom Experiences, School Facilities and Support Services, and Curriculum and Course Workloads. As presented in chapter four, available data indicated that participants learned in large classes in Nigeria. One of the participants noted that there were "hundreds (of students) in a classroom...it looks like a graduation hall" (IN#2 – 03/07/18). The massive number of students per class had supposedly influenced the choice of pedagogy and manner of classroom engagements or interactions by their Nigerian instructors. A participant said that "there was no room for interactive sessions or maybe, very few" (IN#9 – 04/07/18). The participants' Nigerian instructors had adopted lecture methods, repetitive tests and exams, and minimal interactions with students in bids to manage large workloads, and such approaches gave them away as highhanded. Consequently, learning was perceived by most participants to be theoretical, boring, and did not encourage creativity and independent thinking.

Moreover, several participants had claimed that learning facilities and services such as classroom spaces, instructional technologies and equipment, and support services were inadequate. These individuals had suggested that their Nigerian classroom spaces were small compared to the teeming students' population and indicated that there was no access to online resources or materials to supplement classroom activities. They had emphasized that students

stood for lectures in crowded halls. Some participants' described their previous classrooms and instructional facilities as, "We have more students to the space...you have to get to school early enough so that you can sit in front of the class to be able to hear the lecturer speaks or teaches" (IN#1 - 02/07/18). "The only thing we had was access to online resources that the University subscribed to, and it was not very effective" (IN#6 – 03/07/18). Some participants perceived that their Nigerian instructors had only depended on regular textbooks, while other instructional equipment and materials were either completely lacking or in short supply for students needing them. One of them averred, "Most of the equipment we use for practical sessions were old – So, we were taught with old technological equipment" (IN#6 – 03/07/18). Others reported that there were no formal or institutionalized learning services, as students obtained such assistance through friends for free or paid. One of these individuals noted that "there were no formal structures dedicated to supporting students, but a level of personal interactions as well as communal interventions among students" (IN#7 – 03/07/18). Perhaps, these universities could not provide learning supports or services because of the dearth of funds, or students preferred help through personal associates.

Lastly, some participants described their previous Nigerian curricula as broad, ambitious, and rigid. They felt that the number of courses required to complete certain degrees or certificate programs was more than necessary and that those courses were typically theoretical or inapplicable to real situations. As stated by one of the participants, "we do much academic work in Nigeria, but those academic works do not connect to physical experience" (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Other participants declared that students were not given options or allowed to make choices in selecting courses. One of these individuals reported, "In Nigeria, we take everything (classes), and do not have a chance or opportunity to say I do not want to do this or that – you have to do everything" (IN#6 – 03/07/18). The setting required students to hang on to classes even when found unconnected to their aspirations, or when odds of passing such courses were slim. Some participants, though, considered such inflexibility as beneficial, arguing that general classes gave them strong footings for higher studies and transferability. For instance, one of the participants who was an engineering student in Nigeria maintained that such compulsory general classes gave him "a good background to fit into any electrical engineering field here in Canada" (IN#6 – 03/07/18). Other participants reckoned similar circumstances as merely encouraging passive learning than allowing room for independent studies and research. One of these individuals

argued, “there are limited research and funding to encourage students to engage in research. Even though there are people doing research, I do think most of the professors and lecturers do more of teaching” (IN#4 – 03/07/18). However, one of the participants had expressed views that differed from the experiences of others. This male participant had adjudged his prior education as sublime because his former (Nigerian) university was well equipped with modern learning facilities (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

The above responses from the individual interviews formed the participants’ aggregate reflection of university education as per their periods of study in Nigeria. Besides, the focus group participants unanimously ratified these data as a fitting representation of most Nigerian universities’ contexts and practices. For the most part and with different instances, I also identified with the participants’ experiences and perceptions of Nigerian university education especially in the aspects of class sizes, teaching methods, nature of curricula, and manner of instructor-student relationships amongst others. I hope that these findings had provided insights into the context and workings of Nigerian universities particularly and helped to advance knowledge on international students’ educational backgrounds and transitions and adjustment experiences.

Research Question Two

Going by the second research question that reads: *What are the teaching and learning challenges Nigerian students have encountered when making transitions to the University of Saskatchewan? How have these students identified and navigated these challenges as they have adapted to the University of Saskatchewan?*

I discovered that most of the participants, as expected, had faced varying levels of transitioning and adjustment struggles at the U of S and had dealt with them according to their circumstances and manners. Some participants’ narratives suggested that they had adapted correctly into the U of S learning environment when others were yet to find a smooth sail. I found similarities in their stories and my own experiences, especially on the aspect of dealing with transitioning and adjustment challenges. I felt that my shared identity with the participants had accounted for those similarities. In the light of the participants’ experiences, I considered myself among the divide that had reasonably adjusted to the Canadian educational environment in the sense that I had been able to pull through my initial learning challenges.

I used interview questions 5 - 9 (Appendix E) to probe for participants' learning challenges during transitions and how they have dealt with identified issues. In their replies, participants named factors that had influenced their choices to study at the University of Saskatchewan. Secondly, they identified some differences in their past and present educations. Thirdly, they pinpointed some transitioning or adjustment challenges at the U of S and described how they had coped so far. These individuals had chosen to study at the U of S for several reasons including growth in knowledge and career, availability of desired programs and willing supervisor, and other perceived better opportunities. Better opportunities for different participants included reasonable tuitions, superior learning facilities, and higher chances for gaining scholarships and practical experiences. Also, some participants came because of family relocation and related motives. Here are some of the comments that expressed those ideas: "While searching for schools, U of S caught my eyes because it combines population health with epidemiology. I was also intrigued by the pedigree of the faculty members, especially, my present supervisor" (IN#11 – 04/07/18); "Well, I picked the U of S, first of all, because of the low tuition...to develop better in terms of the facilities, textbooks, and materials that can make you picture yourself in that situation" (IN#2 – 03/07/18); "my family moved here (Saskatchewan, Canada). So, there was this strike action that lasted about a year, and so that was why I transferred here" (IN#8 – 03/07/18).

Upon coming to the U of S, these individuals witnessed sharp differences in their past and present academic contexts. For example, some participants perceived higher collaborations between instructors and students at the U of S. They saw U of S professors as passionate and committed to students' learning and reckoned such collegial atmosphere as satisfactory and promoting learning. One of the participants voiced, "What stood out for me here, is the fact that (U of S) professors want you to learn, and they are happy that you come to ask questions" (IN#9 – 04/07/18), and another added, "the faculties are easily accessible...my teachers in the U of S see me as their working partner. Hence, they accord me respect as a student" (IN#11 – 04/07/18). Others commended the U of S's commitments to experiential learning and research for excellence. These participants made comments such as, "Here (U of S), you have to do much research and practical" (IN#3 – 03/07/18); "They (U of S) teach with projectors and computers in the class" (IN#3 – 03/07/18), and "Here (U of S), students have the opportunity of dropping a course in which they are not doing well; that is something I would say favours the student when

it comes to the Canadian system” (IN#4 – 03/07/18). They pointed out that courses or classes were flexible at the U of S, and students could freely choose and drop courses within stipulated periods. They expressed confidence that available instructional materials and technologies were outstanding. Other sundry areas of attention included participants’ perception of U of S curriculums, duration of lectures, and the diverse make-up of students in classrooms. Moreover, some of the participants felt that lectures periods were shorter and more engaging, while others had argued that the diversity in students’ backgrounds boosted the quality of exchanges and knowledge in classes. One of these individuals said, “length of lectures at the U of S is short, and you gain maximally” (IN#11 – 04/07/18), and another noted, “classes comprise a mix of international students from different backgrounds...students are exposed to global perspectives in learning” (IN#11 – 04/07/18).

As a result of highlighted differences, most of these individuals found it difficult to adapt or adjust quickly to the U of S learning environment. They traced their challenges to visa delays, late comings, and quick settlements. Because of their late arrivals to campus, some participants were unable to attend newcomer info sessions and orientations. This group could not obtain up-to-date knowledge about the workings of the universities in a fashion to make smoother adjustments to their new learning context. For instance, two participants stated thus, “we had visas approved very close to resumption – so, it was tedious trying to prepare and get your flight ticket and all that; I was not fully settled when the program started” (IN#5 – 03/07/18), and “for the ISSAC orientations; I did not attend...you know, when coming into a new system, you have to settle down at that point” (IN#5 – 03/07/18). Another group mentioned the impact of insufficient funding to their transitions. These were individuals who had come without enough funds, bursaries, or scholarships. This group also found it challenging to settle into their studies. One of these participants remarked, “if the school had probably guaranteed the full-funding into the second year, most students would have finished their projects much faster than what obtains” (IN#5 – 03/07/18). However, some did not encounter funding but academic difficulties. These individuals named academic struggles such as switching to the use of online learning tools and dealing with the intricacies of Canadian graduate-level writing and research. One of the participants said, “I was used to talking to people, and now, I had to trust technology” (IN#7 – 03/07/2018). Other identified challenges included,

- handling the shift from “transmission model” (lecture teaching method) to a culture that required active classroom participation and critical thinking
- switching from an environment which was perceived to muzzle academic freedom to a culture of collegiality, collaboration, and self-expression
- dealing with the Canadian accent and being understood.

These individuals made the following comments: “That critical reasoning, we do not have it because we were just on the receiving end, back home (Nigeria), but coming here (Canada)...you have to criticize...evaluate...do your work from the basis” (IN#1 - 02/07/18); “back home in Nigeria, we usually see our lecturers as mini-gods over us...because ...that is the experience we have from home, we still have that kind of restrictions when we come here (U of S)” (IN#1 – 02/07/18), and “I think the mode of communication, the language, and the accent: it took some time to adjust and be able to understand fully what the teacher is saying in class” (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

Lastly, and individually, participants devised means to cope with these difficulties. Prominent among their survival strategies were personal efforts and peer supports. With the use of online tools such as YouTube videos, some participants put in extra hours to make up the gaps. A participant said, “...I made use of the software. In terms of references, mostly, it was self-help: I watched many videos; there is pretty much everything one can find on YouTube” (IN#8 – 03/07/18). Others reached out to colleagues or course mates for assistance. The participants argued that it was easier to seek help from students or colleagues who had gone through similar routes than it was to get the same from just anyone. For example, another participant remarked, “The way I coped was to talk to other graduate students who had been here before me, and quite a few of them were available and happy to help” (IN#7 – 03/07/18). They felt peers were better sources of information or assistance on issues of common interest such as, choosing or taking a course or dealing with supervisors. Also, some participants sought and received study tips and materials from instructors or supervisors. One of the male participants had reported that his supervisor sends him links to some writing help workshops (IN#9 – 04/07/18). Lastly, university programs and events were of immense help to most participants too. Participants took advantage of the university’s learning or study workshops and resources on a variety of topics to overcome initial setbacks. A participant intimated that the most useful

resources were the free online materials obtainable through the university's libraries. (IN#4 – 03/07/18)

Altogether, several participants blamed their troubles on their weak foundations. In other words, most of them felt that their prior education had been utterly different and had lacked in ways that inhibited more natural transitions to the kind of experiences at the U of S. In the long run, they were able to overcome their difficulties and adapt to the U of S academic milieu. Also, the focus group participants held views that were consistent with those of individual interviews.

Research Question Three

One of the objectives of this study was to verify if and how the U of S's student learning support programs have matched students' needs, especially international cohorts of peculiar educational context such as the group under review. For that reason, I framed the third research questions for that singular purpose. The question reads: *What are the perceived supports available at the University of Saskatchewan, and how have these helped students to navigate through identified challenges? What do they perceive are missing or adjustable?*

This question assisted in examining the participants' participants' perceived levels of awareness, appraisals, use of services, and possible reservations held against student learning services. Therefore, the following discussions relate to findings about such services or programs that had been accessed by the participants while adjusting to learning at the U of S. I used interview questions 10 – 16 (Appendix E) to generate responses from the student-participants and grouped their responses into the following themes: sources of awareness, forms of services, and reservations, while the student support-participants provided insights about programs and trends in the provision and access to these programs. The student support-participants responded to a separate set of questions numbering 1 – 7 (Appendix F). Data from the responses revealed that some students were ignorant of the learning services and programs available for their use at the beginning of their studies. Some participants indicated that they had arrived at the U of S after orientations and newcomer info sessions, and so, had not obtained information about these services, whereas, other participants knew of student learning services and programs from official sources, which included the U of S's website, PAWS emails and newsletters, library website, college or departments' secretaries, instructors and supervisors, and social contacts. For instance, one of the participants declared, "Through the help of PAWS, I saw notifications about workshops and announcements from the library workshops as well" (IN#5 – 03/07/18), and

another added, “if I have issues on how to get access to anything, I ask my supervisor” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). This latter group consisted of early comers who had taken part in orientations and newcomer info sessions or had been resourceful and open to learning about these services and programs.

Most participants received library, study, reading, math, and writing assistance from various student service units including the University’s libraries, Student Learning Services (SLS), and International Student Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC). These units delivered their programs through drop-ins, individual appointments, and group events or seminars. Some participants affirmed that support programs and interventions helped them to navigate through their learning transitions. They maintained that specific programs had helped them to develop tenacity in the face of challenges and had boosted their productivity. Some of these individuals made comments such as “...the workshops, the seminars, the graduate writing workshops here, have been so much help to me” (IN#1 – 02/07/18), and “Yeah, the one that has been very instrumental, is the plagiarism workshops I attended; it just made a whole lot of difference” (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

Conversely, other participants doubted the efficacy of some learning support programs. These individuals argued that most study or learning workshops and events were unknown to students because of inadequate publicity. One of them maintained that support programs were “just there, and nobody is using them because students are not aware. Awareness should be created for those services” (IN#3 – 03/07/18). Other participants articulated concerns such as lack of depth in some study or learning skill workshops, inappropriate timing or scheduling of programs and events for international students, and passive or non-involvement of the ISSAC unit in academic-related services. They made recommendations on ways to solve these identified challenges. Their suggestions included creating awareness of available services to graduate students through respective college or department’s secretary, aligning programs with known or specific students’ needs instead of generic workshops, and seeking intercultural awareness in delivering services to various students’ demographics. The following comments contained some of these recommendations: “Well, they should contact graduate secretaries, that is all. Graduate secretaries will always reach us...it could be also be included in the package they gave us when we come” (IN#10 – 04/07/18); “Each department should try as much as possible to do, in terms

of orientation, supports, educational support for international students; I think it should be more local than the general” (IN#6 – 03/07/18).

On their part, student-service-personnel participants confirmed that programs covered aspects of the library, numeracy, reading, writing, and study support workshops. They indicated that the programs were for every student, irrespective of national affiliation or academic background. One of student support personnel participants argued that their “mandate is not just to serve international students, and because of that...workshops to date have not been directed just to international students” (IN#13 – 19/07/18). They also pointed out that students required different levels of support, but that some international students use specific services more than did others. One of the participants remarked, “I have noticed that the graduate students who partake in the programs are overwhelmingly international students” (IN#14 – 20/07/18). There were no clear records that would determine which international students accessed which services and with what frequency. The student support personnel may have taken such action because of concern for racial profiling or feeding some prejudices. As these participants declared, “I do not think we have had those discussions about focused ethnicity or country of origin, and whether or not there are particular issues...I have heard of certain students being taken advantage of, but this is hearsay” (IN#14 – 20/07/18), and “We do not have data on which students from which country, or country of origin...if the data could be accurately recorded...understanding how students from specific regions/nations access our office would be beneficial in developing future programming” (IN#16 – 20/07/18). In sum, statements from these individuals indicated that these student service units had not sought knowledge of students’ prior academic backgrounds or ethnic orientations for administering services, nor have they kept demographic records of students accessing their services.

Going by the participants’ responses above denote a mixture of feelings about the suitability of support programs to students’ expectations. They had expressed utmost satisfaction with some programs and had doubted the usefulness of others. However, those were only the views of participants of a select population of international students, and other students might hold different opinions about the efficacy of these services.

Conclusion and Recommendations

I sought to establish knowledge on the educational background and transitioning and adjustment experiences of Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan and to

verify the learning services available for their use and how these matched their needs. Driven by the three research questions highlighted above, I engaged selected Nigerian graduate students as participants for individual interviews and the focus groups to seek answers to my questions. Given the purpose of this study and the preceding discussions, I summarized these conclusions in Figure 5.1.

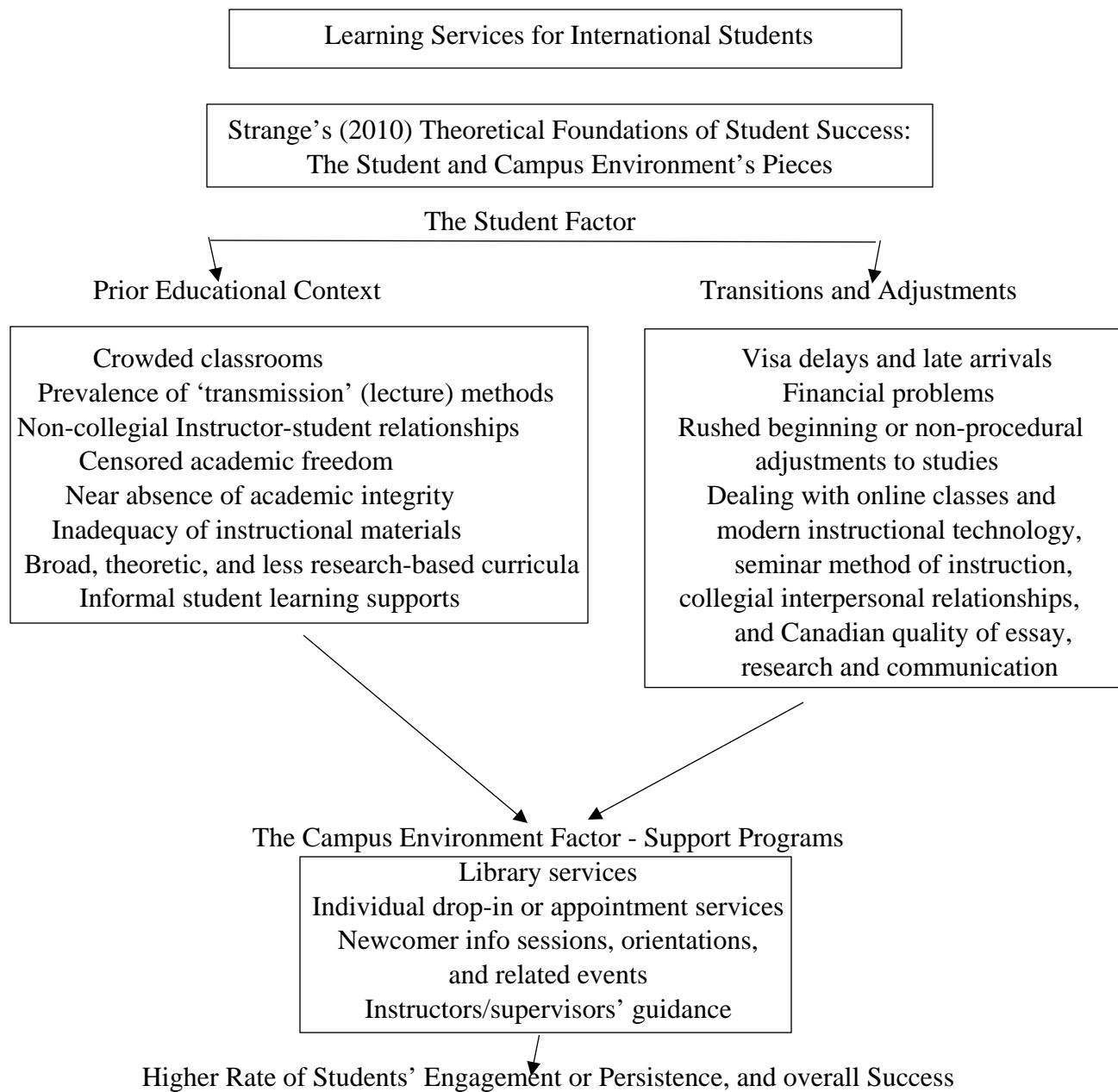


Figure 5.1: Determinants of Learning Services for International Students in Context

As presented in Figure 5.1 above, I drew the following conclusions from the study:

- Nigerian universities' setting has characteristics such as the prevalence of 'transmission' instructional styles or received knowing, non-collegial instructor-student relationships, censored academic freedom, and absence of academic integrity. Other descriptions included their broad, theoretic and less research-based curricula, and communal and informal nature of student supports.

- Using the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) as a standard and as against features of the Nigerian university contexts, Canadian post-secondary education had a radically different setting from the Nigerian brand.
- Those are significant differences that might necessitate new or first-generation Nigerian graduate students in Canada to make some learning adjustments to align with the ideals and practices of their host institution during transitions.
- The U of S provides and supports students with an array of services to ease their transitions and enable them to succeed. However, some of the services seemed not to have worked for some students, especially international students who come from places with different educational orientations such as Nigerians.
- The above conclusions in the context of the theoretical frameworks of this study posited that support programs and services that factor in international students' prior educational experiences and transitioning, and adjustments needs could be more efficient in boosting students' persistence and overall success.

These conclusions validated the knowledge highlighted in chapter two on the learning characteristics of African students and those that share similar educational contexts. African students listen and learn from instructors with minimal participation in the learning process (Aubrey, 1991). Also, this study substantiated earlier postulations about communication abilities of African students that had prior foundations in English language (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986) and the pro-Western patterns of the Nigerian post-secondary education (Achebe, 1958; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003; Fafunwa, 1974). For the most part, the participants barely mentioned difficulties with speaking or communicating in English during their transitions at the U of S. However, several participants had difficulties in areas including grammar and graduate-level writing and such as were very consistent with common problems for other international students (Fatima, 2001; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Leary et al., 2016; Reid, 1997; Trice, 2003). Furthermore, the study has added to understandings regarding the impacts of international students' previous home education or academic background and cultural alignments on their transitions and overall success (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Ikegbulu, 1999; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Zhao et al., 2005). For example, several participants attested that they had struggled between their home country's brand of teaching, social relationships, and respect to elders or people in authority as against the ideals of their host

institution. These individuals had expected to learn in their usual methods, but the U of S's context required independence, self-studies, and collegial dealings amongst its members.

Moreover, the study reinforced the importance of linking support programs and interventions to the needs of different cohorts of international students based on prior learning orientations or histories. The participants highlighted the areas to improve services including the enhancement of supervisor-student relationships, involving or liaising with colleges and departments in the provision of learning services, use of peer mentorship programs, and adequate publicity of learning support programs. Previous studies had identified similar issues as needs and concerns for both graduate and international students (Leary et al., 2016; Neuman, 2010; Hardy Cox & Strange, 2016).

Furthermore, I placed these findings against the theoretical frameworks of this study to make further conclusions and recommendations. First, I felt that the U of S has not adequately sought knowledge of educational backgrounds of the different groups of international students on campus. Through the student support personnel's explanations, I discovered that services had been administered generally to all students without diagnosing needs correctly. This practice made me curious and suspicious of the templates used by these officers to design and evaluate their services. Consequently, I had concurred with Strange (2010) that student service personnel need to access the knowledge base of students' development, growth, and preferences to administering programs effectively. This Strange's (2010) argument is more tenable for serving international than domestic students in the sense that international students are newcomers to the Canadian education environment and barely enough is known about their educational histories (Leary et al., 2016). Besides, I suppose that these theories and practices on student services were built around domestic students and being experimented on international students. Therefore, since the U of S can apply original research, I suggest the university considers the recommendations in this thesis and applies them where necessary.

Second, I learned from the participants that graduate students are not usually interested in socials. Instead, they place much premium on experiences that relate directly to completing their studies and research. This philosophy may not hold sway with all graduate students. However, some international students seek out universities that could help them to achieve their career or academic aspirations with valuable learning supports instead of other attractions (Choudaha et al., 2012; Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Leary et al., 2016; Mori, 2000; Zhao et al., 2005). The fact

that most students prefer services that serve their academic needs reaffirmed Tinto's (2015) position that students do not seek to be engaged but persist. All the participants expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning and research at the U of S and extolled the university for providing such productive and fulfilling experiences. From the participants' narratives in chapter four, the missing piece with their transitioning experiences against Tinto's (2015) model of persistence was that some of them were yet to relinquish the Nigerian brand of respect or 'fear' for professors and student support personnel. In other words, these individuals have not fully embraced the collegial culture of the U of S; they never felt wholly belonged to the campus community. Some of them withdraw from social places and departmental meetings, and still lacked the confidence to ask for help in classes or access other supports. They had blamed such attitude on their prior educational context or culture that never encouraged self-advocacy and mutual relationships with authority figures. The university can solve this problem by proactively educating international students about fundamental Canadian values and culture. Some of these strategies may suffice. International students should be taught early to always reach out for help when necessary, and such training could come through their closest connections such as department or college orientations and peer mentorship programs. As suggested by Leary et al. (2016), faculty members, academic advisors, and support staff could look out for students and confidently ask honest questions on how they are faring. This strategy sounds simple but might require guts and training on intercultural awareness for those willing to offer help. Also, the U of S might consider engaging staff from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds to units that are directly related to supporting learning, such as the library and student learning services. Besides, the university might consider supporting students through ethnic or nationality-structured peer mentorships. There are chances that these strategies might increase students' propensity to persist.

Thirdly, I found out that some support programs worked fittingly for the participants, while the others appeared unnecessary. The U of S has done some excellent works in enriching students' experiences through worthwhile learning support programs, but there are always rooms for improvement. Excellent programs are always encompassing and holistic. Strange and Hardy Cox (2010) had tasked student support units to focus on outcomes and results. In other words, every program or intervention should count productively. Even though graduate students are usually considered self-reliant and requiring lesser assistance (Fatima, 2001), such a description

might not benefit the international cohort. For instance, participants in this study admitted that they had encountered several learning challenges and wanted supports, and the U of S's Student Learning Services (SLS) responded with some services using peer mentors. However, the SLS unit seemed focused or structured for undergraduate students because graduate students supposedly do not have a designated office for coordinating learning services at the university. Perhaps, the university had equally overrated the learning abilities of international graduate students or have not seen need to prioritize learning supports for these cohorts. Such oversights could be because of the increasing enrolment and supposedly retention numbers of international students at the university, and in which case, there could be reservations to claims that those numbers tell all the stories.

Thus, based on the findings of this study and the U of S's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all students, I recommend that the university considers overhauling learning support programs and practices for international graduate students. Understandably, there were remarkable polarizations on the findings and proposals in chapter four regarding learning support programs at the U of S, these polarized topics included:

- Students' preference for specific or discipline related learning and study workshops as opposed to general or broad types
- Decentralizing or administering learning support programs to graduate students through their colleges and departments as opposed to the concentration of services in one central unit
- Staggering or repetition of newcomer orientations and info sessions on available student services to accommodate students that arrive out of the regular periods as opposed to conducting one-shot or week-long programs at the beginning of school terms or year
- Using experts to facilitate study or learning workshops and orientations for graduate students as opposed to student-facilitators or presenters
- Adopting a brand of peer mentorship supports that pairs students with mates of similar educational background or ethnicity or nationality as opposed to randomly selected peer mentors
- Adopting a model of periodic supervisor or instructor or academic advisor-initiated students' learning performance review as opposed to student-led consultations

- Administering learning programs to international students in partnership with their national or cultural associations on campus as opposed to relying solely on traditional channels or offices for help.

Each of the above arguments presented strong points for improving services, and none was utterly wrong on its own. The U of S might consider conducting a holistic review of its learning services, programs, and methods in order to determine which approach or program serves best. Such a review should solicit inputs from all student constituents such as domestic, international students, undergraduate, and graduate students and use recognized models such as the Strange and Hardy Cox's (2010) principles to assess the effectiveness of services. Instruments for the appraisal might include questions that identify students' prior educational backgrounds or histories such they could give context to responses. My experience with this study tells that such a comprehensive study could help the university evaluate students learning services appropriately. This submission may not be an easy assignment, but it will worth the trouble to execute any project that would foster students' persistence and retention and boost their overall success. When students succeed, the university succeeds.

Implications of this Study

This section covers the implications of this study for theory, practice, policy, and further research. Already, I have highlighted some of the implications of this study in the earlier discussions. The narratives below capture other pieces of the implications.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

This study has implications for theories, practices, and policies concerning international students' affairs and student services at the U of S and beyond. Specifically, I feel that the study has added to the knowledge base on prior academic contexts, transitions, and adjustment experiences, and provision of services to international students in Canada. The federal, provincial governments, regulatory agencies, and other policymakers can draw from findings of this research to make policies that will drive recruitments, settlements, funding programs, and other vital decisions on international students in Canadian universities and colleges. Universities and colleges' administration and student service units can rely on this study to make policies and develop programs or interventions aimed at fostering international students' persistence, retention, and success.

At the University of Saskatchewan, particularly, findings from this study could influence decisions, policies, and programs geared towards boosting support for various student groups, especially, international students. These findings could also encourage student learning services and other units to evaluate existing programs to determine their efficacies. This study could serve as a pointer for support personnel to consider students' prior academic preparations or contexts in designing and implementing programs and interventions. The U of S's Student Learning Services could partner with colleges and departments to provide workshops on topics such as supervisor-student relationships, academic integrity, academic freedom, graduate writing and communication, and poster presentations as they apply to students from different regions. Finally, findings from this study could also impact the University of Saskatchewan's understanding of its students' constituents and peculiarities. Such knowledge could influence instructors' dealings with international students in classroom instructions, assessments, and supervisory activities.

Implications for Further Research

This study took place at the University of Saskatchewan, and there are possibilities that the participants' descriptions of learning support services and activities reflected the university's peculiarities. Secondly, the delimitation of the study included only the learning services, while other aspects of student services were not in the scope of the study. Thirdly, I selected first-generation to Canada, Nigerian students as participants because of the assumption that such individuals would typically depend on university services or seek formal supports more than students whose parents or relations have already studied in a Canadian university or college. Given the settings, scope, and sampling deployed in the study and their attendant results, I would like to see similar studies conducted in other Canadian universities to understand other international students' prior academic background and transition or adjustment experiences. Also, it would be useful to seek knowledge of how other universities administer or use learning services or programs and interventions to address peculiarities of various student constituents including needs associated with different international students' prior education or ethnic orientations. Alternatively, other studies could investigate the manner of access or type of services sought by international students from specific regions or nations such as Africa, Asia, Middle East, and others to establish knowledge on needs and program preferences of these diverse groups in our universities. Such data could drive changes or help student affair personnel

to understand and prioritize needs as well as services for students. Moreover, further studies could probe international students' dealings with other aspects of student services such as career, counseling, health, and financial services. Other researchers could use different samples other than first-generation international students to find out how different generations of international students fare with university programs in coping with adaptation challenges.

Lastly, other researchers could explore the acceptance or effectiveness of national or ethnic structured peer mentorship programs for supporting international students or the effects of using ethnic or national associations as tools for administering support services at post-secondary institutions. Such experimentation could yield valuable knowledge for designing programs that may help to build active learning communities and strengthen international students' sense of belonging in their host institutions.

Closing Thoughts

My experiences with the University of Saskatchewan through class discussions, readings, and personal research enhanced my perception of the fundamentals of student success and student services. Through these experiences, I have learned that student success encompassed not only students' personal long and short-term academic achievements but fulfilling the expectations of other stakeholders like parents or family, the university, and the society. Besides, I have realized that student success broadly embodies elements of the student's personal development and growth, and the influences of the campus environment (Strange, 2010). Students must take responsibilities for their learning by coming to classes and participating or being committed to prescribed requirements of their studies, and post-secondary education institutions should create enabling environments by offering relevant programs to students, and intentionally influencing the trajectories through which the learning takes place. Altogether, my classes and transitioning and adjustment experiences at the U of S, and together with my Nigerian background gave the preparation and motivations to explore the experiences of students of similar history and circumstance. I conducted this research for the above reasons and determination and trusted that findings from this work had produced significant knowledge for optimizing services that could boost students' persistence, retention, and overall success.

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Appendix A: Ethics Course Certificate of Completion

PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS

Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE



Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Agbara Chukwu

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

Date of Issue: **20 April, 2017**

Appendix B: Certificate of Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Keith Walker

DEPARTMENT
Educational Administration

ID#
42

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED: University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S): Agbara Smart Chukwu

TITLE: **Exploring Learning Experiences of First Generation Nigerian Graduate Students at the University of Saskatchewan**

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
1 June 2018

APPROVAL ON
12 June 2018

APPROVAL OF:
Behavioural Research Ethics Application
Consent Form
Interview Questions
Recruitment Poster

EXPIRY DATE
11 June 2019

Full Board Meeting

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION: The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS: In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://research.usask.ca/for-researchers/ethics/index.php>


for Scott Bell, Chair
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Services and Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Room 223 Thorvaldson Building
110 Science Place
Saskatoon, SK Canada S7N 5C9

Appendix C: Participants' Recruitment Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORT SERVICES

Dr. Keith Walker – principal investigator, and Smart Chukwu – research assistant, from the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S), are looking for volunteers to take part in research. The title of the study is **EXPLORING LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION NIGERIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN: EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS, TRANSITIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS AND ACCESS TO LEARNING SERVICES**. We are interested in hearing from Nigerian graduate students about their educational background, transitions and adjustment experiences, and awareness and access to learning services at the University of Saskatchewan. The ambition of the study is to explore your past teaching and learning experiences in Nigeria, verify your transition and adjustment challenges to the U of S, and ascertain how university learning services matched your needs and expectations.

Participation in the study involves:

- Participating in an individual interview with the research assistant at a mutually convenient time and place on campus (lasting up to approximately one hour)
- Reading your written transcription when it is completed and signing a release of transcript form
- A probable occasion to participate in a follow-up focus group (lasting up to 1.30 hours)

This study has been reviewed by and received approval through, the Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer to participate, please contact Smart Chukwu at akc254@mail.usask.ca.

Appendix D: Participant's Consent Form for Interview

You are invited to participate in a study entitled: **Exploring learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian (International) graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan: Educational backgrounds, transitions and adjustments, and access to learning services.** Please read the following guidelines carefully, and feel free to ask any question you might have.

Researcher:

Agbara Smart Chukwu,
Graduate Student – Masters
Education Administration,
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
akc254@mail.usask.ca

Thesis Supervisor:

Keith D. Walker
Professor
Educational Administration
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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the learning experiences of Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan, and to ascertain how available support services matched their needs and expectations. The study will engage a review of the background of first-generation Nigerian (international) graduate students, verify earliest learning transitioning and adjustment challenges, and awareness and access to learning services. The primary objective of the study is to elicit knowledge of the educational background, transition and adjustment experiences of first-generation Nigerian (international) graduate students at the University of

Saskatchewan, and promote awareness, access to, and suitability of the university learning services.

Procedure: I will conduct individual interviews with selected participants - Nigerian (international) graduate students, and service personnel who provide different kinds of teaching and learning (academic) supports to students at the university. The interviews will last for one hour approximately and will be audio-recorded. The interviews will hold in secluded places on the university campus, and should need be, I will contact the participants after transcribing the audio records for further clarifications.

Potential Risks: This study will not pose any known risk to the participants. However, to ensure that potential risks of confidentiality or social stigmatization are eliminated or minimized, I will destroy all the documents and materials that contain personal information of participants. All data collected from this interview will be confidentially and securely stored under lock and key at the Research Extension Division, University of Saskatchewan, and will be destroyed after five years. For these interviews, participants will share past educational experiences in Nigeria, and matters relating to transitions and adjustment to learning with access to support services experiences at the U of S. In addition, student services personnel will describe nature and manner of services for students at the U of S. Upon conclusion of the interviews, participants will be asked to vet transcribed copies of their responses before including such in the study.

Benefits: There are no monetary compensations provided for taking part in this research. However, I that hope participants will benefit from sharing their knowledge, experience, and perceptions in contributing to the understanding of provision, delivery, access, and aptness of learning services for all students of the university.

Confidentiality: This study is conducted and will be defended as a partial requirement for a master's degree in Education Administration, in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Thus, I will report data and findings gathered in this study both in aggregate form and by direct quotations. However, your identity as a participant will be kept confidential by removing all identifying information from my thesis report. Also, I will replace real names with pseudonyms, and consent forms will be stored separately from the study data so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. It should be noted, however, that participants are selected from a relatively small group; despite all best efforts to conceal identity, it may still be possible to be identified

based on what you have said. For this reason, I will give you the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview in order to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you deem fit. Finally, during this study, I will store all data tentatively in a personal online file with encryption, and upon the conclusion of the study, I will immediately destroy all identifying information.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this discussion group is *voluntary*—you do not have to take part if you do not want to. You may withdraw from this study for any reason, at any time and without cause for explanations, and if you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. However, after submission of the final report of this study to the University, it may no longer be possible to withdraw your data.

Sharing of Results: All participants in this study will have access to the results upon completion of this thesis via the university library website. An email will be sent describing how to access these results when they are available.

Questions: You are free to omit any question you do not feel comfortable to answer, and if you have questions at any stage of the interview, feel free to ask. Also, if there is any concern you should have following the interview subsequently, you are also free to contact me, or my thesis supervisor at the contacts provided above. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided above. I have been presented with an opportunity to ask questions, and I am satisfied with the answers provided. I consent to participate in the study described above, and I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Participant | Signature of Participant | Date |
| _____ | _____ | |
| Researcher's Signature | Date | |

Appendix E: A Sample of Interview Prompts and Questions (For Students)

Introduction

We are here today to discuss your experiences as a Nigerian student schooling at the University of Saskatchewan. Our focus is your educational background from Nigeria, transitional and adjustment needs at the U of S, and explore your access to teaching and learning (academic) support services.

If, at any time, you require clarification of a question or the interview process, please feel free to ask.

Questions:

Study Background

1. As you think back to schooling in Nigeria, what best describes your background regarding teaching and learning? (classroom activities, student-teacher relationship, and support services and use of facilities)
2. What would you describe as the typical Nigerian post-secondary teaching style or methods, mode, and grading system? (e.g., lectures, large or small group discussions, case studies, experiential learning, videos, guest presenters, group presentations, in-class exercises, writing papers, etc.)
3. Back in Nigeria, what is the nature of supervisor/instructor-student relationships in your experience?
4. How much time was required for class/course works, projects, assignments, and examinations?

Transitional Experience

5. Why did you choose to pursue graduate education at the U of S, and what has been your experiences with regards to teaching and learning?
6. At the beginning of your studies here in the U of S, what teaching and learning differences did you notice or experienced, as oppose to what was obtainable in Nigeria?
7. Based on identified differences, what stood out as your most important learning (academic) need at the U of S, or what do you consider the most challenging learning issues you have faced or are facing currently in the university?
8. How have you coped or are coping with these problems?

9. How has the university's services and programs helped you to navigate transitions and adjustments? And What do you think the university could do more to help you deal with these issues?

Student Learning Support Services/Programs.

10. Are you aware of student services/programs at the university? If yes, give examples (notably, those directly related to actual teaching and learning). How did you learn about those services? If no, why?
11. Have you used any of these services/programs: campus tours and new-comer orientations, academic advisory, learning support workshops, seminars (e.g., graduate reading, writing, use of the library, clinical or laboratory seminars), and ISSAC programs, etc.?
12. U of S usually holds about a week-long orientation at the beginning of academic sessions and before the start of classes. Which activities, if any, did you participate in during that week? To what extent did you understand the information delivered in the speech in the orientation sessions? If you did not understand anything at that time, did you know where to get help when or if you needed the information?
13. Did you attend an orientation session for international students? If yes, how helpful was the orientation, and if no, why did you not participate?
14. Overall, what learning services did you consider the most useful to you, and why are they useful?
15. Based on your experience, what services/programs or resources would you recommend to the university that could be more helpful to students, or what existing programs/services could the university improve upon to match international graduate students' needs better?
16. Lastly, is there anything else you want me to know about your perceptions regarding student support services/programs as about international graduate students? It could be from what we have discussed or something else we have not mentioned.

Appendix F: A Sample of Interview Prompts and Questions

(For Student Service Personnel)

Introduction

We are here today to discuss your roles and functions as a student support unit at the University of Saskatchewan. Our focus is on activities and experiences regarding the type of available programs, the manner of access or delivery, and of the recipients, especially international students at the university.

If, at any time, you require clarification of a question or the interview process, please feel free to ask.

Questions:

1. How would you describe the services provided by your unit? Give some overview of the roles of your department to student support. What are the critical pieces of your programs?
2. One of the significant changes lately noticed on campus is the influx of international graduate students from different parts of the world. What effect has this changing students' population distribution brought to your program developments and practices? (Are there services designed targeting certain groups of international students?)
3. Over the years, (the past five to ten years) have you noticed significant changes in the needs or concerns or expectation of students regarding the services offered by your unit compared to what was obtainable in the past?
4. How do you handle or accommodate students whose needs differ from the services or programs already in place?
5. In your experience, do you notice any difference in students' learning needs or abilities based on ethnic background or regional educational characteristics? (e.g., Africans, Asians, Caucasians, etc.)
6. What are the general trends of students' access to your services (which group comes more frequently – (Aboriginal, African, Asian, Caucasian, etc.,))
7. Are there significant challenges encountered dealing with students from a given regional or national identity (e.g., issues with verbal or written communication, use of computer/internet, selection of courses/classes, use of the library, etc.)

Appendix G: Participants' Consent Form for Focus Group

Research Study: Exploring learning experiences of first-generation Nigerian graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan: Educational backgrounds, transitions and adjustments and access to learning services

Researcher:

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What is the Research?

The purpose of this study is to explore the learning experiences of one international students sub-group at the University of Saskatchewan – Nigerian (international) graduate students and ascertain how available support services matched their teaching and learning needs and expectations.

What to Expect

The discussion will take place in a small group of 4 - 8 participants selected from among U of S students and student services personnel. Some of the participants may be known to you. The focus group will be facilitated by Smart Chukwu, a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan.

The focus group conversations will take no longer than 1.5 hours

Participants will be asked to look at the results of an initial data collected from first-generation Nigerian (international) graduate students through individual interviews and focus group as part of this study and to engage in discussion regarding the results, and other matters relating to your perceptions of support services as a student or in your capacity as a student service provider in the university.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this discussion group is *voluntary*—you do not have to take part if you do not want to.

If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them.

You may leave the group at any time for any reason.

The focus groups will be video recorded only for the researcher's ease in transcribing the discussion and will not be shared with anyone outside the researcher's supervisor or thesis advisory committee.

Risks

We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study.

This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits

There are no monetary benefits provided for taking part in this research. We hope participants will benefit from sharing their knowledge, experience, and perceptions to contribute to the understanding of provision, delivery, access, and aptness of support services for all students of the university.

Privacy

Your name will not be used in any publication.

The discussion will be kept *strictly confidential* by this researcher and participants are asked to respect the privacy of all members in this focus group by not discussing individual conversations or responses outside this group, though this cannot be guaranteed.

All research data will be stored in a secure, online file cabinet and video will be destroyed once the researcher's final thesis is complete.

Videotape Permission

I have been told that the discussion will be videotaped for ease in transcribing the discussion and will not be shared with anyone outside the researcher's thesis advisory committee.

I agree to be videotaped ___ Yes ___ No

Sharing of Results

All participants in this will have access to results upon completion of this thesis via university library. An email will be sent describing how to access these results when they are available.

Questions: If you have any concern following this focus group, you are also free to contact me, or my thesis supervisor at the contacts provided above. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Please print and sign your name below if you wish to take part in this focus group.

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of Participant | Signature of Participant | Date |
| _____ | _____ | |
| Researcher's Signature | Date | |