HUMANISING PEDAGOGY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ADJUSTMENT AT AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

A Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa has been the hub of international students ever since its conception. In 1957, the university constituted of local students and those from countries like Bechuanaland (Botswana), Basutoland (Lesotho), Swaziland, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Nyasaland (Malawi), Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika (Tanzania) and its enrolment of international students increased over the years. Given this historical background, the Eastern Cape HEI under study has a critical role to play in hosting international students and ensuring their smooth transitioning and adjustment to the local environment. This paper aimed at exploring challenges faced by international students at an Eastern Cape HEI, potential solutions and the role of humanising pedagogy in breaking these transitional challenges. Data were collected using quasi-structured questionnaires administered to undergraduate international students. Data were analysed using thematic data analysis. The results reveal that the challenges faced stretch from language barriers, delays by the immigration department to issue out study permits, academic challenges, tedious registration processes, accommodation challenges and cultural shock. Suggestions of mitigating these challenges range from offering local language courses compulsory for international students, ensuring the use of English as the medium of instruction in classes without mixing with local indigenous languages, offering intercultural communication courses for all students, offering international student support systems and providing lecturer consultation times for students arriving late. The role of humanising pedagogy in the form of a compulsory first year course called Life, Knowledge, Action (LKA) proved to offer a platform for individual expression of views, social interactions, dismantling of cultural and disciplinary barriers and expression of students' lived curriculum.

Keywords: Humanising Pedagogy, International Students, Internationalisation, University, Cultural Shock.

Introduction

The demand for globalisation and internationalisation has increased students' cross-border enrolment (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016). In the African context, South Africa is the most popular destination for international students (Mudhovozi, 2011). McGregor (2007) indicates that the number of international students enrolled in South Africa's 23 institutions of higher learning rose from 12 557 in 1994 to 53 733 in 2006. Most of these students (in descending order) came from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2016), 69 381 international students were registered at South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 2016. These figures indicate a probable increase in numbers yearly. The statistics obviously call for South African HEIs to be sensitive, cater for the needs of international students, and ensure smooth transitioning and adjustment. As the biggest suppliers and channels of knowledge (Maiga, 2017), HEIs have an important role of providing a platform for global connectivity and borderless intellectual interaction. Knowledge is diverse, hence the need for higher education curricular frameworks and methods of teaching to be friendly to diverse students from across the globe.

With this increased number of students who enrol in foreign institutions of higher learning, humanising pedagogy can be used to ensure a smooth transitioning and adjusting of international students. Humanising pedagogy is defined as interactional learning that is rooted on principles of dialogue, critical thinking, combining new knowledge with meaning and acknowledgement of the diversity of students (Keet, 2011). Humanising pedagogy's diverse intellectual community tells the students that instead of focusing on how different they are, they can learn from their intercultural complexities by dialoguing across disciplines and cultures. The global interconnectedness of knowledge calls for an integrated and mutual pedagogy across institutions of higher learning. The presence of international students at a host institution can change both the pedagogy and the content taught as they bring an international perspective to classroom discussions. International students also challenge lecturers to consider new instructional methods to cater for student diversity (Chua, 2010). Research shows that international students experience more challenges compared to domestic students (Schreiber, 2011), hence the focus on them in this study.

Challenges Faced by First Year International Students

South Africa is a very diverse country; hence, international students' transitional challenges are inevitable. Mokgwasi (2017) submits that a number HEIs "have adopted strategies to try and help international students to adapt in South Africa". Despite these strategies, international students still face a wide range of challenges. Literature on international students indicates that most of the challenges faced are common to most institutions of higher learning across the globe. Mokgwasi (2017) stipulates that these immigration problems affect all South African HEIs, as international students are obliged to comply with them. Study permit/visa applications go through a rigorous verification and there is no guarantee that some applications will not be rejected when they do not meet the requirements (Lee & Rice, 2007).

A study by Baklava and Kazakov (2016) on the challenges of international students' adjustment to HEIs in Russia concluded that international students face academic, social and cultural problems.

The academic challenges are linked to language barriers, while the cultural challenges largely speak to values and beliefs. Similarly, a study done by Titrek et al. (2016) on the challenges faced by international students in Turkey indicated similar challenges including communication/language barrier, accommodation, cultural differences and different social interaction activities. Although communication was a barrier in the Turkey study, students indicated that they received immense support from their lecturers and academics. In Turkey, the challenge was largely differences in religious beliefs (Titrek et al., 2016).

After overcoming the hurdle of immigration, students travel to the country of study where they are welcomed by new challenges at the host institutions. Maundeni et al. (2010) indicate that international students' registration process is tedious in that host institutions need to verify their qualifications prior to registration since students come from different countries with different education systems. Nicholson (2001) states that the university has the responsibility to help international students to adjust to the new environment.
While English is largely used as the medium of instruction, international students still feel a sense of isolation when they are excluded from local language dialogues. The implication is that globalisation should obviously come with the need for cultural integration and internationalisation; hence, there is an urgent need for intercultural communication teachings (Kolosova & Poplavskaya, 2017) and indigenous language learning, particularly by international students. In the same vein, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) indicated that social support systems are very crucial for international students to foster smooth adjustment.

Although globalisation has indicated a huge importance of the use of English as a global language of instruction (Sawir, 2005), it does not mean that indigenous languages should lose their importance. Ibrahim (2019) critiques the notion of the global village and globalisation as very cliché and states that there is no area of human activities that is not affected by globalisation. Global uniformity is impossible and people of the world cannot, for instance, be forced to speak the same language. There is so much language diversity in the world and among people, particularly students have the ability to learn indigenous languages of their host institutions. Ibrahim (2019) and Ezema (2009) argue that the issue of globalisation and the use of English as the global language even in Africa has been viewed as advanced capitalism and re-colonisation in disguise.

Humanising Pedagogy

Humanising pedagogy speaks to the art of teaching that gives a voice to students, empowering them to take ownership of their own education through active involvement. This paradigm is a brainchild of Paulo Freire who wrote immensely on the 'Pedagogy of the oppressed'.

Freire's ideology is rooted in the Marxism framework, which explores societal economics and power imbalances, and the friction between two economic classes, namely the owners and labourers. Freire (1970) argues that societal imbalances also overlap to education systems, in which students have no autonomy over their learning. Freire sees the education system in the same lenses as the economic class struggles. According to Freire (2005) and Delport (2016), the traditional teacher-centred education system is and has been de-humanising students by seeing them as empty vessels. Hence, the process of re-humanising learners previously disadvantaged by the education system is called a humanising pedagogy, and for humanisation to be promoted, de-humanisation must be acknowledged (Freire, 1970). This kind of pedagogy gives voice to the previously voiceless students by promoting their active involvement in their education, through dialogues, debates, critical thinking, sharing of personal experiences and collective problem solving (Huerta, 2011; Law, 2015). This moves away from surface learning towards deep learning as it broadens the scope of knowledge sharing and deepens classroom and out of classroom student interactions, which breaks departmental barriers and cultural barriers and destroys stereotypes and misconceptions that students have of each other.

The institution under study offers a compulsory first year module called Life, Knowledge, Action (LKA), which is rooted in principles of humanising pedagogy. The module focuses on a problem-solving curriculum, a theatre of engagement for both staff and students. It is a move from a one-size-fits-all paradigm to focus on more humane approaches of teaching and learning that focus on recognising diversity and offering both classroom and out of classroom opportunities for students. This paper thus partly assesses how humanising pedagogy in the form of LKA assists first year international students with the transitional challenges they face. Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019) indicate that humanising pedagogy in the form of LKA builds meaning between students, their life experiences and their cultural differences, hence producing a more humane graduate compassionate towards other human beings.

Life, Knowledge, Action (LKA) Module

In the year 2006 when the HEI understudy celebrated its 90th anniversary, it was undergoing administrative challenges; hence, it needed a turnaround strategy. The institution's community (academic staff and students), held a problem identification dialogue considering these administrative problems. The outcome of the dialogue was that students struggled to connect their studies to the wider purpose and academic staff members felt that there was social isolation to the academic project. The dialogue concluded with suggestions of a module for all first-year students that would be promoted by different academic staff across different faculties (Mahlangu & Garutsa, 2019).

The module was to offer a decolonised curriculum, adopt humanising pedagogy styles of teaching and learning and be transdisciplinary (in the sense of enrolling diverse students); it would also promote community engagement and students would get a platform for sharing their lived curriculum (Keet & Porteus, 2010). In 2007, the university council and senate adopted the module and it was endorsed by the audit of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2009 and piloted in July 2009.

The module also aims to close the gap in students' articulation by promoting student engagements and dialogues across different departments and nationalities, allowing them to share personal experience and cultural dynamics, and discuss social predicaments faced in communities and offer solutions to these predicaments beyond departmental and national borders (Mudehwe, 2014; Mudehwe-Gonhovi et al., 2019). The groupings of students cutting across university departments and nationalities promote an interdepartmental and intercultural approach to the humanness of students as they contribute towards a shared experience of learning, promoting openness to diverse knowledge and offering solutions to the predicaments faced in their communities through classroom discussions and dialogues. This produces socially engaged graduates who can produce a critical citizenry, who are confident and competent enough to authentically generate, engage with, and apply knowledge across disciplinary boundaries (Keet & Porteus, 2010). The course is not taught but it is facilitated by senior students; the role of the facilitator is to guide the student-centred discussions. The student-centeredness of the course breaks the traditional teacher style of lecturing, hence humanising the students. LKA was initiated to offer a curriculum that speaks to each student's reality and a curriculum that equips a student to be competitive in the global village (Keet & Porteus, 2010). Its pedagogical structure is as follows:

Umzi (household)	An autonomous student-led learning group, focusing on dialogues, debates, presentations, group projects and social action.
Ikhaya (home)	A bigger group supported by senior student facilitators and academics to raise the level of dialogue and debate, and to provide more detailed support to extend reading and writing practice of first year students.
Village	The coming together of amakhaya for larger more "lecture like" inputs, resembling a lecture session.
Abakhwezeli (facilitators)	These are a special group of senior students trained to facilitate reading, writing and dialogic engagement of LKA students.

(Garutsa & Mahlangu, 2014).

LKA's pedagogical activities include weekly journaling, reading, writing and re-writing, movie nights and jamboree (end of semester celebration through arts such as poetry, drama, song and dance).

The module targeted first years as a response to the transitional challenges they face, and to promote inclusivity of diverse students, provide a platform for social interaction and produce compassionate citizens. Topics covered include:

- Introduction to Life, Knowledge and Action

- Pan Africanism and African Citizenship

- The transition from colonisation to liberation and democracy in South Africa

- The impact of Science and Technology on Environment and Society

- Poverty, Inequality and Development in the Southern African Perspective

- Health, HIV/AIDS and stigmatisation

Students engage with peers at the different levels of the Umzi, Ikhaya, Village and the Jamboree.

Methodology

A case study was carried out at a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Data were collected using a qualitative quasi-structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate international students in the second to fourth year of their studies. Babbie (1990) defines a questionnaire as a document with questions meant to solicit information required for analysis. Although the questionnaire used was largely open-ended, it had some questions that were wheeled towards a particular angle by predefined response categories, hence termed a quasi-structured questionnaire. Archaya (2010) defines a quasi-structured questionnaire as having both structured and unstructured questions. Its advantages are that it provides consistency in answers and it collects data that are easy to manage.

The study aimed at assessing the role of humanising pedagogy in the form of LKA in breaking transitional challenges that are faced by first year international students. Since LKA is done by students at first year, it made sense to administer the questionnaire to undergraduate international students (from second to forth year) who had already completed the module. Thus, convenience sampling was used to sample respondents from the larger population of second to fourth year undergraduate students. A total of 681 international students were registered at the HEI under study in the year 2019. Of this figure, undergraduates totaled to 243. With the exception of first year students who were still doing the module when the study was conducted, the total study population was 164 undergraduate international students. A Rao soft calculator was used to calculate the sample with 5% margin error. Of the 116 questionnaires, 79 were received and 19 were spoilt.

Data from the 60 questionnaires were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis turns unstructured texts into a set of codes. In this study, data from questionnaires were typed on a computer and put into categories relating to each question asked. Researchers then aligned preliminary codes to data and eventually searched for patterns in codes. Codes were then reviewed and defined to form themes.

Ethical Considerations

For this study, researchers sought and received ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee of the sampled institution. All ethical standards were adhered to. Ethical issues such as informed consent, anonymity and management of information were outlined on the questionnaire.

Results

Challenges Faced by First Year International Students and Possible Mitigating Strategies

The study aimed at understanding the role of humanising pedagogy in mitigating challenges faced by first year international students. Nearly all the respondents indicated that they faced several challenges. These challenges ranged from language barriers, delays in issuing out of study permits by the Department of Home Affairs, academic challenges, tedious registration processes, accommodation challenges, adjusting to a different environment, and cultural shock.

Language Barriers

Several respondents from the three different campuses of the university indicated language barrier as the biggest problem faced by international students both in and out of lecture halls. The dominant local language spoken in the university is isiXhosa, commonly referred to as Xhosa. Respondent 33 said that, "*I had extreme difficulties in adapting to the native Xhosa language in expressions by lecturers during lecture time*". Respondent 7 said, "*Some of the facilitators and lecturers were not able to express themselves in English the entire session*". A significant number of respondents indicated that most local students communicate in their local language, even in academic spaces. Respondent 41 stated that, "*The majority of students and lecturers speak Xhosa and assume that we all speak Xhosa. That can be challenging at times*". Some respondents indicated that because South Africa is known as a rainbow nation, they were optimistic that they would not feel any sort of discrimination. Respondent 59 said, "*It took me long to understand local languages like Xhosa, Zulu etc. given that South Africa is a multiracial, multi-cultural and multi lingual society, I had too much expectations of a smooth inclusion*". Furthermore, Respondent 29, said, "*It was difficult for me to speak the local language, and I was constantly mocked that I come from Zimbabwe and my pronunciation of some words is weird*".

In addition, Respondent 19 said, "*Communication with lecturers was a struggle, although we spoke English, there was a misunderstanding in our accents*". It is crucial to note that the issue of language is deeper than often assumed; students felt not only side-lined by their inability to speak the isiXhosa language but by their English accents and pronunciation of words. Respondent 12 said, "*There were language constraints especially in courses like African customary law where Xhosa terminologies were used*". The issue of language barrier and culture diversity go beyond the classroom. One respondent said, "*I faced a challenge with my roommate in terms of communication and culture*". Several other respondents reiterated similar sentiments.

When asked for suggestions on how to deal with language barriers, the respondents indicated that there is need for a compulsory Xhosa course for all international students. Respondent 45 said, "*The institution's administration could initiate a short course similar to the computer literacy programme that is aimed at familiarising international students to the local indigenous languages and certain diverse cultural practices*". Furthermore, Respondent 12 said, "*There is need to introduce a module or a course that will be there to teach the local language so that we won't be left out*" while Respondent 18 said, "*If the university policies allow the use of Xhosa language in lectures, the basic Xhosa lessons must be taught to international students for better communication*". Language is a tool which helps in expression and communication, therefore learning a local language helps one to connect with native speakers and understand their culture.

While some respondents indicated the need for isiXhosa to be taught to all international students to mitigate language barriers, some indicated that the university must emphasise and solidify the use of English as a medium of instruction. Respondent 17 said, "*They can at least emphasise the use of English, which will bridge the gap between international students and the staff and local students at large*" while Respondent 33 said, "*Lecturers should encourage students to speak in a language we all understand*". Although this is a valuable suggestion, like many non-English speaking countries, South Africa has an English proficiency challenge.

Delays in issuing out of Study Permits by the Department of Home Affairs

One of the major challenges faced by respondents was reporting to the university very late due to delays in issuing out of study permits legalising their stay in South Africa. As a result, most international students missed the first weeks or months of class attendance. Respondent 39 said, "*I arrived after the normal registration period, hence the registration process became very long as staff were not found at their registration stations*". Respondent 15 said, "*... because of immigration delays in issuing my study permit, I arrived late and classes had already commenced, so it was a bit difficult to catch up because most or rather some of the lecturers were not very accommodating*".

Furthermore, Respondent 2 highlighted that, "*I got to school very late because of study permit delays and everyone was ahead in all modules. I felt left out and the lecturers never bothered to repeat the topics covered to accommodate those who came late*". Respondent 49 also mentioned that, "*... we were left out due to visa applications, our marks were averaged according to what we had done, however some of the lecturers just went on and put zeros*". Although these delays are external factors, institutions through their international offices have the mandate of liaising with lecturers to make sure that international students who arrive late are accommodated.

Academic Challenges

The delays mentioned above seemingly escalated to another problem of academic pressure for international students. Most respondents concurred that due to study permit issuing delays, they arrived late and had to submit assignments and write tests with limited preparation time. Participant 3, said, "*Challenges of delays to process our documents led to a late registration and we were not able to attend classes during the first days. This led us to miss important lectures and assignments and we failed our first tests*". However, not all the academic challenges emanated from study permit delays; some were ordinary challenges that any first-year student would face at a higher learning institution. Several respondents indicated that they could not connect what they learnt from high school with the university curriculum. Respondent 29 stated that, "*There was a sense of discontinuity from what I learnt in high school with what is offered at this university. It felt like a new syllabus altogether*". Respondent 13 indicated that, "*The courses that I was enrolled in were a total opposite to the combination of subjects that I did in high school. I was doing sciences in high school, here I was given an arts degree*". On the same note, Respondent 17 stated that, "*My major academic challenge was having to adapt to South Africa's history since the syllabus was based on history... I had to research before coming to class*". Interestingly, one respondent mentioned that other students had stereotypes about international students. Respondent 1 indicated that, *"... there was also a mentality that when you are a foreigner in South Africa, you are intelligent, hence you are put under pressure*". A significant number of international students indicated that they had challenges with assignment writing. For instance, Respondent 7 said that, "*I didn't know how to write assignments and to reference properly*", while respondent 8 lamented that, '*Assignment writing was a challenge. It was difficult to adapt to the standards and quality of assignments expected by the lecturer. It was also difficult to meet deadlines. Generally, the workload seemed very heavy and unbearable*". As mentioned above, respondents indicated that most lecturers proceed with the syllabus without accommodating international students, who mostly arrive late. Regarding this, respondents suggested that lecturers should be mandated to assist late-comers as their reasons for delayed arrival is beyond their control. Respondent 27 said, "*They should be able to assist students with additional lectures and notes as a result of missed lectures*". Extra consultation time with the students can then assist them to catch up and not risk failing their assessments.

Tedious Registration Process and Accommodation Challenges

Several respondents highlighted that the registration process for international students is a bit elongated compared to local students as a lot of documentation is required. These range from medical aid, study permit and registration fees. Respondent 9 said, "*I had a challenge with the registration process because a lot is required since I'm an international student*" and Respondent 21 said, "*The registration process was so hectic as we had to go back and forth*", while Respondent 54 said, "*There is lack of support to orient and welcome international students. I felt like the system was not welcoming enough to international students to make them feel accepted. I even struggled securing accommodation*". Although all students face the accommodation challenge since student accommodation is a huge challenge for most institutions of higher learning. International students felt that there was little assistance extended to them to deal with accommodation issues. Specifically, Respondent 23 said, "*There was limited support by the international office when it comes to residences*". In response to the accommodation issue and other challenges, the involvement of the international office in international students' matters needs to increase.

Respondents highlighted that although the university has an international office to cater for the needs of international students, the assistance they got from the office was not adequate. Respondent 38 said:

"In order to mitigate these challenges, the international office should be more involved. In my opinion, that office must keep a proper look on the affairs or issues that international students face, which goes beyond the scope of helping them with registration. They must engage with international students so as to know what is affecting them".

In addition, Respondent 4 said, "*The international office must assist with accommodation for self-funded international students and to be the intermediator for international students in case a situation arises*", while Respondent 16 said, "*The international student affairs office must help international students to integrate in the university community*".

Adjusting to a different Environment, and Cultural Shock

A huge number of respondents indicated that it took time for them to adjust at the university. Respondent 1 said::

"My major challenge was coping and adjusting to a new mode of life as a student as I was in a new country and I had to cope with a lot of issues". Others indicated that students from diverse cultures behaved differently, and what is deemed as taboo in one, is normal in another. Respondent 30 indicated that, "*Adapting to a new set of cultural practices was a challenge as one would be accustomed to his cultural practices.*

Another challenge was in creating a network since naturally people would mingle according to their tribe of belonging".

Some respondents highlighted that making friends was a challenge; they felt isolated and some local students made xenophobic utterances towards international students. Respondent 22 said that;

"There is some kind of stigma towards foreign internationals. I personally believe in the spirit of ubuntu especially when you are a host. I had to try so hard to get the meaning from the indigenous language spoken, very little effort was made to use English and accommodate international students".

Furthermore, Respondent 30 highlighted that, *"If possible, the university should provide a course which specifically deals with intercultural communication and how to relate with those different from you*". There was thus a common consensus that such a diverse institution should have a compulsory intercultural communication module, even if its non-credit bearing. Other than language barriers, cultural diversity intolerance is also a problem.

In addition, a student support system for international students support was recommended. A huge number of respondents indicated that the university needed a strong international support system, beyond the international office. Respondent 15 said that, "*The University should initiate a youth friendly corner to help students to engage with each other, especially to be diverse in knowing other cultures*". Furthermore, Respondent 5 said, "*The university should provide a special unit that assists students in fitting in, especially international students*" while Respondent 22 said, "*... they should conduct proper orientation facilities so students can get to know the campus and educate students that they should live well with other students from different countries*". This will allow the students to access any kind of support they might need without fear of being victimised and they can receive survival strategies within a new environment from qualified personnel, thus allowing a smooth transition for the international students.

The Role Played by Imizi and Amakhaya LKA Sessions

An umzi, a Nguni name for a house, is used in the LKA sessions to instil a sense of family to an otherwise diverse group of about 10 students. Students who form an umzi are registered across different university departments and faculties who come together to do LKA group assignments projects and seminars. Ikhaya is a Nguni name for home. It is larger than umzi in the sense that it is composed of extended family members. In the context of LKA, an ikhaya is a group of about 6 imizi combined together with 2 postgraduate facilitators heading it. Imizi and amakhaya are platforms where student interaction is encouraged through the guidance of the facilitators. Below are the responses on the roles of LKA imizi and amakhaya sessions in ensuring smooth adjusting of first year international students.

Provided a Platform for Individual Expression of Views

Several respondents agreed that the LKA imizi and amakhaya sessions gave them a unique experience of self-expression of views. Respondent 41 said, "*LKA imizi and amakhaya helped me express my views of how I live, from where I come from to engage to learn about other people's cultures*". Respondent 20 stated that:

"*To a certain degree there was a platform to express one's views in terms of culture and personal experiences, then interaction with most of the problematic issues within South Africa and the whole world. Most of the time, the topics would be controversial and a platform would be open for debate, presentations or suggestions for the time that you are in the ekhayas, there are no social differences and you all as students feel like one, as you have to cooperate in order to complete the tasks*".

Furthermore, Respondent 49 said;

"*The programme allowed us to express opinions without any fear. It offers the platform to extend our minds and view things from each other's perspectives. Hence, we really got an understanding of other things that seemed to be discriminating on culture, personal levels. I have made friends with other people from different nationalities*".

In addition, Respondent 4 said, "*LKA provided a conducive and non-threatening environment which encouraged students to express their views without hesitation/fear. The facilitation styles used also induced me to express my views -discussions, dialogue, presentations etc.*" while Respondent 24 said, "*LKA helped me to express my views through presentations. The program creates a relaxed environment where everyone feels comfortable to express themselves, it brings students from different departments which enabled me to create friends*". The platform allows the students an opportunity to meet new people and engage with them. This results in them getting to know each other better, thus removing misconceptions of one another and building relations as a result. In addition, engaging in dialogue would then build confidence as more students meet at the umzi level.

Provided a Platform for Social Interactions (Creation of Friendships)

A significant number of respondents indicated that LKA provided a platform for social interactions, which ultimately facilitated the creation of friendships. Respondent 39 said, "*We were put in groups and from those groups, I managed to befriend a couple, which I am still talking to even now*". Furthermore, Respondent 9 said, "*I have started new relationships and I can use them as life long and build on them, and groups provided a very suitable platform to create friendships and LKA movies did assist in socialising*".

Respondent 58 said, "*In the gatherings you would be mixed as people from diverse ethnic groups, tasked to work together, from that, the tribal misunderstandings would be clarified and replaced by friendships*". In addition, Respondent 29 stated that, "*We were able to meet people from other departments and faculties in the university and become friends with them. Without LKA, this probably would never have happened*". Respondent 12 said, "*... Imizi and amakhaya comprised of people of various races, cultures and abilities, for that reason it did boost my friendship interaction*".

Dismantling Cultural Barriers

Several respondents indicated that LKA assisted them to break cultural stereotypes they had of each other. For example, Respondent 7 said, "*... I was free to speak my mind, and show my culture and tradition and also the interaction helped me to make Xhosa friends and also know their culture and language*". Respondent 10 said, "*LKA gave us a platform to speak about our views as people in general and to express our cultures as it is a diversified module which accommodates students from all over the world*". Furthermore, Respondent 5 said, "*Topics discussed in class were not only restricted to the Republic of South Africa, if they were about South Africa, I could use my own country as reference or comparison*". In addition, Respondent 27 said, *"It is in those sessions that I got to learn other cultures and this made me to be able to break the stereotypes and other generalised views that I thought were true*" while Respondent 14 said, "*We shared our backgrounds in relation to culture, but it was only during the time when we did LKA, after that the established relationships we had vanished and we became foreigners again*". These responses are in line with the suggestions given by the students on how cultural barriers could be dealt with, thus allowing for smooth transition.

Dismantling Disciplinary Barriers

University departments can be barriers to socialisation as people in departments often prefer to associate by familiarity. Several respondents indicated that the transdisciplinary nature of LKA, in which students come together despite their disciplinary affiliation, helped dismantle the disciplinary barriers that existed. For instance, Respondent 19 said, "*We were being given a chance to gather as one team from different departments and discuss life problems through which we were able to understand each other*".

Expression of Personal Experiences (lived curriculum)

A noteworthy number of respondents concurred that LKA allowed them to express their lived curriculum in class. Respondent 6 said, "*Different topics always involved sharing certain things that one would have gone through in order for the topic to be understood by others. Those experiences could also freely be expressed in the LKA journals*".

Participant 9 said, "*Every time I was given a chance to speak, I would always make reference to my personal experiences,*" while respondent 13 said, *"LKA helped me to express my experiences, for example, it allowed me to avail myself that I'm able to do presentations in front of the crowd of students*". Respondent 28 said, "*Through journal entries, I managed to surface my personal experiences and people also talked of their personal experiences which I could relate to*". It is therefore apparent that LKA assists students in sharing about their lives, previous experiences and so on, thereby dismantling cultural barriers and stereotypes.

The Role Played by LKA to Ensure that International Students fit in Academically and Socially

Academic Roles

a) Assignment Writing

LKA has a semester long assignment where students are taken through the process of writing and re-writing of drafts. Respondents indicated that this assignment helped them with the art of writing essays. Respondent 30 said, "*The LKA essay was the first assignment I ever wrote at university, so I was taught how to reference*". Respondent 12 said, "... *academically, I learned how to write a good assignment, how to use referencing styles, how to write creatively, how to critique and appraise arguments*". Therefore the LKA assignment, which is usually the first for first year students in the university introduces them to essay writing and teaches students the process of writing.

b) Enhanced Group Work

Respondents indicated that imizi group assignments kept them glued together and they facilitated better teamwork. Respondent 13 said, "*The umzi group help us to communicate, work in teams and co-operate with each other regardless of one's background and culture. It gave us a room to participate as a team*". Respondent 19 said, "*Through LKA, we were able to mix up, socialise, participate and take charge of the learning process. LKA made me a competent and active learner at the University...*" Imizi (homes) in their actually sence are ideally supposed to promote, peace, unity and cooperation. In this study, the LKA imizi proved to be beneficial in that regard.

c) Critical Thinking

Several respondents indicated that the self-governed imizi and amakhaya led by postgraduate students became free platforms for discussions, debates and dialogues, which helped them to think critically. Participant 19 indicated thus, "*They assisted us to think out of the box, they shaped our minds*", while participant 7 said, "*I was trained to think critically in those sessions*". Participant 16 said, "*The imizi and ekhaya sessions opened a platform for students to be able to think outside the box academically.*

The discussions closed the gaps for barriers between students and their facilitators thus, making it easier for us to fit in the university". Critical thinking is one of graduateness attributes in South Africa's HEIs.

d) Promoting Transdisciplinarity

A sizeable number of respondents indicated that they learnt from each other's diverse disciplines. Respondent 33 said, "*LKA exposed me to students from other departments and even exposed me to issues related to other departments. I understood the South African context better*".

Social Roles

Apart from being an academic module and programme, a substantial number of respondents indicated that LKA assisted them to fit into the social space of the university. Respondent 4 said:

"Imizi groups helped me feel comfortable with local students as it encouraged dialogue and friendships. By mingling with others, it led me to see that I was not the only person experiencing the problems I was facing, hence it helped me to calm down and focus on my studies".

Furthermore, Respondent 17 said, "*It played a huge role in promoting the idea of expanding interaction and social skills. It managed to build friendship relations with most of South African citizens*". In addition, Respondent 26 said, "*Considering that the course was done in the first semester of one's first year, it became easy to meet new people of different classes*". Other than its academic mandates, universities should play a role in promoting social adaptation by its diverse students.

Discussion of Results

This papers explores the role played by humanising pedagogy to mitigate the challenges faced by international students at an institution of higher learning in South Africa. To achieve this aim, there was firstly a need to identify these challenges.

Challenges Faced by First Year International Students

This study firstly explored the challenges faced by the international students. These range from language barriers, delays in issuing out of study permits by the South African Department of Home Affairs, academic challenges, tedious registration process, accommodation challenges, adjusting to a different environment, and cultural shock. Respondents indicated that the language barrier escalated to classrooms as lecturers used IsiXhosa interchangeably with English even though some students did not understand.

Both this study and a study that was done by Titrek et al. (2016) on challenges faced by international students indicate cultural differences as one of the biggest challenges. The difference is that in Turkey the challenge was largely differences in religious beliefs while in South Africa the barrier is largely norms and values, including what other students see as taboo and not.

Baklava and Kazakov (2016) posit that international students face academic, social and cultural problems. One student for instance indicated that they thought it was rude to interrupt while a lecturer is teaching but other students continued interrupting and the lecturer found no offence in such a behaviour. Thus, these different beliefs and value systems affect student adjustment at a foreign institution.

Immigration laws delay students' registration, thus affecting class attendance and consequently semester performance. Mokgwasi (2017) stipulates that these immigration challenges affect all South African HEIs as international students are obliged to comply with them before they can register. Students need to oblige with all requirements or risk their applications being rejected as they are subjected to the rigorous verification processes (Lee & Rice, 2007).

International students indicated that they were delayed not only by the visa/study permit application process, but also by the registration process itself, which requires too much documentation and verification. Maundeni et al. (2010) suggests that to mitigate this challenge, the host institutions need to verify international students' qualifications prior to registration since students come from different countries with different education systems. This therefore reduces the stress on the students as the greater part of the registration would have been addressed before international students arrive.

Mitigating Challenges Faced by First Year International Students

Having indicated the challenges that international students face as they enter the host institution for the first time, respondents were further asked to provide solutions to these predicaments. These solutions include that the institutions should offer the local language as a compulsory course, ensure the use of proper English as a medium of instruction, offer an intercultural communication course, provide an international student support system, and ensure more involvement of the institution's international office in international student affairs and lecturer consultation times for students who arrive late.

Sawir (2005), contends that indigenous languages are still vital even though English is largely used as a language for instruction. Therefore, international students still feel a sense of isolation when they are excluded from local language dialogues, hence respondents in this study indicated that local languages such as isiXhosa should be made compulsory for international students to foster a sense of inclusion.

A significant number of respondents suggested that all HEIs should provide compulsory intercultural communication studies as students react differently to those from different cultures. Similarly, Kolosova and Poplavskaya (2017) contend that globalisation obviously comes with the need for cultural integration and internationalisation, hence the urgent need for intercultural communication teaching.

Respondents in this study also suggested that international student support system would assist them in adjusting to the new environment. The general suggestion was that this could be in the form of a helpdesk to which international students report to, when they need assistance. Although the institution has the office of international affairs, respondents highlighted that the office was too small to cater for the diverse needs of international students such as assisting with accommodation and registration. Thus, expanding the role of the international office and appointing of more staff would help to reduce the frustrations that international students have at host institutions. Nicholson (2001) argues that it is the university's responsibility to help international students adjust to the new environment. In support, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) highlight that social support systems are very crucial for international students to foster smooth adjustment. There are high changes that one challenge faced by international students leads to other challenges if the international students do not access the institutional support.

The Role played by Imizi and Amakhaya LKA Sessions

Respondents indicated that LKA imizi and amakhaya sessions help in dismantling cultural and disciplinary barriers amongst students and provide a platform for individual expression of views, social interactions, critical thinking and expression of lived curriculum. These assist both local and international students to realise that they have a lot of similarities as human beings although they come from different spaces and cultures. Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019) indicate that, '... LKA is characterised by holistically social interactions collectively shown through the course structure from the umzi (house) to the ekhaya (home), in its pedagogical sequence' (p. 4). The imizi and amakhaya provide a platform for group accountability and support amongst students. The self-management of imizi groups gives students a sense of autonomy in their education and help dismantle whatever differences students have, thus fostering a sense of family amongst otherwise diverse students and giving a voice to the less confident students through its platforms for dialogue and debates.

Conclusion

The challenges that international students face at host HEIs are inevitable; however, they can be reduced. The challenges indicated in this study, particularly the problems of cultural differences, language barriers and visa/study permit applications are common to many HEIs across the globe.

The study proved that humanising pedagogy plays a crucial role in reducing most of the challenges that international students face at first year. Mahlangu and Garutsa (2019) indicate that humanising pedagogy in the form of LKA builds meaning between students, their life experiences and their cultural differences, thus producing a more humane graduate who is compassionate towards other human beings.

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