

**A Phenomenological Exploration of the
Experiences of International Students**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
School of Education

October 2014

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Acknowledgements

I feel as though there are not enough words available to adequately and appropriately thank all those who have helped with well-timed encouragement and constructive guidance during this process. The list goes on and on but I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone.

I would like to thank my fellow international students for participating in this study and providing me with information about their own experiences; those at the International Student Office and the students' union for discussing different aspects of the intended research in relation to ongoing efforts to improve student experiences; colleagues in RAISE, NRPA, and NAFSA who have pointed towards additional resources as well as questioned and encouraged me to explore these issues further and participate in relevant international discussions; the wide network of friends and colleagues that has developed over the past few years including fellow students and staff in the School of Education and within the ESSL Faculty to those I have had the pleasure of running around with while trying to orientate myself or otherwise taking time to take a step back to laugh, dance a reel, and refocus.

My dear friend and research colleague, Fernando Ona: thank you for believing in me and getting me to take a chance. Without you, this might never have happened.

My magnanimous supervisors, Gary Chambers and Matt Homer: thank you for helping me navigate through the maze that has been this PhD journey. I am indebted to you both for all the support and encouragement you've given, the helpful feedback and insights gathered from our discussions, the tough questions that got me to think more about what I wanted to do/say and how to get it done, and of course the prodigious cups of tea and water which kept us all from losing our voices.

My friends, near and far and in-between, all who have shared in this journey encompassing every emotion from laughter to tears, frustration to joy. You are constants with hugs, jokes, movie nights, food, drinks, runs, and random adventures.

And last, but definitely not least, my family. I am truly blessed to have such wonderful people standing behind me and lifting me up, often rousing or at least consenting to my random and eclectic bouts of curiosity, and encouraging me towards the proverbial finish line especially when it felt too difficult to continue – regardless of the physical distance between us. I have been given wonderful examples of love and understanding throughout my life and am beyond thankful for those who are still here, as well as for those who are gone but will never be forgotten. I love you more!

Abstract

International students have an undeniable effect on the higher education (HE) landscape worldwide, from economics and political strategies to HE efforts to focus on and improve 'the student experience'. However, most previous research about students' motivations for having an international experience and experiences of student engagement has focused on factors identified from the staff perspective rather than that of the students. As 'student engagement' is a widely used term in HE policy and practice, it is important to increase understanding: of the concept itself; how motivations influence student engagement; and how different types of student engagement may affect students' perceptions of their experiences. Therefore, this research explores the nature of the relationships between identified motivations, types of student engagement, and perceptions of international students at a university in the United Kingdom (UK) in order to increase understanding of the students' experiences from the students' perspective.

Using a phenomenological approach with a mixed methods design, data was collected from students during the 2012/13 academic year which included 249 questionnaires and 10 semi-structured interviews. Students reported various motivations which impacted their decision to come to the UK for part of their HE experience and also had an effect on how they engaged in their international experiences. Additionally, responses from students indicate that students tend to focus on the non-academic aspects of their experiences (i.e. social interactions, friendships, travel, clubs and societies, etc.) when reflecting on their international experiences with other students as opposed to academic aspects (i.e. studying, coursework, etc.). Finally, the findings suggest, when compared with academic engagement behaviours, international students' perceptions of their experience were more influenced by behaviours for non-academic engagement; specifically, data indicates that non-academic engagement behaviours can decrease students' concerns whilst abroad and also have a positive influence on students' overall perceptions about their international experience.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AUSSE	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (Australia)
CEQ	College Experience Questionnaire (Australia)
CSEQ	College Student Experiences Questionnaire (USA)
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher education
HEA	Higher Education Agency
HEAR	Higher Education Achievement Report
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IIE	Institute of International Education
ISB	International Student Barometer
NSS	National Student Survey
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement (USA and Canada)
NUS	National Union of Students
PMI	Prime Minister's Initiative (1999-2005)
PMI2	Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (2006-2011)
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)
QAA	United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Quality Code	United Kingdom Quality Code for Higher Education
UK	United Kingdom
UKCISA	United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs (2007-now)
UKCOSA	originally United Kingdom Council for Overseas Student Affairs (1968-1992), this then changed to UKCOSA: The Council for International Education (1993-2006)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Standard Abbreviations for Statistical Terminology

CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling

Chapter One: Introduction

International education is a complex and growing field of interest which can be quite difficult to describe. In the foreword of *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education*, Josef Mestenhauser (2012) explains this chosen “specialization”:

Everybody is apparently expected to have one, so I often answer “international education”. Yet, I always feel that such an answer is totally inadequate to explain that my field is untraditional; that it is not a disciplinary “speciality”; that it does not reside in its own “box” but that it is found in many boxes; that it is a composite of borrowings from virtually every academic discipline and every culture; and that international education is therefore multidimensional, multidisciplinary, and cross-cultural. (p.vii)

International education is indeed “multidimensional, multidisciplinary, and cross-cultural” as it connects and crosses between the fields of education, language and culture studies, sociology, politics, geography, economics, and so forth. Historically, only privileged and wealthy students were encouraged to participate in international education experiences due to the cost and other restrictions related to access to education in general (Byram and Feng, 2006; Deardorff et al. 2012; Lewin, 2009); such experiences were considered a capstone for young male aristocrats who could claim they had spent part of their education on a ‘Grand Tour’ traveling and living abroad, often in continental Europe (ibid). However, recent advancements in policies provide evidence of advocating increased access to international education experiences for everyone, recognising that students and staff from all cultures and backgrounds and every academic discipline can benefit from international education experiences; examples of such policies exist at national levels such as the Paul Simon Study Abroad Act in the United States of America (NAFSA, 2013; Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, 2013) and the Prime Minister’s Initiative in the United Kingdom (UK) (IIE, 2014; UKCISA, 2012b), as well at the supra-national level with the Joint Quality Assurance Capacity Building Project for ASEAN countries (Wu, 2012) and the Bologna Process within the European Higher Education Area (Sweeney, 2010).

These policies also affect higher education institutions (HEIs) in developing and adapting strategic plans and partnership agreements to include an higher education (HE) internationalisation agenda (Deardorff and van Gaalen, 2012; Nolan and Hunter, 2012; University of Leeds, 2009, 2014b), often referring to the reputation of the institution as well as increased attention to the numbers of incoming and outgoing students and staff who participate in international education experiences. The rationales behind changing such policies and practices are widespread and according to Knight (2012) encompass four different dimensions:

- academic (i.e. comparisons of international standards, increased attention to international dimensions in teaching and research),
- economic (i.e. predictions and evaluations based on revenue generation and competition at individual, institutional, and national levels),
- political (i.e. critical examinations of national security and foreign policy),
- and/or social (i.e. interventions and programmes for increasing intercultural understanding, community and social developments).

Though presented separately as individual foci, these four dimensions are not discrete entities in international education; rather, they are interdependent with each one relying on or affecting another. Furthermore, although research in international education has been conducted at every level from elementary to tertiary (or post-secondary) education and has included both staff and students (Lewin, 2009; Deardorff et al., 2012), the experiences of incoming international students at HEIs remain a topic of continued current debates with comments reflecting all of the four dimensions as stated above (Garner, 2014; Jobbins, 2014; UKCISA, 2014c).

1.1 Rationale for the Research – Why focus on international students?

Research in international education (Deardorff et al., 2012; Lewin, 2009) is traditionally divided into studies which either focus on staff (i.e. programme administration, training for professional development) or on students (i.e. motivations, satisfaction). There is also a noted divide in the field (NAFSA, 2014) which either focuses on individuals who go abroad (i.e. education abroad or study abroad) or those who come from other countries to study (i.e. foreign or international students). The terminology used in these separate areas of international education thus distinguishes between two groups of students (i.e. incoming and outgoing), acknowledging different cultures and individual students' needs as well as practical implications regarding the availability of different support services and distinct administrative requirements for specific visa regulations or immigration procedures.

However, while there is an agreed meaning attributed to 'study abroad' in reference to emigration with students who leave the country, there is less consistency in the conventional understanding of 'international students' (Banks and Bhandari, 2012). Some institutions report data for 'international students' based on residency and citizenship or visa status (i.e. holding a passport from another country or needing a special visa), while others provide their data based on the fees students pay for academic tuition (i.e. one rate for home and EU students, a separate rate for students from outside the EU). Further, some institutions only collect data for those students enrolled in full degree-granting programmes and/or programmes of a full academic year (as opposed to short-term mobility programmes of six months or less). Each of

these distinctions seems to exclude significant numbers of students who do not fit into these categories for data collection (see for example UNESCO UIS, 2014; University of Leeds, 2014a). This creates noticeable discrepancies in the amount and types of available data while discounting a basic similarity between the students, which as the UKCOSA (2004) report succinctly states, “all non-UK students face similar issues in adjusting to life in the UK,... regardless of the level of fees they pay” (p.18). Thus, for the purposes of this study, a more inclusive definition of ‘international students’ as proposed by the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2012) is most appropriate:

students who undertake all or part of their higher education experience in a country other than their home country or who travel across a national boundary to a country other than their home country to undertake all or part of their higher education experience.

This definition is intentionally broad as it includes both degree-seeking (i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research students) and non-degree students (i.e. International Foundation Year, Erasmus or other exchange programmes, and study abroad students) in order to include all students from regions across the world. When combined in this manner, the effects of the international student population on HE policies and practices are considerable; according to data compiled by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2014), more than 3.5 million students worldwide enrolled in tertiary education and studied at HEIs outside their country of residence in 2012, representing approximately 2% of total HE enrolments¹. Among this substantial number, over 425,000 international students enrolled in HEIs in the UK in 2012/13, constituting 18% of total UK HE enrolments (IIE, 2014; QAA, 2014; UKCISA, 2014b) and contributing an estimated £4.9 billion to the UK economy (Universities UK, 2014), with £3.4 billion coming from non-EU students.

The UK has a long history of attracting international students and is consistently rated among the top host destinations for international students – currently ranked 2nd behind the United States of America (IIE, 2014; UKCISA, 2012a; UNESCO UIS, 2014). Since 1999, important reforms have been introduced by the UK government which focus on improving international education strategies (UKCOSA, 2004, 2007; UKCISA, 2008, 2011, 2012b); namely, the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI) began as a five-year national strategy from 1999-2005 which was then followed by the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education (PMI2) from 2006–2011.

¹ This percentage is based on examining the UIS dataset (UNESCO UIS, 2014), which compiles available national data along with UIS estimations of enrolments; the data only covers students “who pursue a higher education degree outside their country of usual residence (so called ‘degree mobility’) and exclude students who are under short-term, for-credit study and exchange programmes that last less than a full school year”. According to the dataset, total enrolment in tertiary education worldwide in 2012 was 169,578,903 which included 3,503,341 incoming international students (ibid).

At the launch of PMI in June 1999, then Prime Minister Tony Blair stated:

Our universities and colleges are second to none. Their world-class reputation means that they are among the most popular for international students. I am determined to build on this strength with a long-term strategy to attract many more. The institutions, their students and our economy will reap considerable rewards.
(Gürüz, 2011, pp.245-246)

Since 2011, however, the UK government has implemented various immigration reforms which have been considered a deterrent to HEI recruitment efforts and general perceptions of international students wishing to study in the UK (see Home Office, 2014; UKCISA, 2014a) including:

2011 Revision of the visa system by the UK Border Agency (UKBA), tying the visa to the HEI which issues the Certificate of Acceptance for Studies (CAS); HEIs must now monitor international students' attendance and academic progress and report to the UKBA.

International students are now limited to the amount of work they may undertake, if any, during their studies (depending on the terms of the visa, between 10-20 hours per week during regular term time) and must apply for a separate visa if they wish to stay in the UK to work after their studies are completed.

2012 UK Home Office eliminates Tier 4 post study work visa, which previously allowed international students to stay in the UK to work after their studies.

2014 Immigration Act 2014 increases the enforcement powers for immigration officers, prohibits banking institutions from opening bank accounts for anyone without express permission to do so, requires landlords to check the immigration status of prospective tenants, increases the use and retention of biometric data collected, and adds new charges for access to National Health Service (NHS) treatment in hospital to immigration application fees which are calculated based on annual estimates.

These official policy revisions were intended to 'fix' noted deficiencies with the system:

We want to attract more world-class individuals with the knowledge and expertise that will drive leading research and economic growth. However we have reformed the student visa system because it has been abused for too long, with providers selling immigration, not education.
(Richardson, 2013)

These changes in UK immigration policy have subsequently attracted notice both domestically and abroad, especially in 2012 when the UKBA temporarily revoked London Metropolitan University's official Tier 4 sponsorship status (London Metropolitan University, 2012; NUS, 2012); this action not only affected prospective international students with offers for placements to study at the university starting in the autumn but also those students who were already enrolled in programmes (effectively

halting their studies unless they were successful in transferring to another HEI). The university responded by taking legal action against the UKBA (Vasagar, 2012), claiming it had met and/or exceeded the UKBA's requirements which had been significantly changed more than ten times in the previous three years:

London Met is concerned that the current immigration policy is creating confusion across universities in the country and irrevocable damage to the UK's globally recognised education sector. (ibid)

Such complications with immigration procedures, along with rising tuition fees, have been argued to have a significant detrimental effect on HE in the UK (Garner, 2014; Jobbins, 2014; Kandiko Howson, 2014; Sellgren, 2013), noting the evidence of a decrease in the number of international student HE applications and subsequent HEI enrolments in the UK since 2012 (HESA, 2014; UKCISA, 2014b).

In fact, the government had initially introduced PMI as an economic response to a relative decline in international student enrolments in the UK during the 1990s, and so provided a specific aim to increase the number of international students enrolled in HE and further education (FE) programmes by 2005 (DTZ, 2011); PMI2 then further expanded the UK's international education agenda with focused efforts to increase the number of British students going to other countries in addition to evaluating the range of services and support available for international students in the UK (ibid). Specifically, the UK government used PMI2 to focus on four main areas or 'strands' (Hallett, 2011) to "secure the UK's position as a leader in international education":

1. marketing and communications (i.e. selling the benefits of UK education to increase numbers of incoming international students);
2. diversification of HE markets (i.e. reduce dependence on small number of countries sending high numbers of students to the UK and increase enrolments of students from less represented countries);
3. ensuring the quality of the student experience (i.e. managing expectations and increasing student satisfaction with the student experience and employability);
4. and building strategic partnerships and alliances (i.e. establishing long-term relationships through HE and FE partnerships projects). (ibid)

The third of PMI2's four strands – the student experience – has attracted a great deal of attention by funding multiple collaborative projects which have been administered by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the National Union of Students (NUS), and numerous HE and FE institutions (see UKCISA, 2013a).

1.2 Statement of the Problem – What is missing from discussions about 'the student experience'?

Different organisational entities (DIUS, 2009; DTZ, 2011; Gosling, 2013; UKCISA, 2013a, 2014c; UKCOSA, 2004) have interpreted the target of "ensuring the quality of

the student experience” in relation to improving student satisfaction ratings with HEIs and students’ unions, as delineated in PMI2. As a result, HEIs increasingly use large institutional surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and the International Student Barometer (ISB) to get feedback from students in order to compare levels of student satisfaction with teaching, services, and support, specifically noting trends and progressions over time and also evaluating comparative data between institutions (HEFCE, 2013, 2014; i-graduate, 2012; NSS, 2014; QAA, 2013; UKCISA, 2011). The results from such surveys have prompted HEIs to evaluate existing services to identify areas which need improvement as well as examples of good practices that demonstrate ‘excellence in teaching and learning’ (ibid). However, other research has indicated that “satisfaction” should not be considered synonymous with “quality” (Brookes, 2003; Chen and Chen, 2010; Cole et al., 2002; Douglas et al., 2008; Grace et al., 2012; Wiklund and Wiklund, 1999).

While satisfaction is used to signify the degree to which one’s expectations are or are not met, experience quality is a representation of the student’s overall impressions characterised by an emotive evaluation of their experience (Dale, 2003; Douglas et al., 2006, 2008; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). With this in mind, experience quality encompasses not only students’ satisfaction with provisions made by the HEI (i.e. course content, facilities, services, etc.), but also students’ attitudes and other perceptions about the total experience (i.e. overall satisfaction, overall quality, and willingness or intention to recommend to others) (ibid). A closer examination of students’ attitudes and perceptions regarding experience quality, beyond measures of satisfaction, is considered useful as such perceptions can affect the reputation of an HEI, or even that of the national HE system. For instance, the UK is traditionally seen as a “world-leading” competitive force in international education (Gürüz, 2011) which is often attributed to different marketable features of the UK education system including:

- *an international reputation for education and research*
- *the profile of its elite global higher education brands*
- *historical trade and political links*
- *the popularity of English language study and culture*
- *post-study work prospects* (Universities UK, 2012, p.12)

Each of these characteristics is cited as a reason for why international students choose to come to the UK to study (Böhm et al., 2004; UKCISA, 2011; UKCOSA, 2004), reflecting socio-cultural, political, and economic incentives for students and the UK. Yet most of these characteristics depend on previous and current students confirming and perpetuating the belief that there is a unique value and distinctive benefits in choosing the UK education system over another. Encouraging international students to come to

study in the UK and helping them to have positive experiences is of crucial importance on many levels, for as Dame Alexandra Burslem (2004) states,

...the international diversity on our campuses enriches the environment for all staff and students... Perhaps most importantly, their familiarity with the UK will allow them to influence others – positively or negatively, depending on their experiences – both in their home countries and wherever else in the world they go. Over and above our responsibility to ensure a higher quality of experience for all our students, as future partners in diplomacy, trade and cultural exchange, and as people likely to become influencers and decision-makers, we should take very seriously the question of whether international students' experiences of the UK are positive. (p.6)

Along with references to 'the student experience', some institutions and researchers have gone further to include the term 'student engagement' in various marketing and publications (HEFCE, 2008, 2014; i-graduate, 2012; Ingham, 2012; Nygaard et al., 2013; QAA, 2013; SPARQS, 2014; University of Leeds, 2009, 2014b). The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2013), for example, states:

Student engagement is all about involving and empowering students in the process of shaping the student learning experience. QAA is committed to working with higher education institutions and students' unions to help them develop the tools to actively involve students in the organisation of their own learning and student experience.

Although such efforts support increasing the active involvement of students, the understanding of 'student engagement' seems unclear. Fundamentally, such statements lack explicit references as to what student engagement means, how students can or should be involved and/or empowered, and how student engagement can be seen to directly affect the students' experiences. Furthermore, while there is considerable available research (see Bryson, 2014b; Chapman et al., 2013; Ku, 2001; Ku et al., 2008; Nygaard et al., 2013; QAA, 2012; Solomonides et al., 2012; Trowler and Trowler, 2010) from a staff perspective which considers student engagement issues for staff and students, sometimes recruiting students as co-investigators or consultants in the research process, there is a dearth of evidence for research on student engagement which has been initiated and conducted from the students' perspective.

While there is considerable debate regarding the proper interpretation of 'student engagement' (ibid), this study considers the definition of 'student engagement' as proposed by Bryson (2014a) better for clearly articulating the most salient points:

what a student brings to Higher Education in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. SE is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions. (p.14)

Compared to previous descriptions (Astin, 1984; Ku, 2001; Ku et al., 2008; McInnis et al., 2001; Pace, 1984; Schlechty, 2011), the above definition of student engagement

acknowledges the effects of students' personal backgrounds, emotional responses, behaviours, interactions with others, and cognitive perceptions about their experiences; thus, considering student engagement to be both an "outcome" and a "process" in the students' experiences beyond just examining their academic grades and/or persistence as measured by staff and the institution (ibid). As such, student engagement is not a static concept which may be easily measured and interpreted. Rather, as Kahu (2013) states, there are important emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components of student engagement which are related to identified antecedents and consequences. As students' perceptions regarding satisfaction and experience quality may be considered appropriate as measurable consequences or outcomes of student engagement (Bryson, 2014a; Kahu, 2013; Solomonides et al., 2012), their previous experiences and motivations may also have noticeable effects on the students' general perceptions of their experience as the antecedents of student engagement. However, in reviewing relevant content from previous published studies, it seems that few examples exist of recent research which has explored the topic of motivation in relation to student engagement beyond their involvement in academic activities (Astin, 1984; Martin, 2007; Milem and Berger, 1997), which could more adequately identify the level of association between the two concepts.

Research shows that various subgroups within the general student population have different motivations towards their student experience which can then directly affect how they engage in their HE experience (see Harper and Quaye, 2009; Nygaard et al., 2013). For example, international students have different motivations than domestic students and also face separate concerns with how they engage in the HE experience (UKCOSA, 2004), which includes coping with adjusting to a different education system as well as opportunities to experience different attitudes, behaviours, dress, foods, sights, and even variations in language. Much of the previous research has focused on retrospectively exploring students' motivations in terms of benefits of international education identified by staff such as opportunities to experience other cultures (Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Freestone and Geldens, 2008; Van Hoof, 2005), improving foreign language skills (Allen and Herron, 2003; Cohen et al., 2005; Engle and Engle, 2004), improving future career opportunities (Hamza, 2010; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009), and engaging in positive global citizenship behaviours through increased awareness and understanding of other cultures (Douglas and Jones-Rikkens, 2001; McAllister et al., 2005; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009). Students often become more self-aware and further develop their intercultural skills, whilst they enjoy what many believe to be "once-in-a-lifetime" experiences (Byram and Feng, 2006; Lewin, 2009).

However, when compared to the great quantity of research centred on the experiences of domestic students, a relatively small proportion of the research in student engagement is focused on international students (Anderson et al., 2009; Hardy et al., 2013; Montgomery, 2010; Warmington et al., 2013). Of the few published studies which have addressed the topic of student engagement for international students (ibid), no evidence has been found of studies which have taken a mixed methods approach to more thoroughly explore the relationships between students' motivations, students' engagement, and students' perceptions about satisfaction and/or experience quality. This study therefore aims to address a gap in the existing literature on international students' experiences by using mixed methods to focus on motivations, student engagement, and perceptions about their experiences regarding satisfaction and experience quality. A phenomenological approach is utilised in the methodological design and interpretation of the findings of this study in order to focus more on the students themselves rather than the HEI or staff. Thus this study hopes to contribute to the existing knowledge base by providing additional information from the students' perspective regarding the student experience and those of international students in particular.

1.3 Research Motivations

The initial impulse to conduct this research began as a result of a conversation between students and a member of staff during a first-year undergraduate module. When discussing various attendance policies and university regulations, one of the students replied, "Some of the best things you learn in life don't come from a classroom". This struck me at the time as being quite profound, even in its relative simplicity. As an undergraduate, I was enrolled in a dual honours programme (International Studies and German) and also worked in the university's recreation department. I kept busy both academically and socially, making connections with other students and staff and becoming very involved with student clubs and societies. This continued throughout my undergraduate experience until I went to study abroad for a year in Austria. This became a significant period of adjustment as I received very little support from staff at the host university (i.e. unaware of visa regulations, loan disbursement dates and procedures, and how or when to send academic transcripts back to my home university), I was not assigned to any specific academic department (i.e. I enrolled in various classes across multiple disciplines in relation to international studies – history, politics, language, law, etc. – of which most were taught in my target language of German), there were no university clubs or societies to join, and I was not allowed to work according to visa restrictions. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, or in fact maybe because of them, I had a wonderful study abroad experience; I learned more about myself, became more familiar with another culture, made friends from across the

world at the university and during my travels, and found out how to cope with a different academic system.

I returned home to find I then had to re-adjust to everything that was once familiar – language, culture, food, studies, etc. However, I maintained an interest in the experiences of international students and continued to work with the university's international office in addition to the part-time position I had in the recreation department. In my final year, I proposed this research (i.e. exploring the experiences of international students) to my academic advisor as an idea for an undergraduate honours project but was directed elsewhere as it was not their area of expertise and there was not much research available at the time on which to base the study. So, I kept the idea as an alternative interest for potential graduate or postgraduate work with an international focus. With this in mind, I subsequently planned this study as part of completing a masters degree, until I found myself once again diverted to focus on another topic due to extenuating circumstances. As I knew I wanted to go abroad again and felt strongly that this was a topic worth exploring, I submitted a detailed outline of the research proposal with my application for postgraduate research study. Being an international student enrolled at a UK university has ultimately provided an opportunity to examine the topic from a perspective (i.e. the student perspective) which has not been fully explored before in this manner. My previous experiences studying and working at different universities have also affected the design and interpretation of this study with an emphasis on both academic and non-academic aspects of the student experience, particularly in relation to international students. A further examination of my position as the researcher for this study is provided in Chapter Three.

1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

Definitions of motivations, student engagement, satisfaction, and experience quality are discussed further in Chapter Two; however, the following brief working definitions are provided in reference to key terms as used in this study.

Experience quality: a holistic evaluation of the student experience based on examining students' perceptions about various aspects of their experiences whilst abroad; in this study, experience quality refers to a combination of students' emotive responses related to a total measure of satisfaction, willingness to recommend the international HE experience, and an overall measure rating the international experience.

International students: students who are not originally from the UK and have come to the UK in order to complete part, or all, of their HE experience.

Motivations: why students choose to undertake an international education experience (i.e. study abroad) as part of their HE experience.

Satisfaction: the level to which students' responses indicate that particular expectations have been met in regard to targeted outcomes.

Student engagement: both a process and an outcome, measured in reference to students' behaviours and involvement in academic and non-academic activities as a precursor to students' perceptions of experience quality.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter discusses the theoretical context and background in which this research is situated. As such, a review of literature relating to the student experience and the concept of student engagement is provided along with an overview of the theoretical framework which underpins this study. In taking account of previous research and relevant theories, this chapter establishes the justification for this study by noting particular gaps in the general discourse around students' experiences and student engagement, and more specifically in relation to those of international students.

As stated earlier in Chapter One, research in international education is complex as it incorporates different features from various, otherwise seemingly disparate, fields (i.e. education, foreign languages, sociology, politics, etc); the complexity of such interdisciplinary research is further compounded if a study is intended to connect theory with practice and/or aims to address perceived inconsistencies in existing research by utilising an alternative perspective to those presented in previous studies. Development of this particular study has involved recognising the usefulness of multiple contributions from the fields of business, education, and recreation and tourism for the express purpose of advancing knowledge about the experiences of international students in HE from the students' perspective. With this in mind, the literature review is divided into six primary sections in order to develop a more thorough and coherent discussion of the specific concepts and relevant research for a critical exploration of the experiences of international students. The first three sections focus on presenting further clarification of the individual concepts of 'quality' (Section 2.1), 'student experience' (Section 2.2), and 'student engagement' (Section 2.3) which were briefly introduced in the previous chapter, as well as discussing both the practical and theoretical distinctions between their relative components. The fourth section (Section 2.4) then provides a summary of these key concepts to consider research which involves focusing more on the students' perspective of the HE experience. The fifth section (Section 2.5) then provides a synthesis of existing research in relation to the particular experiences of international students, noting various cultural differences, motivations, and outcomes. The final section (Section 2.6) then summarily abridges the chapter by identifying specific objectives and the primary questions for this study based on reviewing the noted gaps from the research and evaluating relevant theories of motivation and student engagement, thus leading towards a discussion of methodology used in this study which will be presented in Chapter Three.

2.1 Conceptualising 'Quality' in Higher Education

As stated earlier in Chapter One, the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) identifies four key strands for increasing and improving international education efforts in the UK (DTZ, 2011; UKCOSA, 2007; UKCISA, 2011, 2014); one of the strands encourages a "new focus on strengthening the overall quality of the international student experience" (Hallett, 2011). However, when such key terms are merely used in a tokenistic manner as 'jargon' or 'buzzwords' in targeted initiatives such as PMI2 and individual HEI strategic plans (Nolan and Hunter, 2012; Sweeney, 2010; University of Leeds, 2009; Van der Velden, 2012a), the meanings behind 'quality' and 'student experience' are unclear as well as whose perspective this 'new focus' should come from. Additionally, as international students' experiences are multidimensional beyond just traditional academics (King et al., 2010), as will be discussed further in Section 2.2, relevant research for exploring experiences and student engagement is also found in the fields of leisure, recreation, and tourism.

In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is promoted as "the independent body entrusted with monitoring, and advising on, standards and quality in UK higher education" (QAA, 2014); in this role, they state:

We are dedicated to checking that the three million students working towards a UK qualification get the higher education experience they are entitled to expect.

Established in 1997, the QAA conducts regular external reviews of HEIs to assess whether they are following set expectations from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), which replaced the former Academic Infrastructure in 2012 (QAA, 2012). The Quality Code contains specific guidance and recommendations for HEIs in the UK regarding accepted standards for teaching, assessment, and degree qualifications; thus, the information gathered by the QAA in reference to the Quality Code provides evidence from HEIs to students and the general public centred on accountability and competitive marketing with principles borrowed from customer service, "based on provision of 'what the customer wants' and information about what is on offer" measured in "student satisfaction and league tables" (Fry, 1995, p.1).

Comparisons between strategies for managing non-profit HE provisions and for-profit competitive businesses in the private sector are numerous (Altbach et al., 2009; Aldridge and Rowley, 1998; Baldwin, 1994; BIS, 2013a; CBI, 1994; Deardorff and van Gaalen, 2012; Fry, 1995; Grace et al., 2012; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998). Sporn (1999) describes this change from historical European HE management structures:

The nation-state seems to have outlived its purpose, and its function has been redefined as supervising (as opposed to controlling) higher education development. This is a change from the past, when state ministries were responsible for all areas of higher education – including funding, access policies, program planning, and employment issues involving academics and

administration. The move towards a supervisory role for the state led to the introduction of quality standards and external reviews, greater institutional autonomy, buffer organizations, new information flows, and alternative procedures for resource allocation and funding. (pp.70-71)

Thus, the establishment of various initiatives and independent organisations² which provide specific guidance for HEIs continues to reflect previous national government practices, even though HE has generally become decentralised with individual HEIs responsible for their own management practices. The comparisons between HE and private business practices are especially prevalent in the UK since the 2012 tuition fee increase (from £3000 to £9000 per year), as individuals question the 'value' of HE and compare HEIs by reviewing course requirements, published rankings and league tables, marketing of available services, and the perceived benefits of enrolment (Bohms, 2011; Coughlan, 2010; Paton, 2013). Even the language used in the Quality Code seems to adopt or mirror terminology from the customer service industry including feedback reports and student 'satisfaction' as a proxy for 'quality', requiring HEIs to meet minimum standards with specific 'Expectations' for the QAA's quality control audit assessments (QAA, 2014). Yet, Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) explain that satisfaction is a precursor to quality, with the difference being that "quality is a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service, whereas satisfaction is related to a specific transaction". Interestingly, though taking note of the difference between temporal satisfaction with specific aspects versus aggregate perceptions of the entire process, other researchers (Douglas et al., 2008; Grace et al., 2012; Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002) are inconsistent in that they prefer to use the term 'overall satisfaction' for the entire process with 'quality' being specific to the course or programme. However, this only increases confusion as the terms have thus switched connotations from their earlier meaning, producing convoluted explanations such as:

Measures of student satisfaction cover five dimensions: the quality of teaching, the quality of support facilities and physical facilities, social climate and leisure activities. Most of these variables are measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 'very discontent' to 'very content'... Students were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction, how close the college/university is to an ideal higher education institution, how they judge the institution compared to prior expectations, and whether it is likely that they would recommend the institution to friends and acquaintances. (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002, p.187)

The above example is taken from a study on student satisfaction conducted in Norway. While the separate measures of student satisfaction seem consistent (asking "are you satisfied with x/y/z?" on an individual transactional level), their measure of 'overall satisfaction' actually seems to refer more to an evaluation of the entire process of the

² Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA), European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (Altbach et al., 2009, p.64)

HE experience at the HEI and students' related emotional responses to this process, which theoretically is closer to quality than satisfaction. However, this also brings into question whether HEIs and staff are more interested in a transactional level of research (i.e. considering HE to be a single episode, in order to identify specific areas in need of improvement) or conducting wider research to encompass an overall, global focus on students' and staff attitudes (i.e. considering HE to be an aggregate of multiple encounters over time, assessing overall quality impressions).

2.1.1 Conceptualising Quality: The SERVQUAL Framework and Applications

Different studies on student satisfaction (Arambewela and Hall, 2006, 2009; Clewes, 2003; Douglas et al., 2008) cite earlier work from the research team of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985, 1988), involving the development and assessment of the service quality (SERVQUAL) framework and survey instrument. SERVQUAL has its origins in retail marketing, using executive interviews and cross-sectional focus groups with customers selected from four different firms involved in either financial services or product repair and maintenance (ibid). However, many other fields use SERVQUAL as a foundation for research in customer services, including education (Parasuraman et al., 1991, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1993). In broad terms, SERVQUAL utilises a gaps model to evaluate service experiences between customers and service providers by focusing on deficits among expectations, perceptions, service delivery and performance, and communication. According to the team (ibid), service quality is an aggregate measurement focusing on differences between what customers expect and their perceptions of the service/s received (Figure 1).

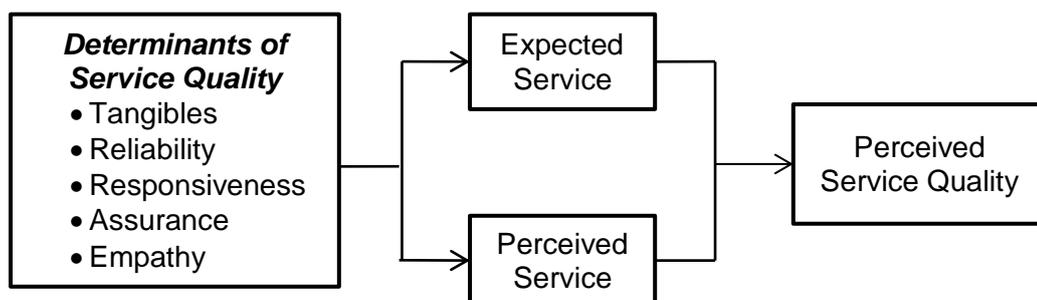


Figure 1. SERVQUAL gaps model
(adapted from Parasuraman et al., 1991, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1993)

In order to provide a quantifiable measure for service quality, the SERVQUAL survey uses 22 items to address customer expectations and perceptions along five different dimensions:

1. Tangibles: *physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel*
2. Reliability: *ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately*
3. Responsiveness: *willingness to help customers and provide prompt service*
4. Assurance: *knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence*
5. Empathy: *caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers*

(Parasuraman et al., 1988, p.23)

The five dimensions are adapted depending on the service provider, whether the service product involves manufactured goods with distinct transaction stages (i.e. creating, marketing, selling) or more esoteric experiences with multiple interactions between the customer and provider or service staff. Furthermore, although the five dimensions are conceptually distinct, they are also interrelated (Parasuraman et al., 1991), though the exact nature of these relationships is not specified.

In a subsequent study (Zeithaml et al., 1993), the team also provide evidence regarding preceding factors or antecedents of customers' expectations, identifying five distinct areas from the customer standpoint which involve personal needs, perceived alternatives, self-perceived role, situational factors, and past experience. These five additional areas are thus added to the explicit promises (i.e. advertising, marketing communications) and implicit promises (i.e. tangibles, price) of the service provider, and word-of-mouth recommendations (i.e. personal acquaintances, expert reports) that a customer receives, which can then affect their expectations regarding what they consider to be their level of desired service versus adequate service (ibid).

Figure 2 shows the relationships identified by Zeithaml et al. (1993) between each of the determinants for customers' expectations of desired and adequate service. Noting the difference between expectations of desired service versus adequate service is important as services may "vary across providers, across employees from the same provider, and even within the same service employee" (ibid, p.6). However, between what is desired and what is determined adequate, or minimally acceptable, there is a flexible 'zone of tolerance' in which, "There is a certain level of service you expect... as long as the service is within a certain 'window' of that level you don't complain" (ibid). Based on their research, the team concludes that there are variations in customers' tolerance zones and, furthermore, that there are also fluctuations in tolerance zones among the five previously identified dimensions of service (i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) (ibid). Most of the fluctuations occur with what customers consider adequate service, as over time their judgements about what they would like to experience versus may only change slightly whereas their minimum standards for service(s) may change significantly more (ibid).

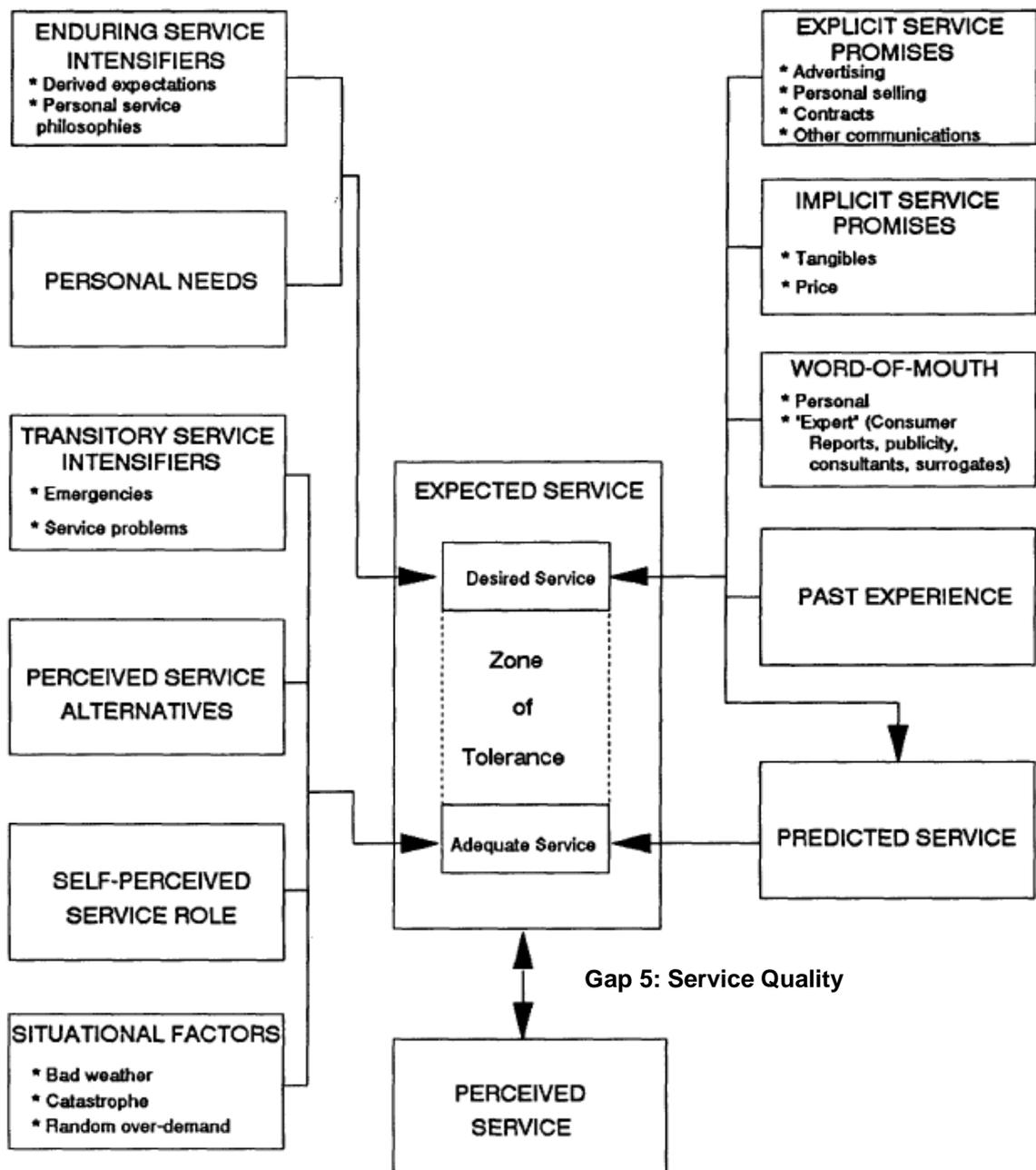


Figure 2. Determinants of customer expectations
(taken from Zeithaml et al., 1993, p.5)

The final part of the SERVQUAL framework which should be addressed involves whether satisfaction precedes perceptions of quality or vice versa. Some studies would argue that perceptions of quality precede perceptions of overall satisfaction, including:

- Student satisfaction in HE (Clewes, 2003; Douglas et al., 2006, 2008; Grace et al., 2012; McInnis et al., 2000; Ramsden, 1991; Wiers-Jensen, 2002)
- Customer satisfaction in leisure and tourism (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Bigné et al., 2005; Campo and Yagüe, 2009; Chen and Chen, 2010; Cole and Illum, 2006; Cole et al., 2002; Dmitrović et al., 2009; Hosany and Witham, 2009; Huang and Hsu, 2010; Pegg and Patterson, 2010; Yoon and Uysal, 2005)
- International student satisfaction (Arambewela and Hall, 2006, 2009; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008)

These studies tend to use ‘performance indicators’ regarding satisfaction with the quality of specific encounters or aspects of service situations to predict overall satisfaction; thus, such research is conducted based on Cronin and Taylor’s (1992) premise against SERVQUAL that customers’ expectations are not as important as how the service is performed or delivered. However, Parasuraman et al. (1994) question this position as studies such as those listed are focused primarily on evaluating customers’ satisfaction with specific transactional episodes rather than global, overall attitudinal measures of quality, which is not SERVQUAL’s original premise. The preference or tendency to focus on particular episodes or specific practices rather than the whole experience is conventionally acknowledged by the researchers. For example, in conducting research with the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) survey instrument in Australian HE, McInnis et al. (2000) explain the scope of their research by stating,

While classroom instruction is obviously an important part of the learning environment provided by universities, it is far from the sum of the university experience for students. The CEQ does not account for the social dimension of the student experience and the learning climate that is very much a product of a mix of student attitudes, outlooks and behaviours. (p.4)

Recognising that many researchers are more inclined to focus on individual segments which can be controlled by the provider (as demonstrated by McInnis et al. above) as opposed to holistic perceptions of the entire process, which would include factors outside the provider’s locus of control, Parasuraman et al. (1994) suggest two different models for examining service quality – a transactional model and a global or overall model. The first model (shown in Figure 3) centres on a single experience or transaction between a customer and service provider. According to this transactional model of service quality, customers have perceptions about the quality of service (SQ), the quality of the product (PQ), and the price (P) which affect whether or not they will be satisfied with their experience with the chosen service. In this model, the measure of customers’ satisfaction is used to address specific areas of service provision which are lacking and may be improved.

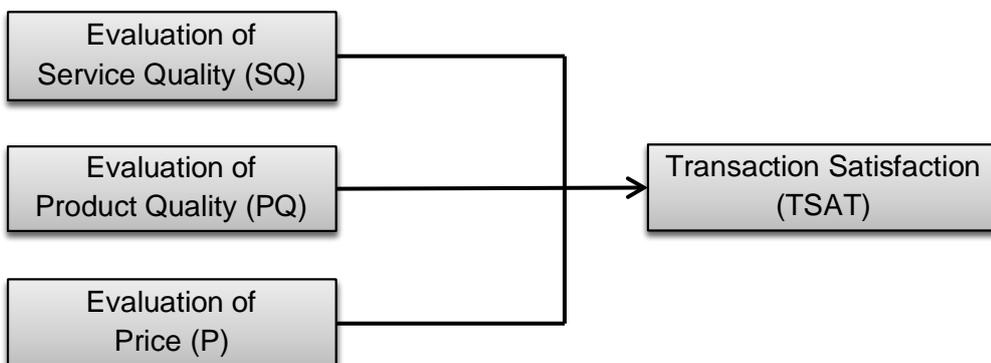


Figure 3. Components of transactional satisfaction evaluations
(adapted from Parasuraman et al., 1994, p.121)

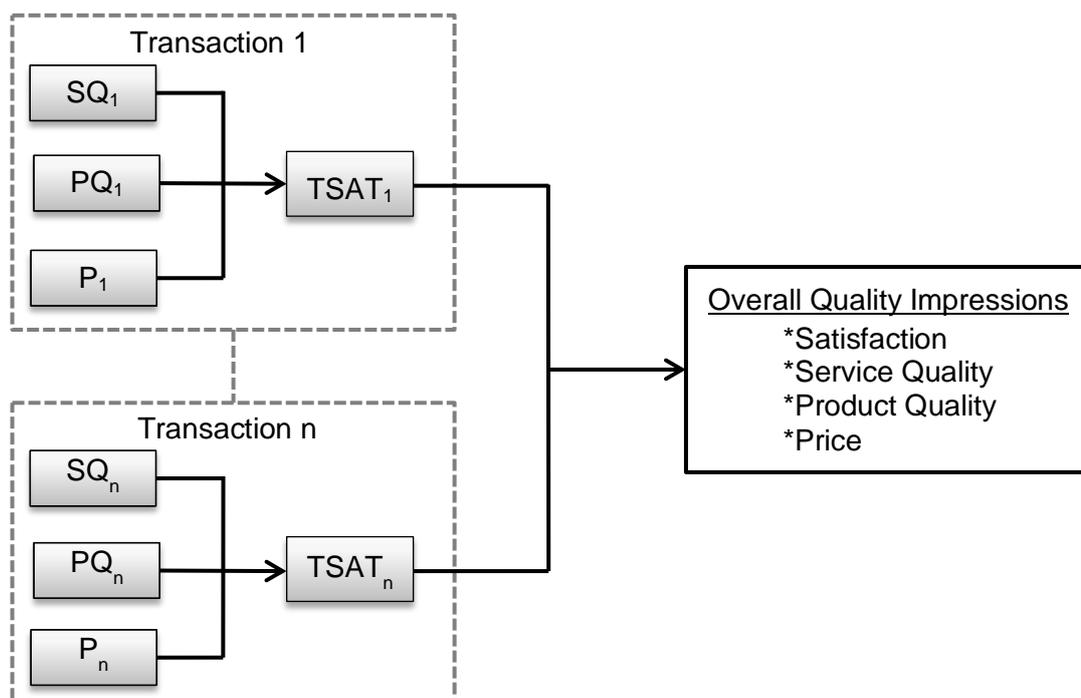


Figure 4. Components of overall quality evaluations
(adapted from Parasuraman et al., 1994, p.121)

The second model (shown in Figure 4) postulates that customers' perceptions about the overall quality of the service provider depend on multiple measures of satisfaction based on various transactions and/or interactions within the service experience with the service provider. Thus, this model incorporates the earlier transactional satisfaction model while recognising that there may be multiple service encounter transactions which can then affect customers' impressions regarding overall quality. With this model, individual areas of service provision in need of further scrutiny from the service provider may be identified (i.e. individual transactions) but the focus is on the collective attitudinal measure of customers' overall quality impressions about the service provider. Furthermore, the model shows that customers' overall quality impressions about service providers are multidimensional, depending on four summative evaluations in perceptions of satisfaction, service quality, product quality, and price. Most previous studies (as cited earlier) utilise the first model (Figure 3, transactional satisfaction) with distinct incidents, resulting in a noted gap in available research using the second model (Figure 4, overall quality) to examine experiences.

2.1.1.1 Previous Studies Examining Student Satisfaction

As previously stated, many studies in different fields have been published based on the aforementioned transactional model of overall satisfaction (depicted in Figure 3), as opposed to the paucity of studies which consider overall quality (depicted in Figure 4). Although this study intends to examine the experiences of students from a quality perspective rather than that of satisfaction, there is useful information to be gleaned by

examining studies which consider satisfaction to be a suitable proxy for overall quality. As a review of all studies would be beyond the purview of this research, a brief review of key studies examining satisfaction based on research with students is provided here.

Some widely-used instruments are based on using student feedback through reports of overall satisfaction with specific reference to learning and teaching experiences, these include the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) in Australia (ACER, 2014; Coates, 2009, 2010; McInnis et al., 2001), the International Student Barometer (ISB) which is used worldwide (Garrett, 2014), the National Student Survey (NSS) in the UK (Ramsden, 2008; Ramsden et al., 2010), and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in North America (Kuh, 2001a, 2001b). The customised information provided to HEIs in reports from these instruments is considered useful as research shows that reported overall satisfaction is linked with students' willingness to recommend the HEI to others (Garrett, 2014; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998; UKCOSA, 2007); thus these instruments are used to provide accountability data to HEIs based on individual institution responses, as well as comparisons between institutions and academic departments which may indicate areas in need of improvement. Although the general majority of HE students seem to be satisfied with their experiences when reviewing reports across the different datasets for the AUSSE (ACER, 2014; Coates, 2010), the CEQ (McInnis et al., 2001), the NSS (BIS, 2011; Grove, 2014), the ISB (Garrett, 2014; UKCISA, 2011; UKCOSA, 2004), and NSSE (Kuh et al., 2006), critics note that comparing HEIs based on published rankings can be troublesome as:

League tables are fraught with methodological problems, but are avidly read by students (notably international and postgraduate ones) and HEI managers alike. ...Nonetheless, HEIs are strongly influenced by league tables since they relate to institutional reputation, and executive teams and governing bodies use them as KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] or strategic targets. (Middlehurst, 2011, p.25)

The instruments have produced other useful findings beyond league tables though, with noticeable variations in responses between particular groups of students:

- Accommodation – students living in university accommodation or on campus seem to be inclined to report higher satisfaction (Coates, 2009);
- Age – younger students generally report higher satisfaction than older students (Coates, 2009; Garrett, 2014; UKCOSA, 2004);
- Nationality – international students have a tendency to report lower levels of satisfaction than domestic students (Coates, 2009), and among international students European students are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction and recommendation than students from Asia and the Middle East (Archer et al., 2010; Garrett, 2014; UKCOSA, 2004); and
- Social connections – students reporting close friendships and perceptions of supportive campus environments tend to report higher levels of satisfaction (Coates, 2009; Kuh et al., 2006; UKCOSA, 2004).

Different reports from AUSSE (Coates, 2009) and NSSE data (Kuh et al., 2006) further indicate that a supportive campus environment is the “single best predictor of student satisfaction”, noting:

How students feel about their school does not necessarily directly affect how much they learn. But perceptions do directly affect student satisfaction and how much effort students will expend on educationally purposeful activities.

(Kuh et al., 2006, p.40)

As such, the CEQ (see Grace et al., 2012), the AUSSE (see Coates, 2009) and NSSE (see NSSE, 2013, 2014a) posit that student satisfaction and positive learning outcomes are related to effective student engagement practices based on key indicators for: academic challenge, peer learning, experiences with HEI staff, the HEI campus environment, and identified high-impact practices (i.e. learning communities, participation in service and research projects, internships or field experiences, studying abroad, and final year projects). Reports from the ISB (Archer et al., 2010; Garrett, 2014; UKCOSA, 2004), however, go further in examining students’ perceptions, indicating the most important factors in relation to overall satisfaction for international students centre jointly on the subject expertise of teaching staff and students’ ability to make good contacts through social connections whilst abroad.

The differences in such results could be attributed to the content and purpose of the instruments: the CEQ and NSS focus on students’ course experiences, the AUSSE and NSSE are interested in student engagement, and the ISB is centred on HEI services which affect international students’ experiences. However, although the various instruments ask students to provide responses considering various facets of the learning experience with the course and/or the HEI, data are mostly analysed and results are presented in such a manner which negates the possibility to thoroughly examine relationships between different elements of the students’ experiences or HEI service provision and students’ ratings of overall satisfaction; rather, the information is separated to examine trends in students’ responses to individual items as shown by the following.

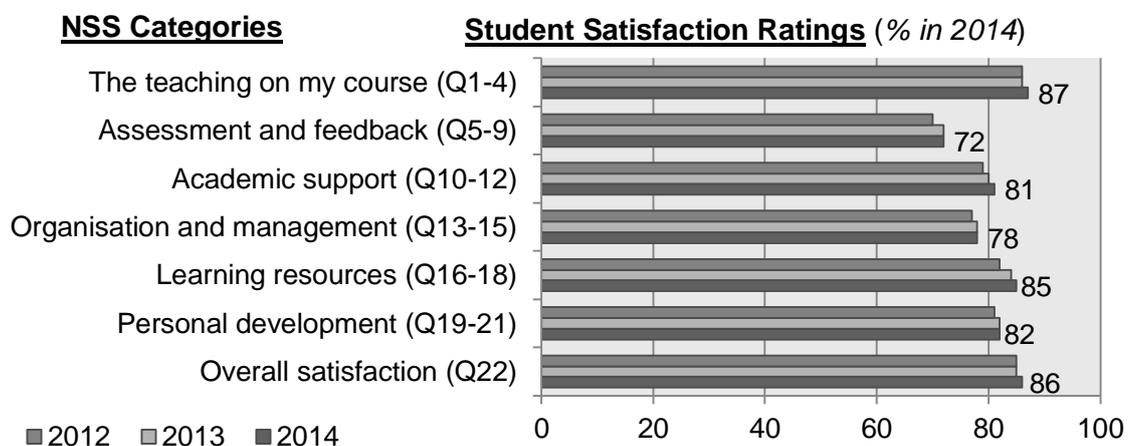


Figure 5. NSS results and improvements 2012-2014
(adapted from HEFCE, 2014)

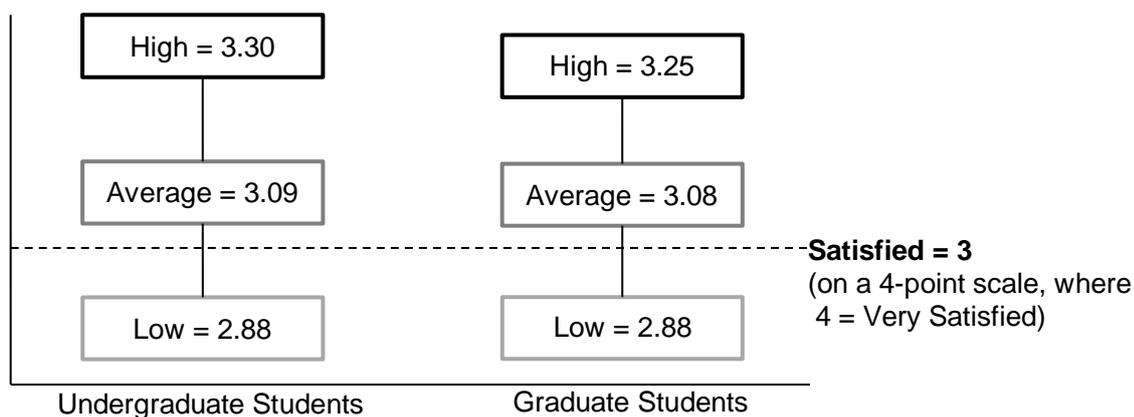


Figure 6. High, average, and low institutional performance on 'Overall Satisfaction' (data from Autumn 2013 wave of ISB, taken from Garrett, 2014, p.10)

Although this information is considered useful by students and HEI administrators, some (McInnis et al., 2001) recognise there are noticeable limitations considering most analyses focus on providing descriptive statistics (i.e. numbers and percentages) for individual items as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6. Figure 5, for instance, indicates NSS scores in the UK have risen across all seven categories with overall satisfaction reported by 86% of students in 2014 (HEFCE, 2014). Likewise, Figure 6 indicates that most international students report being satisfied with services at their HEI as average scores for institutional performance are above 3 on a 4-point scale for both undergraduates and graduate (i.e. postgraduate) students (Garrett, 2014). Thus, although such measures provide information to HEIs regarding whether or not students are 'satisfied', the reasons behind the students' ratings are unclear given the majority of the data is gathered via closed questions with little opportunity for students to elaborate on their responses.

Other quantitative studies of student satisfaction reflect similar problems, suggesting the complexity of the concept of student satisfaction. Multiple studies show variations across student demographics and the type of course or academic subject of study (Arambewela and Hall, 2006, 2009; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; Perrucci and Hu, 1995; Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002). Using data from national surveys conducted by four Norwegian newspapers, Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002) examined responses from 10,464 students using five dimensions of incidental student satisfaction as well as an overall satisfaction measure. They found the majority of students reported having positive experiences via a measure of overall satisfaction and would also further recommend their HEI to friends and acquaintances; however, these results contrasted with findings that less than 40% of students considered the HEI close to 'ideal' and less than 30% of students reported their expectations had been met. Furthermore, in examining data across the five dimensions of satisfaction (i.e. quality of teaching, support facilities, physical facilities, social climate, and possible leisure activities), the researchers found

that students were most highly satisfied with the social climate and library services at the HEI. The students reported being “less content with the pedagogic quality of teaching, the balance between teaching and self-tuition and the service level of the administrative staff” (p.189). Moreover, although leisure activities were not found to have a significant effect on overall satisfaction, the researchers suggest examining the effects of other auxiliary aspects of university life (i.e. leisure activities, campus pubs, social events), noting:

even if student assessment of teaching is a valid instrument for improving higher education, it seems that this instrument does not capture other highly-relevant features of students’ learning experience. (ibid, p.194)

Two key studies of satisfaction research were conducted at Liverpool John Moores University in the UK with students in the Faculty of Business and Law (Douglas et al., 2006, 2008). The first study (2006) involved analysing responses from 864 questionnaires to determine which aspects of service at the HEI students consider to be the most and least important in affecting satisfaction ratings. According to the study, students indicated the ten most important factors of HE service as:

1. *Teaching ability of staff*
2. *Subject expertise of staff*
3. *IT facilities*
4. *Lectures*
5. *Supplementary lecture materials*
6. *Tutorials*
7. *Consistency of teaching quality irrespective of teacher*
8. *Blackboard (i.e. online, virtual learning environment)*
9. *The Learning Resources Centre*
10. *The approachability of teaching staff* (p.257)

Thus, the researchers concluded from the questionnaire data that “the most important areas of the University services are those associated with learning and teaching” (p.256), whereas physical facilities and ancillary services (i.e. parking, catering, and recreation facilities) were found to be relatively unimportant in affecting students’ reported satisfaction. The researchers further indicated that students’ perceptions regarding the importance of various aspects may change over time, as expectations are or are not met between stages of application and enrolment at the HEI as:

it seems that the University’s physical facilities influence students’ choice. However, once here it is the quality of the teaching and learning experience that is of importance. ...they are prepared to tolerate, to a large extent, “wobbly tables” and paint flaking off walls as long as the teaching they receive is at an acceptable level. (p.264)

Consequently, the results from the study were determined useful as they provided specific evidence which could be utilised by HE management and staff responsible for quality improvement at the HEI, specifically in regards to “introducing explicit standards of service to various aspects of the University services” (ibid). The second study

(Douglas et al., 2008) then utilised a Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to identify situations which students consider to be of critical importance stating,

Using CIT as a research method may overcome the issue of student diversity as it would allow the students to contribute to the agenda rather than responding to questions that may not be relevant to them, as well as using a somewhat less prosaic approach than the more traditional methods of collecting student satisfaction data. (p.26)

A total of 517 anecdotes from 163 undergraduate students were obtained via a questionnaire which were then analysed using an interpretive methodology. Specific “themes” were identified in reference to the ten determinants of service quality from Parasuraman et al. (1985) and categorised according to whether they focused on “ancillary services” or “teaching, learning and assessment” (Douglas et al., 2008, p.27). The researchers also used a 2x2 matrix of importance and satisfaction to analyse responses in order to subsequently prioritise and guide management efforts (i.e. maintain quality: high importance-high satisfaction; concentrate here: high importance-low satisfaction; possible overkill: low importance-high satisfaction; and low priority: low importance-low satisfaction). Findings indicated 88% of students “would recommend the University to a friend or neighbour”, but certain aspects of service quality were found to be more important in terms of the likelihood of students’ recommendations or continuation of their course. As such, the critical determinants identified by students regarding teaching, learning, and assessment included responsiveness and communication from HEI staff, whereas critical determinants of ancillary services were staff responsiveness, access, and experiences of socialising (i.e. making new friends and using the students’ union). Thus these results generally support the findings from the previous study (2006), emphasising the importance of teaching and learning whilst acknowledging additional effects of ancillary services on students’ HE experiences.

In a different study involving 573 mail survey responses from Asian postgraduate students, Arambewela and Hall (2006, 2009) used the SERVQUAL framework to assess international students’ satisfaction at five Australian HEIs asserting that “Student satisfaction is a barometer of service quality in education” (2006, p.144) and “measurements that incorporate customer expectations provide richer information and have more diagnostic value” (p.148). Based on their data, they concluded students’ nationality (i.e. Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, and Thai) to be an important factor in managing international students’ expectations and predicting relative levels of satisfaction. Primarily, they determined that not all students from Asian countries reported similar responses, as students of certain nationalities had higher expectations and standards for satisfaction than other nationalities. In the first stage of analysis (2006), they found noticeable variations in data across individual service quality variables (i.e. tangibles, empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability) relative to

students' nationalities. Later analysis (2009) showed that there are multiple constructs (i.e. social issues, technology availability, economic considerations, accommodation, safety, HEI prestige and image) in addition to 'direct educational issues' which should be recognised in relation to measuring student satisfaction.

While the findings from these studies are considered particularly useful to HE managers and staff, generally indicating positive trends and improvements in students' evaluations of their HE experience, some (Callender et al., 2014; Naidoo et al., 2011; Ramsden, 2008; Ramsden et al., 2010; Staddon and Standish, 2012; Wenstone, 2012) argue that using measures of satisfaction as a proxy for quality and adopting private business practices from the customer services industry is particularly problematic and questionable in the HE context:

To sustain a high quality student experience, we must not fall into the trap of accepting as accurate a reading of students principally as consumers, demanding value for money, expecting 'satisfaction', passively receiving skills and knowledge, grumpily complaining about service standards, and favouring above all else the easy acquisition of qualifications. (Ramsden, 2008, p.16)

Basically, it is thought that HEIs which operate according to private business practices with a new 'neoliberalist agenda' (i.e. considering students to be 'consumers' with education being a product) challenges the traditional ethos of HE:

Higher education has traditionally been seen as a public good – of value to society as well as to individual students – and thus largely a responsibility of society (the state) to support and fund. This concept functioned where higher education was mainly public, the academic enterprise was fairly small and thus not too expensive, and when academe served a small and relatively elite segment of the population. The idea of higher education as a private good – of benefit primarily to individual graduates and thus to be paid for mainly by the "users" (students) – is a result of several converging ideas and realities. (Altbach et al., 2009, p.12)

The "converging ideas and realities" referred to in the preceding quote encompass the various political, social, and economic changes which have occurred worldwide since the end of the Cold War, recognising prolific effects from amplified globalisation: widening economic disparities and fluctuations caused by economic crises; rising demands for more ethical transparency and accountability in all sectors; and increased competition and privatisation in HE with higher student enrolment rates alongside decentralised government control and decreases in funding (ibid). In fact, debates on the 'commodification of HE' have been on-going since the early 1990s, but encouragement to focus on quality in HE rather than satisfaction goes further as:

Despite more than a decade of formalizing quality-assurance programs, many elements of measuring and monitoring quality remain problematic. The idea of exactly where quality resides in higher education remains somewhat elusive. (Altbach et al., 2009, p.170)

2.1.2 Conceptualising Quality: Looking beyond Satisfaction

Providing a conceptual distinction between satisfaction and quality is important as:

service providers need to know whether their objective should be to deliver satisfied customers, who will then develop a perception of high service quality, or that they should aim for high service quality as a way of increasing customer satisfaction. (Douglas et al., 2008, p.21)

In the HE context, this statement may be paraphrased to consider whether HEIs should try to satisfy students who will then feel they have had a high quality education experience, or whether the HEI should aim for providing a high quality education experience which would then increase student satisfaction. Essentially, it is a matter of accountability – what is the HEI supposed to provide? The latter perspective relies on a view that quality should mean HE is distinctive and special, and HEIs should always get everything right, pre-empting any potential problems before they can arise (Harvey and Green, 1993). However, in this case quality is a relative term meaning “different things to different people” (ibid) and there are not standards or accepted benchmarks for ‘excellence’ considering the variety of stakeholders in HE (i.e. students, employers, teaching and administrative staff, government, funding agencies, assessment entities, general public). However, by using principles of quality assurance adopted from the business sector, HEIs and the QAA evaluate the ‘fit’ and ‘purpose’ of HE with minimum standards for efficiency and economic competition, generally adhering to the former view that satisfaction precedes quality. Such evidence indicates that HEIs are working on the basis of a deficit model (i.e. trying to fill noted gaps to meet expectations), especially exemplified in the “you said, we did” strategies. In general, there are only so many factors which an HEI can control, even though there are many interrelated spheres to the HE experience:

Although there is no escaping the fact that the senior management of an institution bears responsibility for the quality of the whole of its provision, nevertheless senior management alone cannot, by policing-style checks, balances and monitoring, create quality in the day-to-day life of the students. (Perry, 1994, p.36)

Perry argues that the locus of responsibility for an HEI does not extend to the daily life of students outside the university, aligning with other research (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Astin, 1984; Callender, 2014; Clewes, 2003; Douglas et al., 2006, 2008; Milem and Berger, 1997; Pace, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002), recognising that there are many different factors which can affect students’ perceptions of their education experiences (i.e. students’ abilities and emotions, accommodation and extracurricular activities, friendships and other relationships, personal development and other experiences). Thus, although the latter argument seems to fit better with traditional views regarding the purpose of HE (i.e. excellence in HE, quality should come before satisfaction), most of the current mechanisms for feedback focus on

students' satisfaction with individual elements of the HE experience (i.e. teaching, assessment, facilities or services) whereas perceptions of quality result from the whole process. This could account for the noticeable preference in previous studies such as those presented in the previous section (Arambewela and Hall, 2006, 2009; Douglas et al., 2006, 2008; Grace et al., 2012; Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002) to focus on using a transactional model for evaluating students' satisfaction with a specific part of the HE experience rather than a global model for examining students' attitudes towards their HE experience overall.

Even as education is widely considered to be a provided service with intangible outcomes (i.e. knowledge, personal development, experience), previous researchers (Clewes, 2003; Douglas et al., 2006, 2008; Van der Velden, 2012a) note that satisfaction is particularly difficult to measure in education as there is a particular reluctance to consider students as customers. For example, in a report to the Secretary of State for Universities and Skills, Ramsden (2008) states,

The vision of a learner as passive consumer is inimical to a view of students as partners with their teachers in a search for understanding – one of the defining features of higher education from both academic and student perspectives, and powerfully embodied in academic culture since at least the time of Humboldt. There is no reason to impose a false divide between higher education as a road to a better, more highly-paid career and a vision of it as a life-changing personal experience. (p.16)

Ramsden's statement summarily reiterates the problem regarding the perceived value of HE and from whose perspective satisfaction and quality should be judged – from an independent organisation (i.e. QAA), the provider (i.e. HEI), staff, or the receiver (i.e. student). Ramsden (2008) addresses this conundrum when saying,

'Value' to a student may be measured as the excess of experience over expectation; but students are often poorly informed about what they can expect. Many have only the haziest notions of what the experience will be like and how it will differ from other types of education they have encountered. Prospective students require more clarity about what higher education can and cannot provide for them and more guidance in working out what their choices could be. (p.12)

Essentially, HE providers should be accountable and can offer multiple opportunities to students whilst meeting expectations set by the QAA, but students also have a responsibility to be informed, develop realistic expectations, and co-create their HE experiences. Thus, in keeping with the original term designations by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988), this research considers satisfaction to refer to how an HEI is accountable and matches specific expectations with factors within the control of the HEI, whereas the students' perceptions about the quality of their HE experience also includes the students' involvement in the process itself and their emotional reactions.

2.1.3 Conceptualising Quality: Focusing on Experiences

Moving forward from the previously noted gaps or deficit-model of satisfaction in HE service provision (i.e. using SERVQUAL and other feedback mechanisms to measure satisfaction and thus identify areas in need of improvement to improve overall perceptions of quality), a wealth of experiential research focused more on quality and experiences comes from the field of leisure and tourism. In *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, Pine and Gilmore (1999) discuss the historical evolution of society's economic interests from agrarian commodities (i.e. agricultural products) to industrial goods (i.e. manufactured products) to delivering services (i.e. intangible products provided by others) to providing experiences (i.e. events and memories); these distinctions are presented further in Table 1.

Table 1. Reviewing Trends and Economic Distinctions

Economic Offering	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences
Economy	Agrarian	Industrial	Service	Experience
Economic function	Extract	Make	Deliver	Stage
Nature of offering	Fungible	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key attribute	Natural	Standardized	Customized	Personal
Method of supply	Stored in bulk	Inventoried after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over a duration
Seller	Trader	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	Market	User	Client	Guest
Factors of demand	Characteristics	Features	Benefits	Sensations

(taken from Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.6)

Whereas people used to be mainly interested in tangible products and services, now it is “the experience” which is of primary import to providers and consumers in nearly every industry (ibid). According to Pine and Gilmore, there are four basic types of experiences: entertainment, esthetic, escapist, and educational. Each type of experience can be identified based on a typology framework, as shown in Figure 7, depending on whether individuals are passive or active participants and the type of environmental connection involved in the experience. Other studies from leisure and tourism research (Hosany and Witham, 2009; Manfredo et al., 1998) provide further validation for Pine and Gilmore’s experience designations.

The four “realms” of experience, as shown in Figure 7, are “mutually compatible domains that often comingle to form uniquely personal encounters” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 32). Entertainment refers to passive sensory experiences, where one “absorbs” the experience as their attention is fully occupied such as when listening to music or watching a film.

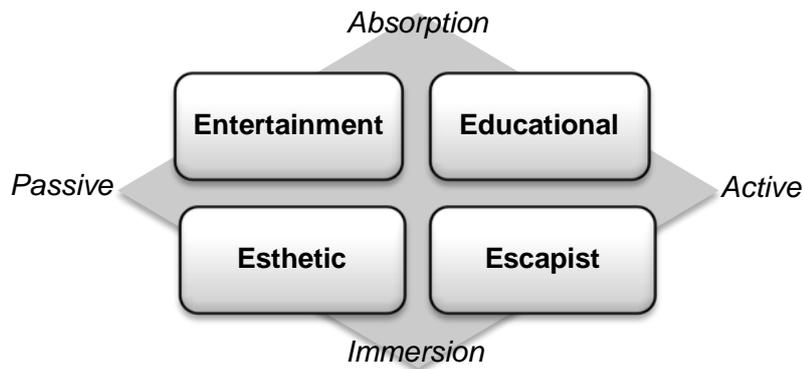


Figure 7. Different types of experiences
(taken from Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.31)

Esthetic experiences then denote those in which individuals are encouraged to be passive whilst enjoying being immersed in a different environment; esthetic experiences tend to focus on an appreciation of the natural environment such as a calming day at a spa or watching a sunset. In contrast, Escapist experiences indicate a situation in which an individual is fully immersed in their environment and actively participates in the creation of their experience; a key factor of the escapist experience is that individuals “do not just embark *from* but also voyage *to* some specific place and activity worthy of their time” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.34), such as when an individual goes to a theme park or takes a traveling holiday. Finally, education experiences involve an individual actively participating by taking information in (absorbing) through the senses, whether the learning occurs via the mind or the body. With this in mind, students are more interactive in their learning experience while still receiving valuable knowledge and information. Each type of experience provides different benefits to individuals based on their motivations for engaging in the experience, the nature of the experience itself, and the level of personal involvement the individual has with the experience (ibid). In general, different people may have different needs at different times which subsequently can affect their experience choices and expectations.

While Pine and Gilmore (1999) recognise that education can be an active and interactive process between teachers and learners, one could find fault with the statement about how individuals are connected with their environment in an educational experience (i.e. sensory absorption rather than total immersion). In leisure or recreational contexts, this may hold true as individuals cannot materially affect the exhibits on display in a museum or the athletic equipment used for training in a gym. However, in an HE context, there is often a direct exchange of information through conversations between students and lecturers which can sometimes alter the intended lesson plan. Furthermore, if the university has a centralised campus then students may actually feel fully immersed in the environment. In contrast, other students may not feel engaged at all and choose to remain passive in their education. Additionally although

many students leave home to come to university, international students travel farther to get to the host HEI and once there often choose leisure and entertainment experiences that are unavailable in their home countries (British Council, 2010; Byram and Feng, 2006; Jones, 2010; Sánchez et al., 2006; Teichler, 2004; UKCOSA, 2004). Pine and Gilmore (1999) do say that some experiences tend to blur the lines between the different realms. Thus, different factors may interact to change the nature of the student experience as well as affecting a student's response to it depending on where the student is coming from, why they chose the HEI or the course, what their expectations are, and how they choose to engage in the experience.

In reviewing Pine and Gilmore's (1999) typology and their acknowledgement of pre-existing personal factors (i.e. motivations, personal needs, expectations), in addition to the SERVQUAL framework regarding antecedents, expectations, and perceptions regarding satisfaction and quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1993), one may consider that the contemporary student experience (and those of international students in particular) can be quite complex, progressively moving between the four different realms of experiences (i.e. educational, entertainment, esthetic, and escapist) depending on the students' motivations and how they are engaged in the experience. Furthermore, there are also different models for basing research which focus on emphasising either students' satisfaction with specific aspects of the course or HEI which primarily encompasses factors the HEI can be considered responsible for (i.e. transactional model) or students' overall perceptions regarding the quality of the entire HE experience which would also include factors outside the university setting and beyond the control of the HEI (i.e. global model).

2.2 Conceptualising the 'Student Experience' in Higher Education

Providing a high quality student experience is a key priority for the UK government. Higher education provides a significant contribution to ensuring the economic and social success of the UK on a national and international scale. It is therefore of upmost importance that higher education institutions provide an exceptional student experience to encourage students to enter and remain in education.
(Inside Government, 2014)

The above quote is taken from the January 2014 conference for HE administrators and staff titled "Student experience 2014: Enhancing the quality of student support and campus services" (ibid). Essentially, the rising preference to use the phrase 'the student experience' seemingly places more emphasis on students' perspectives over those of the HEI or staff. As the quote implies, currently there is a growing interest in general support for the student experience, as well as identifying practices which can demonstrably improve it. Some argue that the expansion in initiatives to improve the student experience can be attributed to recent changes in HE funding and policies:

One outcome of this is a new emphasis on the quality of the student experience. Indeed the phrase 'student experience' is now reiterated, as if de rigeur, in university policy statements and in the burgeoning literature on student satisfaction that is produced by the higher education sector and its supporting professional bodies. The argument in such documents runs, in brief, that only those universities that offer a good student experience will remain competitive and that a good student experience is one that combines good quality with value for money. (Staddon and Standish, 2012, pp.631-632)

This quote rationalises the increased interest in the student experience in terms of HEI sustainability by basing efforts on strategies to address anticipated threats from the competition (i.e. other HEIs, other countries). However, there is also a wider imperative to make all HEIs more accountable, putting emphasis on the importance of the students' role in the HE system:

The changes we are making to higher education funding will in turn drive a more responsive system. To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful. (BIS, 2011, p.5)

There are various factors which have combined to produce such views: increased numbers of student applications; less funding support from the government; increased interest from private organisations for HEIs to produce qualified graduates in required fields; rising tuition fees and additional living costs; more transparency in general communication of available opportunities and individual reputations based on HEI's standings in various league tables; and general perceptions about HE's value and appeal for students, parents, and the public (BIS, 2011; Gosling, 2013). Ultimately, there are noticeable changes in HE in general based on reacting to economic and political pressures as well as social changes, which consequently puts more stress on HEIs to be more competitive both nationally and internationally.

As the student experience is increasingly emphasised as an important indicator of satisfaction and quality in HE, it would be useful to provide a definition for the concept. However, defining what is meant by 'the student experience' can be difficult, as there are multiple definitions for the student experience based on inclusive / exclusive variations:

- *Life experiences of all students while they are students.*
- *All experiences of an individual student while a student, including wider life experiences.*
- *All experiences of an individual student while in their identity as a 'student'.*
- *All experiences of facets of the university experienced by an individual student (e.g. a sense of 'belonging', wider social activities tagged to the university).*
- *'Consumer' experiences of an individual student, e.g. administrative procedures, catering, IT support, availability of amenities, car parking accessibility, child care etc.*
- *All experiences of an individual student that contribute to their personal development as learners (sometimes described as the 'student learning experience').* (Baird and Gordon, 2009)

Basically, the first three definitions identified by Baird and Gordon (2009) centre on looking at the student experience from a wider perspective, acknowledging the influence of additional factors outside the university environment. In contrast, the latter three definitions focus on the student experience from more of an administrative perspective, identifying and assessing specific provisions by the HEI including effective services, beneficial activities, and pedagogical practices. For example, Middlehurst (2011) notes various differences between standard perspectives regarding views of the student experience:

In practice, HEIs define the student experience differently. Many separate it into different parts of the student life-cycle, from recruitment to learning, awards, destinations and on to alumnus status. Others consider the student experience across areas of service provision such as the academic and teaching experience, academic support services, administrative services, the social experience and non-academic support services. One thing is clear: the student experience is much more than the teaching that takes place. (p.35)

Such varied conceptual distinctions seem to indicate that there is some disagreement regarding what is pertinent to this area of research; namely, that students and administrators may have different thoughts and beliefs as to what should be considered appropriate in research on the student experience. However, some argue that the basic premise for defining the student experience is actually at fault:

'Student experience(s)' are unique for each individual, across the range of contexts through which students engage as part of their university studies: there is no such thing as the student experience. (Radloff et al., 2011, p.35)

Yet, this does not suggest research on addressing the student experience is useless:

However, while there is no such thing as the student experience, there are certainly aspects of the student experience that can usefully be identified, and evidence sought in them for differences, commonalities and variations over time. (ibid)

In fact, there are numerous examples of previous studies which examine specific aspects of the student experience with most concentrating around learning and teaching practices (Chalmers, 2008; Clark et al., 2014; Douglas et al., 2006; Grace et al., 2012; Hellstén and Prescott, 2004; Lizzio and Wilson, 2013; Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012; NUS and QAA, 2012a). This is often justified by statements such as,

It might be argued that teaching quality, assessment and feedback, and engagement with learning are the most vital aspects of a high quality student experience. (Ramsden and Callender, 2014, p.19)

Others rationalise that research focused on these academic aspects of the student experience is more useful for providing measurable outcomes with "reliable, valid, and generalizable information" by specifically concentrating "on aspects of the student experience for which universities could reasonably be assumed to have responsibility" (Radloff et al., 2011, p.6). However, in putting so much 'responsibility' on the HEI, such views seem to neglect consideration of the relative role of the student, their choices,

and their responsibility for their own experiences. Thus rather than exploring the student experience from the students' perspective and then identifying patterns from responses or otherwise letting the students clearly elucidate directly on their experiences, the HEI or organisation administering the research decides beforehand what is and is not to be considered important in their particular environment. This seems especially counterintuitive if the specified purpose of looking closer at the student experience is to focus on the students' voice.

Within the UK HE context, the students' union usually focuses on "being the primary champion of the student voice and sole representative body of the student experience to their parent institution" (Chapman et al., 2013, p.272). Although students' unions are often featured in the marketing materials for individual HEIs, students' unions in the UK tend to be independently operated (i.e. they are not managed by the university or part of its governing infrastructure). Thus, students' unions are actively inclined to be more student-centric, especially when they are "student-owned and operated". In another sense, students' unions often act as a mediator in various disputes between students and the HEI as the mechanisms and opportunities for more direct student representation within the HEI system (i.e. course representatives, departmental representatives, etc.) are comparatively newer (ibid).

For many years SUs [students' unions] have been championing the quality of the academic experience of students via student representation and other quality assurance routes. They have also supported student involvement in wider learning opportunities that lay outside of the curriculum such as participation in sports, societies and volunteering programmes. (ibid, p.275)

In this way, students' unions work on a principle of safeguarding students' rights and adding value beyond the "traditional" HE experience of increasing general academic and subject-specific knowledge. As such, students' unions operate on a philosophical understanding that students' involvement in 'wider learning opportunities' is beneficial to the students' experience and their personal development (ibid). However, the relationship between HEIs and students' unions is not, always, that of contention (ibid). Though having expressed different foci regarding their primary areas of interest, students' unions can also work with HEIs in partnership to have a positive effect on students' experiences through engagement both on and off-campus (Bryson, 2014b; Chapman et al., 2013; HEA, 2014b; NUS and QAA, 2012b; Nygaard et al., 2013; Wenstone, 2012). Such collaborative practices are essential to HE as the contemporary student experience entails much more than just the 'traditional' academic experience of learning and being taught in lectures (Middlehurst, 2011).

2.2.1 Conceptualising the Student Experience: Feedback and the Student Voice

Since 2005, HEIs in the UK increasingly focus on new initiatives for 'the student experience' within their institutional strategic plans based on the results of feedback

generated through large scale surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) (HEFCE, 2014) and the International Student Barometer (ISB) (UKCISA, 2011). Both surveys are administered online by independent, privately-run organisations in order to collect feedback from two specific student groups: the NSS is conducted with final year undergraduate students at UK HEIs, whereas the ISB targets international students from HEIs across the world; as of 2014, nearly 900 HEIs have used the ISB in 28 different countries (Garrett, 2014).

Each of these surveys provides a synopsis of student experience feedback to HEIs based on results from satisfaction ratings with university facilities and services. The results are then compared between academic departments within the HEI as well as against other HEIs according to national, and with the ISB also global, benchmarks. As these two surveys are the most widely used in the UK for evaluating student satisfaction as a proxy for quality, both are explained in more detail regarding their respective scope and content.

2.2.1.1 Feedback and the Student Voice: The National Student Survey

As previously mentioned, the National Student Survey (NSS) is a questionnaire which asks final year undergraduate students in the UK to provide feedback to HEIs on their course (Callender et al., 2014; HEFCE, 2014). Originally, the stated purpose of the NSS was to provide information about courses to prospective students; however, over time HEIs and the QAA realised the potential for using the data collected with the NSS for quality assurance and quality enhancement activities within HEIs (Ramsden et al., 2010). Therefore, the NSS is currently included as part of the national (i.e. UK) Quality Assurance Framework for HE (ibid). The format of the NSS instrument is based on an adapted version of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) used in Australia (Lizzio et al., 1997; McInnis et al., 2000; Ramsden, 1991); the NSS is administered online using 23 questions to assess different facets of students' course experiences, involving their opinions about:

- Teaching on the course (4 items)
- Assessment and feedback (5 items)
- Academic support (3 items)
- Organisation and management (3 items)
- Learning resources (3 items)
- Personal development (3 items)
- Overall Satisfaction (1 item)
- Satisfaction with the students' union/association/guild (1 item)

(HEFCE, 2014)

In addition to these 23 standard questions, individual HEIs can choose to include up to twelve optional questions to get more information from students (Ramsden et al., 2010). There are also two free response items at the end of the survey which allow students to reflect on any "particularly positive or negative aspects of your course you

would like to highlight” (HEFCE, 2014). As mentioned earlier, the results are then presented in an aggregate form to HEIs and in published league tables which provide rankings for individual academic departments and HEIs according to students’ responses regarding satisfaction with each facet of their course experience.

Following the recommendations from an earlier report (Ramsden et al., 2010), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has commissioned research to review the NSS regarding its purpose, effectiveness, and potential changes (Callender et al., 2014). The research, conducted between July 2013 and February 2014, has involved reviewing the literature and conducting interviews and focus groups with students, funding agencies, and HEIs, as well as workshops with other HE stakeholders and experts in policy and methodology (ibid, p.2). Thus, the final report for the research provides important information about the current form of the NSS as well as potential future applications. According to the published report (ibid), the NSS has three main purposes, recognising the primary focus is on the first two:

1. *Informing prospective student choice*
2. *Enhancing the student academic experience within HE institutions*
3. *Ensuring public accountability* (pp. 2-3)

In order to simultaneously address these three purposes, NSS provides publicly available information about UK HEIs using aggregated course satisfaction ratings. Collective responses from students are published in annual reports, excluding responses to supplemental questions selected by individual HEIs which are published under the discretion of the HEI. These results can be compared between departments within the HEI as well as between different universities. Thus, students can use the NSS data to compare universities when deciding where to apply and HEIs can use the information from the NSS to assess trends and make relevant changes to improve students’ experiences. Overall, the reviewers do not suggest making any significant changes to the NSS which could digress from its stated purpose. In reviewing content for potential revisions, the researchers suggest that three new areas for questions on student engagement may be added in future editions of the NSS, including academic challenge and integrative learning, collaborative learning and learning communities, and student voice (Ramsden and Callender, 2014). Nevertheless, the researchers note:

...the concepts of ‘the student experience’ and ‘student engagement’ are multi-dimensional and contested. There is no single agreed definition of these terms in the research literature, nor was there a consensus among the stakeholders and students participating in this review. The student experience and student engagement topics which potentially could be incorporated within a revised NSS are considerable. Yet, to help preserve the strengths of the NSS while addressing its weaknesses, the focus of the NSS questionnaire needs to be clear and bounded. (Callender et al., 2014, p.3)

Thus, when considering minor revisions to the NSS such as rewording existing questions or including additional questions about student engagement and other facets of the student experience which are not currently assessed, the researchers recommend staying within specific parameters for selection:

1. *Be about something that HE providers can influence*
2. *Be about the academic experience, especially learning and teaching*
3. *Be, as far as practical, universally applicable across all types of HE providers, modes of study, disciplines, and countries in the UK*
4. *Cover measurable and valid issues*
5. *Be meaningful and useful to students, HE providers and other stakeholders*
6. *Produce results that are unambiguous in direction*
7. *Address issues of enduring importance in UK HE rather than transient policy interests*
8. *Meet at least one of the three key purposes of the NSS* (ibid, pp.3-4)

However, critics (Ertl et al., 2008; Gibbs, 2010; Van der Velden, 2012b) argue that by staying focused on the first two criteria (i.e. under the HEI's control and academic experiences), the NSS allows students to evaluate teaching practices on their HE course but does not address the role of the student in the learning process or "in other words, of their engagement with learning, assessment, curriculum and the co-curriculum" or "commitment to the academic and social environment" (Callender et al., 2014, p.18). The NSS provides information for how HEIs can provide suitable environments and teaching practices for students to learn; it does not cover specific aspects of student engagement (i.e. activities inside and outside classroom, different learning approaches, collaborative learning) or information about students' previous experiences (Ramsden and Callender, 2014). Due to this omission of any data relevant to individual students, some consider the NSS to represent more of a survey which rates students' satisfaction with HEI provisions rather than an evaluation of their actual experiences of HE (ibid). Some (Buckley, 2012) further contend that the questions used in the NSS are too vague as they do not provide any contextual information for discretion in student responses while others (Ramsden and Callender, 2014) claim the results are too easily, and erroneously, being manipulated through league tables and marketing, as well as by individual HEIs. Furthermore, since it is only made available to final year undergraduates, the NSS focuses on a limited subsection of the general student population: it does not include any information from undergraduate students enrolled on shorter programmes or who do not finish their degree; neither does it include data from postgraduate students, although a comparative instrument exists with the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) which is much longer than the NSS (Ramsden et al., 2010). Moreover, by focusing on the fourth recommended parameter (i.e. "measurable and valid issues"), the NSS does not allow for more qualitative and descriptive information to be collected about individual students' specific

responses in the survey or more about their general experiences of learning or being in HE. Recognising this issue, the researchers state,

The NSS is designed to reflect aggregated impressions of the student (learning) experience, not to reflect individual experiences (bar perhaps in the open comments). (Callender et al., 2014, p.27)

Even in recognising such limitations, the NSS follows its stated purpose as the information from students' responses is made available to prospective students to inform their decisions and HEIs to make informed strategic improvements. However, there are also many issues which the NSS does not currently address along with significant groups of the student population that are not included in its analysis. The NSS focuses on final year students' experiences with learning and teaching practices which are considered commonly accepted as effective educational practice within HEIs across the UK; as such, it is not meant to evaluate the entire student experience or the relationships between different facets of individual students' experiences in HE.

2.2.1.2 Feedback and the Student Voice: The International Student Barometer

In addition to the NSS survey for final year undergraduates enrolled in UK HEIs, a second widely used instrument for evaluating student experiences is called the International Student Barometer (ISB), which actually arose as a product of PMI2 (UKCOSA, 2004) and is considered "by the UK government as the official measure of the international student experience" (Archer et al., 2010, p.15). Thus, the data gathered in the ISB is used by HEIs in a similar manner to results from the NSS: to attract prospective students, facilitate best practices in HEI provision and quality assurance, and enhance the student learning experience. As mentioned previously in Chapter One, international students represent a significant part of the HE student population in the UK (IIE, 2014; QAA, 2014; UKCISA, 2014b), so the focus on their experiences at UK HEIs is not surprising. In reviewing the aims and scope of the ISB, Garrett (2014) says,

The scholarly literature on the international student experience is dominated by small-scale, qualitative and theoretical studies. This literature is valuable, but a large-scale, quantitative perspective represents a significant methodological gap. (p.5)

The ISB thereby attempts to address this noted gap as an online survey which is conducted according to varied cycles at HEIs across the world, either annually or on a bi-annual basis for each HEI or geographic region. The ISB instrument contains a wide range of questions across multiple areas, encompassing over 100 items in total:

- student characteristics (i.e. nationality, age, gender, accommodation arrangements, funding, course level, main area of study),
- overall satisfaction with the university experience,
- previous education,
- visa information,
- the application process,

- information sources which may have influenced the decision to attend (e.g. friends, parents, alumni, newspapers, websites, etc),
 - the arrival experience,
 - the learning experience,
 - the living experience,
 - satisfaction with support services, and
 - the likelihood of recommending the university to other students
- (i-graduate, 2012)

All of these areas are included in the ISB in order to assess international student satisfaction across average scores and identified components of satisfaction (Garrett, 2014); among the different items, international students are asked about their usage or knowledge of support services and specific experiences at the HEI. As an example, responses for support services include: 'not applicable/not relevant'; 'may be useful but I do not know where it is'; 'I know where it is but do not use it'; and 'I have used this' (Archer et al., 2010, p.34). Unfortunately, aside from reports published by i-graduate (the independent company that administers the ISB), there is little available research on the ISB. Instead, HEIs are given individual comprehensive presentations of the findings for their institution with graphic comparisons of data between similar HEIs (i.e. Russell Group, post-1992 HEIs), HEIs in the UK, and HEIs across the world (i-graduate, 2012). HEIs are also given private access by i-graduate to the complete datasets for their institution to conduct further analyses. The results presented in the 2014 i-graduate report (Garrett, 2014) suggest that undergraduate international students consider the most important factors of their HE experience to be in relation to: the subject knowledge and expertise of academic staff, making good contacts while abroad, academic course content, the organisation of social activities, and the ability to understand academic English relevant to their field (p.20). Students' unions rank at the bottom of the international students' satisfaction comparisons (p.21).

In reviewing trends from the data gathered over the past ten years, Garrett (2014) further notes the importance of academic and non-academic components in the experiences of international students, as well as access to adequate support services for visa advice and other official matters (ibid). Generally, the results from the ISB indicate that international students are more satisfied at HEIs with: clear communication regarding application procedures and processes; effective orientation programmes; opportunities for cultural and social integration; adequate and affordable accommodation; and access to facilities and support services (Archer et al., 2010). The researchers at i-graduate (Archer et al., 2010; Garrett, 2014) specifically note the need for HEIs to manage international students' expectations through pre-arrival information and orientation programmes. However, any interactions between the different parts of international students' experiences (i.e. before arrival, at the UK HEI, and at different times in their international experience) are not noted. Instead, selected items are

reviewed in i-graduate reports for aggregated ISB results with basic descriptive statistical information (i.e. frequencies and percentages). As such, all of the conclusions made with the ISB are based on the researchers' inferences rather than emerging from the data provided by the students. When providing the descriptive analyses, the researchers at i-graduate recognise that "the international student experience is multifaceted, and no one component alone dictates satisfaction" (p.22). However, based on the information in the reports, the ISB does not examine the influences between what international students do whilst abroad and their satisfaction with different parts of their international HE experience. Furthermore, as the ISB only collects quantitative data from the students, more precise reasons behind why international students respond as they do in the ISB are not known.

2.2.2 Conceptualising the Student Experience: Reviewing Previous Models

As stated, both the NSS and the ISB are primarily used to provide HEIs with useful feedback regarding students' HE experiences. However, while both instruments focus on measuring outcomes of the HE experience via student satisfaction with different facets of their experiences, the precursors to such outcomes are not explored thoroughly; namely, what a student brings to their HE experience and the process of the experience itself. In fact, previous research (Astin, 1993; Biggs, 1993; Chalmers, 2008; Clewes, 2003; Martin et al., 1995; UKCOSA, 2004; Yang et al., 2011) supports such recognition of multiple stages of experiences, with declarations such as:

any educational assessment project is incomplete unless it includes data on student inputs, student outcomes, and the educational environment to which the student is exposed. (Astin and Antonio, 2012, p.19)

In order to address this discrepancy, Astin proposes the I-E-O (Inputs-Environment-Outputs) model for educational assessment as shown in Figure 8.

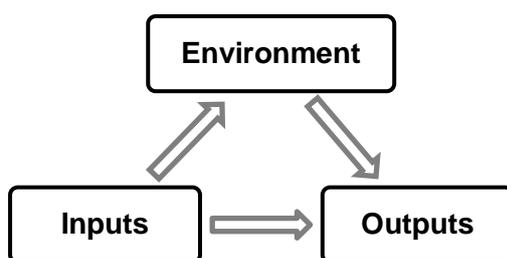


Figure 8. The I-E-O model of educational assessment
(taken from Astin and Antonio, 2012, p.20)

The I-E-O model describes the three constituent parts of the learning process as:

Outcomes, of course, refers to the "talents" we are trying to develop in our educational program; inputs refers to those personal qualities the student brings initially to the educational program (including the student's initial level of developed talent at the time of entry); and the environment refers to the student's actual experiences during the educational program. (ibid)

Addressing all three aspects (i.e. inputs, environment, and outcomes or outputs) in assessment is important as Astin notes,

...simply having input and outcome data of a group of students over a period of time is of limited value if you do not know what forces were acting on these students during the same period of time. (ibid, p.21)

Likewise, studies which only examine the environment or specific outputs separately are limited in the assumption that “what is taught is what is learned” (ibid, p.39).

However, although the I-E-O model recognises there is a process by which different input and environmental factors may affect desired outcomes in education, there is a noted problem with the model in that there is not any distinction between environmental variables which are personally relevant to students’ individual experiences and those which are relevant to the more general environment of the HEI (Hu and Ku, 2003; Kim, 2001). Furthermore, in reviewing studies which use the I-E-O model (Astin and Antonio, 2012; Bryson, 2014a), more than four hundred potential variables have been identified as inputs, environmental factors, and outcomes which seems to indicate a need for greater clarification regarding the precise purpose and appropriate application of the model in educational research. Specifically, the model lacks guidance regarding research which is either interested in investigating individual situations and pedagogical interventions within an HE setting or more generally evaluating the wider HE experience; in each case, limitations need to be identified and possible effects should be noted from factors outside the system and the HEI.

Biggs (1993) presents another conceptual model which utilises the systems approach in describing the relevant components of the student learning experience with ‘the 3P Model of Classroom Learning’ (see Figure 9), using the terms presage, process, and product. In justifying the complexity of the 3P model system, Biggs states,

It is now clear that as well as describing a linear progression from presage to process to product, each component interacts with all other components, forming a system in equilibrium; an eco-system of the educational swamp (p.74)

This “educational swamp” thus consists of factors which are unique to individual students, staff, and the HEI, as well as more general factors regarding the wider HE system and environment. As shown in Figure 9 of the 3P model, presage refers to the prior knowledge, abilities, learning preferences, values, and expectations of students as well as the contextual factors of teaching (i.e. the teacher’s personality, course structure, curriculum, methods for teaching and assessments, classroom climate, etc.). Process then includes direct effects from the students’ abilities and resources such as time given for learning in addition to the “cognitive act of engaging with the content of learning” (p.75).

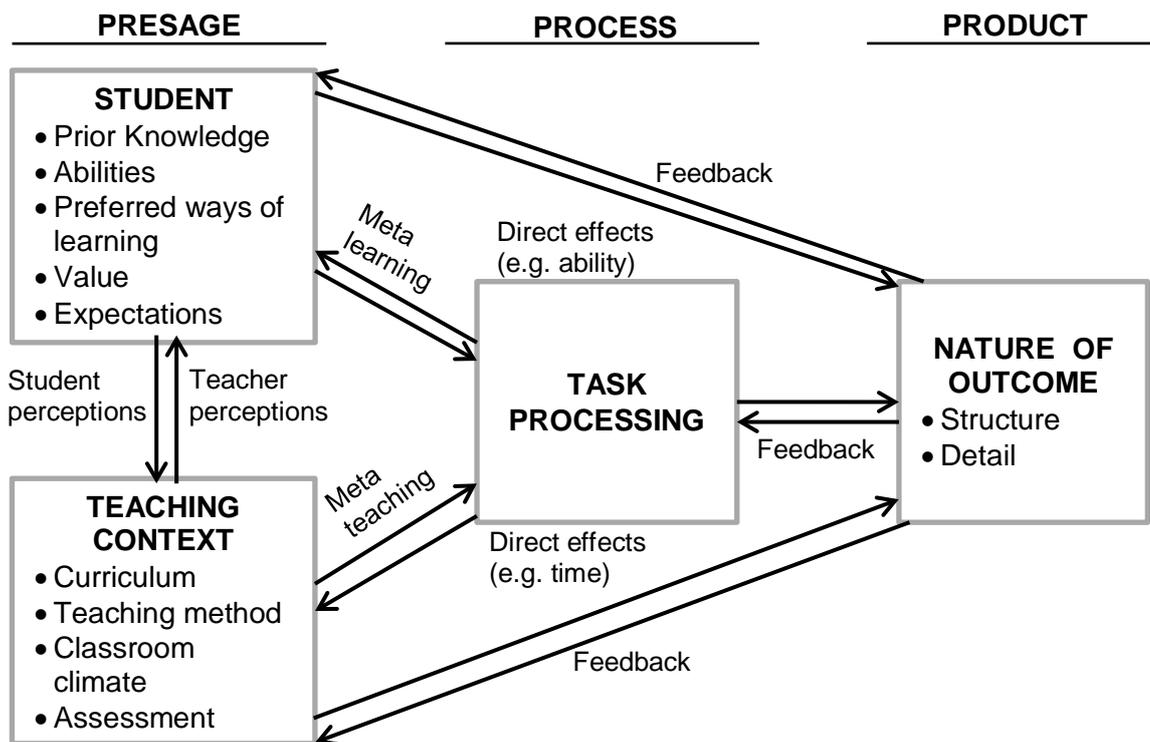


Figure 9. The 3P model of classroom learning
(taken from Biggs, 1993, p.75)

According to Biggs, there are three kinds of approaches to students' cognitive engagement with learning: the surface approach by which students may attempt to minimise effort with the task but still achieve passing marks; the deep approach which is both 'task-centred and task-appropriate' and thus students are considered to be 'fully engaged' in the learning process; and the achieving approach by which students focus on obtaining good marks as an outcome and the given task is merely seen as a means to an end (ibid). Among the three cognitive approaches, only deep learning is considered effective in aligning with the traditional ethos of education which is concerned with achieving desired outcomes while actively involving students in their own learning. Finally, the 3P model acknowledges that the product(s) of learning may be considered in either quantitative terms based on "how much" students learn via particular assessments or in qualitative terms with "how well and in what way" students learn and appreciating affective outcomes of students' feelings regarding their learning experience (p.76).

Whereas both the I-E-O and the 3P models tend to focus on institutionally-relevant outcomes, Clewes (2003) provides a third model for examining students' experiences based on a student-centred approach to service quality as shown in Figure 10.

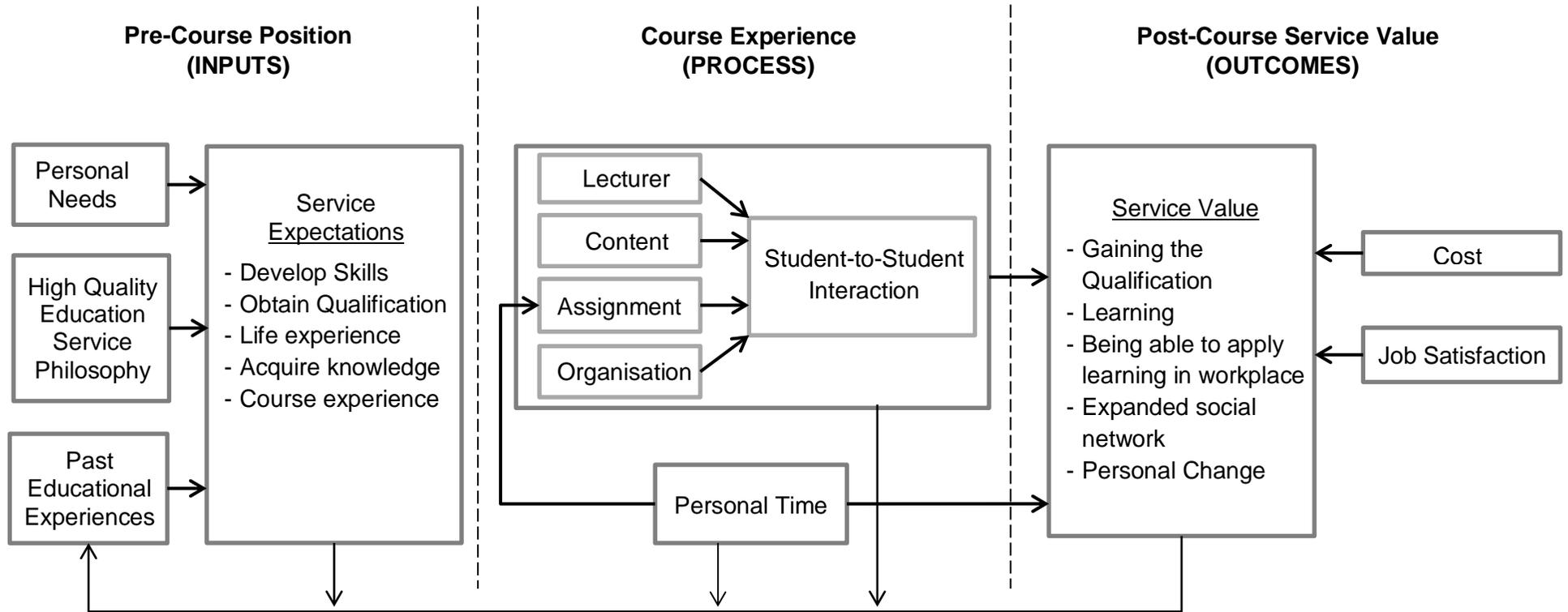


Figure 10. Student-centred model of the service-quality experience
(adapted from Clewes, 2003, p.77)

Created with data from semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring the service quality perceptions of ten postgraduate business students in the UK over a period of three years, Clewes' model in Figure 10 suggests that students' perceptions of the HE experience can be attributed to multiple variables across three distinct transactional phases: before students begin their course (i.e. inputs and expectations); the in-course experience which recognises impacts from the design and management of the course as well as interactions with other students, which can also be affected by students' use of personal time (i.e. process); and subsequent perceptions with the value of the services provided by the course (and, by extension, the HEI) based directly on outcomes of achievement, personal learning, and professional development, as well as indirectly influenced by the cost of the course and post-course job satisfaction (i.e. outcomes). Thus according to this model, service quality in HE can be considered to be a combination of students' perceptions about the process of the course experience and their perceptions about the value of the course. As such, this model addresses achievement outcomes for the course as well as affective aspects of the student experience which are more personally relevant to individual students. However, as each student brings individual needs and past experiences with them to their HE experience and the affective outcomes are based on subjective assessments of value, the model is limited regarding greater generalizability as specific aspects may not be relevant to all students, across different courses, or among the wider HEI environment. Furthermore, although the model recognises effects of peer interactions and activities both within and outside the course requirements, Clewes' model of HE service quality is unclear about the reasons behind why students choose particular courses as well as the role and responsibility of the student within the system to fully engage in their course, in interactions with lecturers and fellow students, and the wider HE experience for students outside the course.

The three conceptual models reviewed here (i.e. the Astin's I-E-O model, Biggs' 3P model, and Clewes' model of HE service quality) have both theoretical and methodological implications for a study intended to examine students' experiences. All three models suggest there are mediating factors to consider between identified inputs and desired outcomes in education, as well as noticeable cyclical effects as experiences build up over time to subsequently influence future capacities. To begin with, Astin's I-E-O model posits that a given environment has a mediating effect in the relationship between measured inputs and outputs. Both of the other two models (i.e. Biggs' 3P model and Clewes student-centred model) then go further in providing more detail regarding which inputs and outputs to focus on, as well as the process involved with the students' actual experience. As such, both of these latter models suggest that there are three distinct stages to consider which involve pre-existing factors, the actual

experience, and then personal evaluations which then cycle back to influence future experiences. When explaining which pre-existing factors to consider in relation to students' experiences, the 3P model makes a distinction between the presage components relative to individual students and those which are more indicative of the teaching context. Thus, Biggs' 3P model seems similar to Astin's I-E-O model by separating environmental factors (i.e. the HEI environment, teaching context, physical facilities, etc) from factors which may more accurately represent what individual students bring to their HE experience. In a similar fashion, Clewes' model also separates inputs which reflect wider institutional provisions from individual characteristics of students. However, Clewes' model also suggests that such environmental factors which represent HEI provisions for learning and teaching (i.e. staff, course content, organisation) are actually more effectively relegated to the course experience process rather than as inputs in the system. In fact, as Clewes' model has a more student-centred focus than the other two models which seem more institutionally focused, the inputs and outcomes in Clewes' model seem more indicative of factors considered unique to individual students' experiences – distinguishing between inputs which reflect students' past experiences, beliefs, needs, and expectations as well as evaluative outcomes which are both internalised by students (i.e. perceptions of value) and measured by the HEI (i.e. academic standards and qualifications). Thus, according to these three models, studies which are meant to examine students' experiences need to acknowledge not only what students bring to their HE experience but also that there is a process involved with specific learning experiences which can then affect subsequent evaluations of specified outcomes. Furthermore, these three models all suggest that there are merits in measuring outcomes relative to students' experiences through both individualised qualitative and more general quantitative assessments. Unlike the other two models, however, Biggs' 3P model also presents another important factor to consider when looking at the actual process for students' experiences – namely, how students engage in their experience. As many different definitions have been used in academic literature, the concept of 'student engagement' therefore merits further consideration.

2.3 Conceptualising 'Student Engagement' in Higher Education

Much like the noted rhetorical focus on 'the student experience', 'student engagement' is now ubiquitous in HE – adopted and used by academic departments, HEI strategic plans, students' union initiatives, funding councils (i.e. HEFCE), quality assurance (i.e. QAA), and even the UK government (see Bryson, 2014a; Nygaard et al., 2013; Solomonides et al., 2012; Trowler and Trowler, 2010). Yet, as before, there is little agreement regarding the concept of 'student engagement' and its application. Harris (2008) summarises the problem with so many conceptions of student engagement as,

there cannot be any 'assumed' shared knowledge about student engagement among academics or teachers. The variation present within literature reviewed and empirical data examined shows the diverse range of meanings attached to the concept. As shared meaning cannot be assumed, the concept of student engagement must be explicitly defined within academic research and government documents to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. (p.75)

The aim of this review, and the larger study, is not to provide another definition of student engagement which would possibly make everything more complicated. Instead, student engagement is reviewed through previous salient research and its implications in order to come to a deeper understanding of 'student engagement' by applying an appropriate definition in considering the purposes and aims of this study.

Based on reviewing available research, student engagement is often theoretically divided into three constituent dimensions – behavioural, affective or emotional, and cognitive engagement – which are broadly based on what students do, how they feel, and how they learn and/or make sense out of their education experience (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Harper and Quaye, 2009; Harris, 2008; Solomonides et al., 2012; Trowler, 2010). A fourth perspective which considers student engagement to be more of a holistic concept incorporating different aspects and interactional effects from the other three perspectives (i.e. behavioural, affective, and cognitive engagement) has also been proposed which recognises that there are pre-existing factors before students get to university which may affect how they engage in their HE experience as well as varied outcomes from students engaging in their HE experience (Bryson, 2014a, 2014b; Kahu, 2013). Although most of the research on student engagement centres on the experiences of domestic students, some (Borsos et al., 2014; Hardy et al., 2013; Jones, 2010; Montgomery, 2010; Warmington et al., 2013) are particularly interested in the experiences of international students. The focus on the different dimensions also seems to have some geographic relevance as student engagement tends to have different meanings in different locations. In North America and Australia, for instance, student engagement is used to refer to students' involvement behaviours based on the amount of time, effort, and resources that students, staff, and HEIs apply towards the learning process (Astin, 1984, 1993; Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Coates, 2005, 2007; Kuh, 2001a, 2001b; Kuh et al., 2008; Pace, 1982, 1984). In contrast, student engagement research in the UK tends to be more focused on student cognition by examining opportunities for effective student representation, feedback, and pedagogical approaches to learning (Little et al., 2009; NUS, 2012b; Nygaard et al., 2013; Trowler, 2010; Wenstone, 2012). Therefore, in consideration of the different variations in conceptual understanding of what student engagement actually refers to and the implications of Harris' earlier statement, each of the identified perspectives is explored further to 'increase conceptual clarity'.

2.3.1 Conceptualising Student Engagement: A Behavioural Perspective

Student engagement from the behavioural perspective is primarily supported by the earlier work of Pace (1982, 1984), Astin (1984, 1993) and Chickering and Gamson (1987), as well as on-going work with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in North America by Kuh (2001a, 2001b, 2009; Kuh et al., 2006, 2008; NSSE, 2012) and its equivalents in Australia including the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (McInnis et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 1997) and the newer Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (ACER, 2014; Coates, 2009, 2010); indicating:

*What students **do** during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to college.*
(original author's emphasis, Kuh, 2001b, p.1)

Much of the research in student engagement measured in terms of students' behaviours follows the proponents of Astin's (1984, 1993) Theory of Student Involvement, which stresses "the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p.528). In his theory, Astin insists that students need to be motivated and actively participate in the learning process through the expenditure of both time and energy, however:

It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement. (p.519)

He posits that there is an important difference in physical and psychological effort as some students can spend hours poring intensely over course materials in order to understand complex concepts, whereas other students may spend the same amount of time with open textbooks whilst actually daydreaming (ibid). In making such distinctions, Astin notes that while student involvement resembles motivation in certain respects (i.e. motivated students are more involved), they are separate concepts; student involvement more accurately describes the 'behavioural manifestation' of students' motivation, and is subsequently more easily observed and measured by others (ibid). The Theory of Student Involvement has been used in different studies and adapted over time to include various types of education experiences from individual classrooms in schools to student projects for volunteering in the community (Dugan, 2013; Huang and Chang, 2004; Krause and Coates, 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998; Zhao et al., 2005b).

Whilst Astin (1984, 1993) emphasises the importance of students' involvement through the application of both time and effort, the role of the HEI in student engagement is also important, for according to Kuh (2001b, 2003, 2009; Kuh et al., 2006, 2008),

Student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities.

This definition of student engagement serves as a foundation for the NSSE survey instrument which, since 2000, is administered annually to both first and final-year undergraduate students enrolled in HEIs in the USA and Canada (NSSE, 2014b). NSSE is based on an earlier survey instrument designed by Pace (1982, 1984) called the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), which focused on students' 'quality of effort' as defined by their involvement in 142 on-campus activities and commonly available opportunities across different HEIs in the USA. In describing the design and development of the CSEQ, Pace (1984) states the remit of the instrument to direct attention towards student accountability within HEI standards,

Our focus would be on facilities which the college provides, and on experiences or opportunities that exist within the college environment. ...we would not be concerned with attitudes, feelings, traumas, identity crises, frustrations, or similar matters of clinical interest. We would focus, as far as possible, on activities and objectively observable behavior. (p.9)

By limiting the scope of the CSEQ as stated above, Pace (1982, 1984) neglects the more psychological aspects of students' involvement in their HE experiences (i.e. emotions and/or expectations) to concentrate on what the HEI can provide and control. The CSEQ thus focuses on the time students spend in academic activities, interpersonal dialogue, and group associations at university (Pace, 1984, pp.72-73). As such, Pace presents a different view than Astin (1984, 1993) who had earlier emphasised the important interactional role between the physical and psychological efforts of students. Instead, Pace sets the premise that 'quality of effort' is an indication of students' initiative towards education (1984, p.96) as determined by the reported frequency of students' involvement in specific activities (i.e. never, occasionally, often, very often) (p.24). When assessing the different activities included in the CSEQ, Pace admits that "Education is both a process and a product" (p.21), but some activities should be considered 'inherently "better" than others' for generally producing measurable outcomes of learning (i.e. acquired knowledge and academic skills) and positively affecting students' perceptions of personal and social development (p.10). The CSEQ focuses on the "process of education – what occurs between entrance and exit" (p.100), in which both the HEI and the student are responsible for determining student success; namely, the HEI can provide opportunities and an encouraging environment for students to be involved and actively engaged in their education experience but it is the student who has the choice and responsibility for doing so. Pace (ibid) reasons that "Students who are most satisfied with college put the most into it and get the most out of it" (p.52), concluding with the following supposition:

...one might say that college can't give you an education, but if you go to college and make the effort to use the facilities and opportunities it provides you can get a very good education. (original author's emphasis, p.97)

2.3.1.1 Student Behaviours: The National Survey of Student Engagement

As mentioned earlier, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is widely used across HEIs in the USA and Canada to measure student engagement via behaviours, resulting in over 160 separate presentations and publications (NSSE, 2014b). NSSE follows the earlier precedent set by Pace (1982, 1984) with the CSEQ in both form and purpose by measuring the frequency of students' reported behavioural involvement in various activities at university. Specifically, NSSE addresses student engagement based on the following five 'Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice' (Kuh, 2001b, 2003; Kuh et al., 2006, 2008):

1. Level of Academic Challenge (11 items)
2. Active and Collaborative Learning (7 items)
3. Student-Faculty Interaction (6 items)
4. Enriching Educational Experiences (12 items)
5. Supportive Campus Environment (6 items)

These 'benchmarks' have been adapted from the earlier recommendations of Chickering and Gamson (1987) who proposed 'seven principles for good practice' in HE to be implemented by staff and HEIs. From 2000-2012, NSSE provided benchmark comparisons for HEIs along the five measures, noting good practice at HEIs in annual reports of aggregated results (NSSE, 2012). However as of 2013, the previous five benchmarks have been converted into ten distinctive 'Engagement Indicators' (NSSE, 2014a), using 47 survey items arranged within four main themes:

- Academic Challenge (17 items in total)
 - ▶ Higher-Order Learning (4 items)
 - ▶ Reflective and Integrative Learning (7 items)
 - ▶ Learning Strategies (3 items)
 - ▶ Quantitative Reasoning (3 items)
- Learning with Peers (8 items in total)
 - ▶ Collaborative Learning (4 items)
 - ▶ Discussions with Diverse Others (4 items)
- Experiences with Faculty (9 items in total)
 - ▶ Student-Faculty Interaction (4 items)
 - ▶ Effective Teaching Practices (5 items)
- Campus Environment (13 items)
 - ▶ Quality of Interactions (5 items)
 - ▶ Supportive Environment (8 items)

The former benchmark of 'Enriching Educational Experiences' has also been replaced with 'High-Impact Practices', which reports students' intentions and/or prior participation in six selected activities: being part of a learning community; doing a community-based project as part of a course (i.e. service learning); working on research with a staff member; having an internship or other relevant field experience; studying abroad; and completing a final year component (i.e. capstone module, final year project or dissertation, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.) (ibid). In noting such

changes (i.e. added questions, modified content, revised Engagement Indicators), the administrators of NSSE contend that the newer 2013 edition retains its original focus:

What has not changed is NSSE's signature focus on experiences that matter to student learning and development – examined with a strong focus on behavior. Our primary emphasis remains twofold: enriching the discourse on college quality and providing colleges and universities with diagnostic and actionable information that can inform educational improvement. (NSSE, 2013, p.4)

Thus, although there is a noted semantic difference – ‘Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practice’ changing to ‘Engagement Indicators’ and ‘High-Impact Practices’ – NSSE still provides general benchmark standards for HEIs, as HEIs specifically use the reports from NSSE for quality enhancement purposes, comparing results between academic departments and with other HEIs to review and adjust strategies for institutional assessment, accountability, and improvement (ibid). Furthermore, although each of NSSE’s Engagement Indicators covers a variety of items “to represent the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement” (NSSE, 2014a), the complete NSSE instrument includes over 100 questions in total, with individual HEIs able to include additional subsets of questions through ‘optional modules’ (ibid). In this way, NSSE is used to identify areas where HEIs are ‘successfully engaging students’, as well as specific areas which suggest a need for targeted improvement efforts from individual HEIs.

According to findings generated from examining NSSE data (Hu and McCormick, 2012; Kuh, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2009; Kuh et al., 2006, 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998; Pike, 2006; Zhao et al., 2005a, 2005b) and NSSE publications (NSSE, 2012, 2013), student engagement represented by time-on-task spent in ‘educationally purposeful activities’ has a directly positive effect on predicting students’ success with academic outcomes; specifically, students with higher scores on the benchmark scales for student engagement report higher gains in analytical and critical thinking, anticipate getting better grades, and are more likely to persist with their education from the first to the second year of university. In the interpretation of NSSE data, ‘educationally purposeful activities’ broadly refer to the frequency with which students spend time participating in and preparing for classes (i.e. asking questions, reading materials, writing assignments), and either working with peers on or talking with staff members about academic assignments and projects (ibid). The researchers (ibid) further indicate that students who are the most at-risk for either failing or dropping out of university can benefit the most from being more engaged. These findings thus support the earlier views of Astin (1984, 1993) and Pace (1982, 1984) that students need to invest time and effort in their educational experiences. Furthermore, in examining and comparing trends in the NSSE data, Kuh and colleagues (Kuh, 2003; Kuh et al., 2006; NSSE, 2013) suggest that some groups of students are generally ‘more engaged on average’

than others, based on comparing summative scores generated for each of the five benchmarks; these groups include:

- ✓ Women
- ✓ Full-time students
- ✓ Students living on campus or in Greek housing (i.e. fraternities and sororities)
- ✓ Native or non-transfer students (those who start at and graduate from the same school)
- ✓ Learning community students
- ✓ International students

Using international students as a demonstrative example from the list above, the researchers (Kuh et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2005b) suggest that international students are generally 'more engaged' in their HE experience than domestic students at HEIs in the USA and Canada as they:

- *Report greater academic challenge,*
 - *Interact more with faculty members,*
 - *Engage more in diversity-related activities,*
 - *Perceive the campus environment to be more supportive, and*
 - *Report greater gains in personal and social development, practical competence, and general education.*
- (Kuh et al., 2006, p.46)

This determination that international students are 'more engaged' than domestic students is further demonstrated in looking at individual behavioural differences between the two groups, showing that international students tend to spend more time studying, preparing for classes, and working with learning communities (Krause, 2005; Zhao et al., 2005b). Furthermore, international students tend to spend less time socialising and/or relaxing than domestic students in their first year, but this difference disappears over time as international students seem to become more similar in their habits to domestic students by the final year at university (Zhao et al., 2005b). However, in noting such behavioural differences between students (i.e. international versus domestic student groups), researchers focusing on comparing students' behaviours in general terms of being 'more engaged' or 'less engaged' do not consider students' motivations for engaging in their HE experience or how they are otherwise affected by such engagement.

2.3.2 Conceptualising Student Engagement: An Emotional Perspective

In contrast to the behavioural aspects of student engagement reviewed above, other researchers (Hardy et al., 2013; Krause and Coates, 2008; Lefever and Bashir, 2011; Martin and Dowson, 2009; Siddeeqe et al., 2011; Thomas, 2012; Tinto, 1993; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2011) maintain that there is more of an emotional or affective component of student engagement. According to this perspective, student engagement is more accurately conceived in psychological terms as a 'state of mind or being'; students who are engaged have developed meaningful connections with other

people and/or the HE environment which subsequently has a generally positive impact overall – on their behaviours, their perceptions of the wider educational experience, and on the students themselves (ibid).

Broadly, advocates of this perspective who emphasise the affective components of student engagement (Hardy et al., 2013; Krause and Coates, 2008; Lefever and Bashir, 2011; Martin and Dowson, 2009; Milem and Berger, 1997; Siddeeqe et al., 2011; Thomas, 2012; Tinto, 1993; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2011; Yorke and Longden, 2008) posit that it is essential to provide opportunities for students to develop a sense of belonging with and within the HE community in order to succeed in HE, as academic and social integration are both directly related to academic outcomes of grades and persistence, as well as more holistic psychological outcomes for students (i.e. happiness, resilience, success); thus, much of the research in emotional engagement (ibid) focuses on the experiences of first-year students who may be more affected by transitions. In addition, it has been found that students who are more at risk for low academic attainment or persistence in education can benefit the most from student engagement in the wider HE community (Carini et al., 2006; Coates, 2005, 2007; Krause, 2005; Krause and Coates, 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998).

Tinto (1997) goes further stating students can form interpersonal relationships to “bridge the academic-social divide so that they are able to make friends and learn at the same time” (p.615). In his model for linking classrooms, learning, and persistence shown in Figure 11, Tinto (ibid) suggests that there are a variety of factors which interact over time to affect students’ persistence in HE, including: personal background, skills, and prior experiences; goals and intentions; academic and social experiences at university; academic and social integration; quality of student effort; and outcomes including learning, future goals, and commitment to the HEI. In accounting for the different stages of experiences and evaluations of outcomes which may change over time, Tinto’s model integrates important relevant factors from both students and HEIs as recognised in the three conceptual models (i.e. Astin’s I-E-O model, Biggs’ 3P model, and Clewes’ student-centred model) described earlier in Section 2.2.2.

Furthermore, in contrast to the view of student engagement always being a positive phenomenon, some researchers (Archambault et al., 2009; Case, 2007; Hu and Ku, 2002; Mann, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002) focus on the opposite of student engagement by concentrating on students who are identified as disengaged or otherwise report feelings of alienation or ‘burnout’ which may lead to negative experiences, leaving the HEI, or dropping out altogether (Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Longden, 2008).

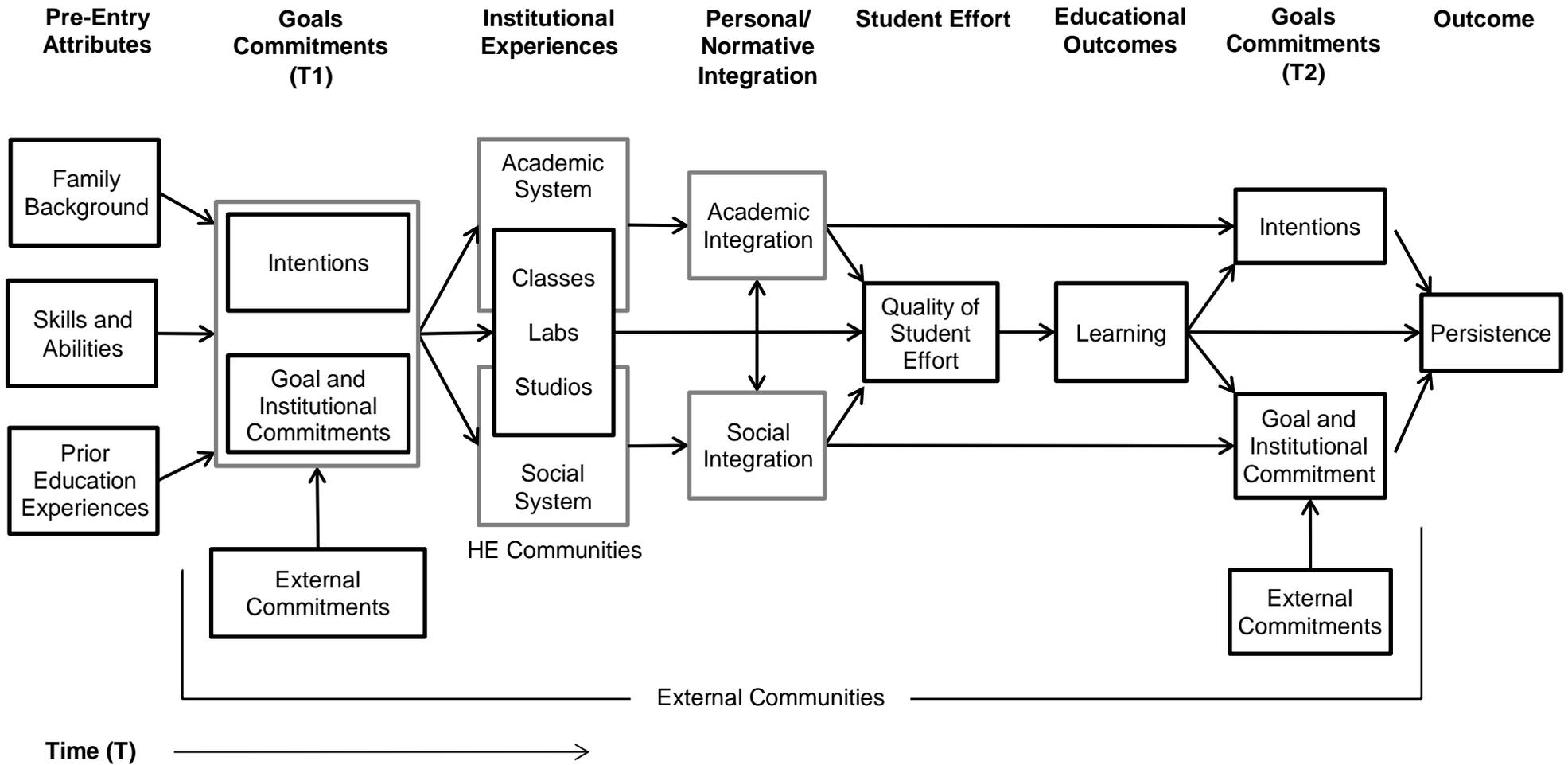


Figure 11. Model linking classrooms, learning, and persistence
(taken from Tinto, 1997, p.615)

As such, this particular perspective aligns with other research focused on psychological transitions, personal resilience, and adjustment to different environments (Bennett, 1986; Glass and Westmont, 2014; Hammer et al., 2003; Saenz et al., 1999; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Westwood and Barker, 1990; Zhang and Goodson, 2011). The roles and responsibilities of staff in students' unions and HEIs are likewise noted for practices which may either facilitate and enhance or inhibit student engagement (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Leach and Zepke, 2012; NUS and QAA, 2012b; Parsons and Taylor, 2011; van der Velden, 2012b; Wimpenny and Savin-Baden, 2011). For instance, in reference to the previous example provided by NSSE data stating that international students tend to be more engaged on average than domestic students in educationally-purposeful activities (Kuh et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2005b), Krause (2005) notes that international students also tend to have more difficulty in engaging with their learning (i.e. comprehending complex concepts) and report more problems coping (i.e. feeling overwhelmed) than domestic students:

For these students, engagement is a battle. It may sometimes mean reshaping identity, letting go of long-held beliefs and approaches to learning and social interaction. There are times when the conflict which such engagement brings is a positive step towards growth and maturity. However, in order to ensure that this form of engagement has a positive result, support structures must be in place across the institution. (ibid, p.10)

Many researchers (Anderson et al., 2009; Misra et al., 2003; Moores and Popadiuk, 2011; Myles and Cheng, 2003; Pedersen et al., 2011; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Sawir et al., 2008; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; Trice, 2004; Yang et al., 2006) recognise that international students must cope with not only academic challenges, but also frequently encounter significant psychological and sociocultural barriers; they are at a distinct disadvantage as they are far from their usual support networks and may subsequently feel isolated, alienated, or depressed. Myles and Cheng (2003) describe the situation as a vicious cycle as international students “feel like outsiders so they do not participate in social activities” but “if they want to feel more like ‘insiders’, they *need* to participate in a host cultural milieu” (p.258). Such issues and other germane factors identified with particular relevance to the international student population in HE will be discussed further in Section 2.4.1.

The emphasis on student engagement beyond the academic curriculum seemingly represents a strong digression from the earlier behavioural perspective. Although some research on student engagement behaviours considers students' involvement in non-academic or extracurricular activities (Balyer and Gunduz, 2012; Kuh, 1993; Shulruf et al., 2008; Stuart et al., 2011; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; Trice, 2004), the majority of the behavioural research on student engagement centres primarily on students' involvement in academic activities within the university environment (see Section

2.3.1). The few studies which consider the mutual benefits of curricular and co-curricular student engagement tend to go beyond the behavioural perspective of student engagement to include a psychological component in their design, analyses, and interpretations (as cited above), thereby providing substantial evidence with connection to the affective and cognitive perspectives of student engagement.

2.3.3 Conceptualising Student Engagement: A Cognitive Perspective

The third perspective focuses on student engagement regarding students' psychological or cognitive investment in their own learning and personal development (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004; Hoffman et al., 2005; Trowler, 2010; Yorke, 2006). Those interested in student engagement from the cognitive perspective seem to be particularly aligned with Biggs' (1993) suggested approaches to learning (i.e. surface, deep, and achievement). In June 2012, the QAA introduced a new chapter in the Quality Code titled Higher Education on Student Engagement (Chapter B5³) stating that student engagement involves two main areas:

- *improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently*
 - *the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience.*
- (QAA, 2012, p.2)

In many ways, student engagement from a cognitive perspective is close to research which focuses on student motivations and goals (Fredricks et al., 2004). Engaged students are students who are personally motivated to learn, find intrinsic value in education, and are otherwise self-regulated, autonomous learners capable of setting personal goals and developing coping strategies (ibid, p.64). However, the variations between motivation and student engagement are multidimensional as noted here:

1. *no single motivational pathway or type of engagement guarantees academic achievement – each student is a unique blend of individual stories and needs, each differently positioned to have their story heard and their needs expressed;*
 2. *motivation and engagement vary depending on the student and his situation. Some students need engagement to be motivated, while others are motivated regardless of being engaged*
 3. *students' psychological connection to school affects motivation levels and participatory behaviors. Feeling welcomed into, included in, and validated by school can exert a profound effect on a student's capacity to engage and his efforts to achieve*
- (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012, pp.4-5)

Taking account of these three points, motivation and student engagement are socially constructed by the individual student and the context of the learning situation. Even in conducive environments, not all students will be engaged using the same strategies because they may have additional needs or face alternative barriers to engaging in their learning experiences. In addition to the variances noted above, measuring student

³ Under review during the academic year 2013/14, the newer revised copy is unavailable.

engagement from a cognitive perspective can also be difficult (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013) as many consider the affective and cognitive dimensions of student engagement to overlap into a single psychological construct or else use similar terminology with 'effort' used between both behavioural engagement and cognitive engagement. Furthermore, student engagement from the cognitive perspective suggests that engagement can be examined through Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) as a state to be obtained in which students' abilities and skills are suitably matched with the level of challenge required in their HE experience; students who are engaged are neither bored (low challenge, high skill) nor overwhelmed (high challenge, low skill) (Shernoff et al., 2003). According to Flow Theory, students have to find interest and enjoyment in their education and be completely absorbed in their learning and fully concentrating on the task at hand (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989). Cognitive engagement thus implies that students should hold a sustained sense of personal psychological commitment to their learning and development throughout the whole HE experience, recognising the meaning and relevance of education in their lives, and feeling connected to others and a sense of belonging to the HEI environment (Appleton et al., 2006).

Realising the importance of personal relevance with the education experience for encouraging and sustaining student engagement is crucial as students' and societal needs change over time, especially as it has been noted of modern students that:

They are interested in education; they are willing to learn; they are highly capable of learning; and they are ready to learn (if not impatiently so). But unlike any cohort of students before them, they clearly and confidently want to learn on their own terms. The pedagogy and technologies of the past are not engaging today's students because these students are "miles ahead of us" before we even begin.
(Parsons and Taylor, 2011, p.31)

Guidance towards a more proactive approach in actively engaging students is further expressed within the broader HE discourse, as generally evidenced by targets for the Bologna Process with the Leuven Communiqué of 2009 and the justification of the formation of the European Higher Education Area (Sweeney, 2010; UK HE International Unit, 2013, n.d.) and specifically demonstrated by the Global Student Statement to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education +10 (International Cooperation Working Group of the European Students' Union, 2009):

We call for higher education institutions to proactively encourage students to participate in all levels of governance and reform, be it at the regional, national, institutional or programme level. ...

We urge governments to recognise student voices in national and international policy and budget debates. ...

On all continents, students are often encouraged to “chew, pass and forget” their curriculum and exams rather than to engage critically with their course content and teachers.

A student-centred approach across the board ensures critical thinking and active participation in the improvement of the quality of higher education.

We urge UNESCO to consult with students on a regular basis, and to facilitate dialogue between the students of the world.

In acknowledging the need to adapt pedagogical practices to facilitate positive transformational learning experiences for students, advocates of the cognitive perspective also promote the role of student engagement in students' development of a sense of personal identity and as partners in their education (Bryson, 2014b; Elkington, 2012; Millard et al., 2013; Nygaard et al., 2013; QAA, 2013; Solomonides and Button, 1994; Solomonides and Reid, 2009; Van der Velden, 2012a, 2012b; Warmington et al., 2013). This view is especially prevalent in the UK as researchers (ibid) tend to focus on collective student engagement through representation opportunities and partnership arrangements. The importance of students' engagement in the structures and processes of HEIs in the UK is further reflected in the following Expectation for student engagement set within the Quality Code:

Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. (QAA, 2012, p.4)

According to the HEA (2014b), partnership is a process which involves the active engagement of students, staff, and students' unions working together to enhance “learning and teaching practice and policy”. In looking at student engagement from this perspective, the desirable outcomes for students in HE involve not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills for academic and professional development but also the changing of attitudes (i.e. social and ethical responsibility, self-reliance, life-long learning) (Bryson, 2014b; Chapman et al., 2013; HEA, 2014b; Nelson et al., 2012; NUS and QAA, 2012b; Nygaard et al., 2013; Solomonides, 2012; Solomonides et al., 2012; Wenstone, 2012). Thus, student engagement and positive HE experiences are seen to have a demonstrable role in positively affecting civil society and educating responsible citizens.

Unfortunately, however, some students may experience difficulties in feeling like they are able to be full partners in their HE experience and/or otherwise become student representatives. The majority of international students in UK HE, for example, do not participate in these schemes, whether this trend comes from a general unwillingness, sociocultural differences, or that they are not given the opportunity to become student representatives is unclear. Furthermore, to take full advantage of the students-as-partners proposition, students and staff need to work together over time to create goals, monitor progress, and continuously re-evaluate systems (HEA, 2014b). With this

in mind, international students are primarily encouraged to become active partners in the process if they are enrolled directly in a UK HEI for their entire degree. Many other groups of international students are only in the UK for a short period of one academic year or less, which depends on whether they are undergraduates on a short-term exchange programme from their home university (i.e. single semester or entire academic year) or postgraduate taught students enrolled directly in degree programmes in the UK (i.e. one or two-year masters and postgraduate certificate programmes). In contrast, international students enrolled in UK postgraduate research programmes (i.e. PhD or EdD) can be either based in the UK for the duration of their programme of study or otherwise choose to be distance-learners and conduct research back in their home country. Thus, while opportunities may be made available for students to be engaged and become active partners in their own learning experience, the implementation and adoption of such schemes can be more difficult for some constituent parts or subpopulations of the student population than for others.

2.3.4 Conceptualising Student Engagement: A More Holistic Perspective

In reviewing the literature and comparing the different perspectives used to examine student engagement, some (Bryson, 2014a, 2014b; Kahu, 2013; Leach and Zepke, 2012; Solomonides, 2012) suggest taking a more holistic approach to this multidimensional concept. Specifically, the holistic approach recognises that there are important interactions between the three dimensions of behaviour, emotion, and cognition; thus, Bryson (2014a) proposes the following definition:

Student engagement is what a student brings to Higher Education in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. SE is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions. (p.14)

Bryson's definition above purposely places the student at the centre of student engagement, whilst remaining relevant and applicable to the interests of multiple audiences including students, staff, and students' unions. Namely, this definition of student engagement recognises that there are uniquely personal factors which each student comes with and experiences of student engagement can be influenced and enhanced by beneficial processes and interactions with other students, staff, and students' unions. As Hardy and Bryson (2009) state,

Student engagement is dynamic and dependent on many factors, both within, and outside, the institution's sphere of influence. In the first year student engagement is influenced by the students' prior experiences of education, their expectations and aspirations which influence their perceptions of various measures of engagement. In addition, integration into both the academic and social community at university is important for instilling a 'sense of belonging' or 'sense of being a student' which is a precursor for engagement.

Looking at student engagement more holistically (as displayed in Table 2) provides a couple distinctions from the previous three perspectives: acknowledging all aspects of students' experiences (i.e. academic and non-academic), recognising the influence of students' personal backgrounds and experiences, identifying potential barriers, and understanding the outcomes and benefits for student engagement. In this view, student engagement is both a worthwhile process and a positive outcome. Clearly, more research needs to be done, for as Kahu (2013) states:

The clearer our understanding of student engagement and the influences on it, the better positioned we will be to meet the needs of students, to enhance the student experience, and to improve the educational outcomes. (p.769)

Table 2. Different Foci in Student Engagement Research

Research Focus	Key Questions and Issues
<i>Behavioural Perspective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do students do? - Students engaging / HEIs engaging students
<i>Affective/Emotional Perspective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do students feel? - Sense of belonging / alienation - Transitions
<i>Cognitive/Transformational Perspective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are students partners in the learning process? - Student identity and autonomy - Higher-ordered learning and relevance
<i>Holistic Perspective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the process of student engagement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Antecedents – Motivations, Expectations, Prior Experiences b. Barriers – Concerns, Lack of Opportunities c. Outcomes – Self Perceptions, HE achievements - How is student engagement an outcome in itself?

2.4 Summarising Key Concepts Relative to the Students' Perspective

Currently there seems to be a particular lack in the prevalent HE discourse from academics, administrators, and/or policy makers regarding any consensus on conceptual understanding for student engagement and the student experience in terms of either process or outcomes. Although many refer to quality in HE, most of the instruments used (i.e. NSS, ISB, etc.) actually focus on satisfaction with particular aspects of the HE experience rather than holistic quality evaluations of the entire HE experience (as discussed in the previous two sections). Various models identified in previous research (i.e. Astin's I-E-O model, Biggs' 3P model, Clewes' student-centred model of service quality, and Tinto's model of persistence) indicate the usefulness of systems analysis and suggest including particular variables which are considered to affect students' engagement in their HE experiences. However, there is no indication of which variables from the different models have more of an effect on the process of

students' engagement in their experiences or how they affect specific outcomes from the students' perspective.

In reviewing a substantial body of research on student engagement, Trowler (2010) set two crucial questions: from whose perspective should student engagement be examined; and for what purpose(s) should such research be conducted, concluding:

While most of the literature discussed – or assumed – the benefits of student engagement, a striking absence was the student voice in the literature on student engagement. Instead, literature was written about students for managers, policy makers, researchers, funders or teachers, with occasional briefing guides for student leaders, by other managers, policy makers, researchers or teachers. Where student voices appeared, it was as data in the form of quotes to illustrate arguments being made by others about them. (p.50)

This noted absence of 'the student voice' is well substantiated in that most of the research around student engagement (and other designations for student experiences) is conducted in order to provide staff of HEIs and students' unions with evidence of "good practice" (ibid). Large scale quantitative surveys such as the NSS, the ISB, and NSSE are conducted by independent organisations in order to provide HEIs with comparable information about specific provisions and services which may affect outcomes for students' learning and persistence in HE. Such information is considered necessary by stakeholders in HE (i.e. policy makers, administrators, staff, students, parents, and the general public) for accountability and quality assurance (see Coates, 2005; Gibbs, 2010; QAA, 2012). Alternatively, smaller scale research involving case studies and interviews which are conducted by staff with individual students tend to focus on topics that are considered important for teaching and learning but may miss out on other aspects of the students' experiences. Thus, the majority of the research on student experiences and student engagement is designed, conducted, and interpreted by staff members. Parsons and Taylor (2011) problematize the situation as,

These gaps and disconnects between what we "perceive" to be high engagement and how students actually feel raises questions about how we are measuring engagement. How accurate are our measures, and how important is it to measure only academic achievement as a sign of engagement? (p.23)

This approach can subsequently relegate students to a tokenistic position in evaluating their own experiences or as Trowler (2010) emphasises– students' voices are merely being used as "quotes to illustrate arguments being made by others about them" (p.50).

While a few examples now exist of students' own accounts of their experiences in work on student engagement (Borsos et al., 2014; Chadwick, 2014; Chambers and Nagle, 2013; Chapman and Ishaq, 2013; Donnelly and Francis, 2013; Furlonger et al., 2014), such accounts are limited to individual case studies and tend to focus primarily on academic experiences in relation to specific pedagogic interventions or mentorship schemes. Thus, the student perspectives provided lean towards focusing on the

personal accounts of students who are already considered to be ‘engaged’ in their HE experience – as student representatives, student mentors, or students who have become involved in research through staff-led projects, or even as staff members themselves. While the perspectives in such qualitative accounts of students’ personal experiences are considered valuable, the generalizability of the conclusions may be questioned. In an HEA commissioned review of student engagement research, for example, Trowler and Trowler (2010) exclude most qualitative research from their examination declaring “often these fail the test of robustness” as,

We define ‘robust’ in terms of studies which meet these criteria:

1. *Having clear and researchable questions*
2. *Using an appropriate methodology to address those questions*
3. *Presenting evidence of an amount and type to give reasonable confidence in conclusions*
4. *Conclusions based on, and limited to, the evidence presented.* (p.5)

Consequently, their review primarily focuses on analyses and results from quantitative research which is considered to align with the targeted scope provided by the HEA. However in limiting their review of research to that which is determined ‘robust’ according to the above criteria, Trowler and Trowler seem to discount the chief advantages of qualitative research in exploring subjective accounts in relation to individual experiences; such a position can be particularly detrimental regarding student engagement research as Ramsden and Callender (2014) emphasise:

No single indicator can capture the multiple meanings of ‘the student experience’. Needless to say, surveys cannot address all the aspects we have identified. (p.19)

The HEA review (Trowler and Trowler, 2010) also summarily dismisses prior studies which authors have not specifically flagged as ‘student engagement’, declaring:

A more holistic picture would thus require a full review of areas potentially related to student engagement as defined above (including, but not restricted to, student feedback, student representation, student approaches to learning, institutional organisation, learning spaces, architectural design, and learning development) as well as the literature flagged as ‘student engagement’. This, however, was beyond the remit of this project and would be an enormous project. (p.3)

While reviewing all possible areas of literature with potential relevance to student engagement research would indeed be “an enormous project” as stated above, Trowler (2010) makes a few specific recommendations regarding areas for further research:

- *Exploration of the concept of ‘student engagement’ from the student perspective, including problematizing the student role and identity in changing contexts (such as part-time students, students who return to interrupted studies, working students and students with family responsibilities);*
- *A locally grounded but internationally validated conceptualisation of student engagement, which can be operationalised, tested and improved in classrooms, halls of residence and student societies;*
- *The development of a robust body of evidence built up through small-scale local studies that speak to – to confirm, challenge or redefine – other studies, so that instead of a collection of stand-alone, almost anecdotal, evidence, a more integrated and rigorous picture can emerge of practice and effects.* (p.50)

These recommendations have consequently been taken into consideration in proposing the research project for this thesis.

Given the wide prevalence of strategies for ‘quality enhancement’ which focus on ‘the student experience’ and ‘student engagement’ across the general HE discourse as discussed throughout the previous sections, it seems apparent that more research needs to be conducted which focuses on the relationship between the various concepts relevant to students’ experiences (i.e. precursors to student engagement, experiences of student engagement, and outcomes of student engagement) and how these interactions can be identified. Such research would provide useful information to not only advance theoretical knowledge in the field of HE research, but also by offering practical assistance for HEIs and staff in effectively directing strategies to enhance students’ experiences of HE as well as empowering students in the process with evidence-based guidance as to how they can potentially be more responsibly engaged and improve their own experiences. More specifically, as international students constitute a growing and vital part of the HE student population (as discussed earlier in Chapter One) yet experiences of international students are cited inconsistently among the different dimensions for student engagement as either ‘more engaged’ or alternatively ‘disadvantaged’ when compared with domestic students, exploring students’ experiences from the perspective of international students may better provide a “locally grounded but internationally validated conceptualisation of student engagement” in order to build on the “robust body of evidence” as suggested by Trowler (2010) and others (see Bryson, 2014b; Harper and Quaye, 2009; Kahu, 2013; Little et al., 2009; Parsons and Taylor, 2011) and in advancing research in international education further with practical connections to previous theories.

2.5 Examining Previous Research of International Student Experiences

The focus of research in international education (also commonly referred to in the literature as ‘study abroad’, ‘education abroad’, ‘student sojourn experiences’, ‘education exchange’, or ‘student mobility’) has changed over the past twenty years (see Byram and Feng, 2006; Deardorff et al., 2012; Lewin, 2009), from studies concentrating on staff practices for effective programme management (i.e. international student support services for incoming international students, facilitation of study abroad or outbound exchanges for domestic students) to, more recently, studies examining specific elements related to students’ experiences of participation in such programmes. In this way, the evolution in international education research is similar to the general trend in wider HE towards integrating more student-centred approaches for teaching and learning, using quality measures for student engagement and the student experience, as noted in previous sections. While ‘international education’ is the term

primarily used in this study, it should be noted that other terms may be used on occasion when referencing research previously conducted by others.

A common approach to conducting research with international students seems to consider specific facets of the student experience separately, by focusing on:

- Motivations or deterrents for choosing an international education experience (BIS, 2013b; Bunch et al., 2013; Chirkov et al., 2007, 2008; Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Doyle et al., 2010; Eaton and Dembo, 1997; Eder et al., 2010; Engle and Engle, 2004; Goel et al., 2010; Jianvittayakit, 2012; Jianvittayakit and Dimanche, 2010; Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008; Martin et al., 1995; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Presley et al., 2010; Relyea et al., 2008; Salisbury et al., 2009, 2011; Sánchez et al., 2006; Toncar et al., 2006; West, 2000; Yang et al., 2011),
- Experiences of engagement (or its counterparts of disengagement and alienation) in academic studies or social environments (Andrade, 2006; Borsos et al., 2014; Brennan et al., 2009; Case, 2007; Cheung and Yue, 2012; Glass and Westmont, 2014; Hardy et al., 2013; Jones, 2010; Milem and Berger, 1997; Montgomery, 2010; Sawir et al., 2008; Teichler, 2004; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; Trice, 2004; Warmington et al., 2013; Williams and Johnson, 2011; Zhang and Goodson, 2011; Zhao et al., 2005a),
- Personal difficulties and acculturation concerns or adjustment issues (Arasaratnam and Banerjee, 2011; Church, 1982; Fritz et al., 2008; Harrison and Voelker, 2008; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; Lee and Rice, 2007; Lucas, 2009; Martin et al., 1995; Misra et al., 2003; O'Reilly et al., 2010; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Robertson et al., 2000; Sawir et al., 2008; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; van Hoof, 2005; Wei et al., 2007; Yan and Berliner, 2011; Zhang and Goodson, 2011), and/or
- Institutional practices for facilitating better academic achievement for students and higher satisfaction ratings for HEI services and provisions (Arambewela and Hall, 2006, 2009; Archer et al., 2010; Deardorff and van Gaalen, 2012; Garrett, 2014; Hammer, 1992; Henthorne et al., 2001; Paige et al., 2004; Parker and Rouxville, 1995; Perrucci and Hu, 1995; UKCOSA, 2007; Westwood and Barker, 1990).

However, breaking up international students' experiences into such constituent pieces seems to directly conflict with the recommendations of both Bryson (2014a) and Kahu (2013) stating student engagement is better conceptualised as a holistic process, influenced by students' motivations and other contextual factors, as well as capable of influencing desired outcomes in HE (discussed previously in Section 2.3.4). The need for more integrated approaches to explore students' experiences is further supported

as Solomonides and Button (1994) state, “Learning does not take place in convenient isolation and has to be understood in terms of cognition, behaviour, affect and context” (p.131); each facet (i.e. behaviours, emotions, cognition, and context) is connected for students in their learning experiences and as Bryson and Hand (2008) emphasise:

... we must be cautious about focusing too narrowly on one facet of learning – such as deep v. surface, or learning styles or orientations, or motivation – however insightful they appear, because they are insufficient to describe holistically the full individual experience of learning. (p.8)

Furthermore in recognising a need to holistically explore students’ actual experiences of HE, much of the previous research seems to inordinately carve international students’ experiences into two distinct spheres – students’ experiences which are facilitated by HEIs and students’ unions in relation to academic achievement and satisfaction with the institution (Cohen et al., 2005; Hamza, 2010; Hardy et al., 2013; Leask, 2009; Mann, 2005; Nolan and Hunter, 2012; Robertson et al., 2000; Siddeque et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2005a) and students’ experiences outside of academic course requirements commonly designated in terms of ‘leisure’, ‘recreation’, and ‘tourism’ (Carr and Axelsen, 2009; Chen, 2006; Currie et al., 2008; Freestone and Geldens, 2008; Gallarza and Saura, 2006; Kim et al., 2007; King et al., 2010; McAllister et al., 2006; Morgan, 2009; Myles and Cheng, 2003; Pizam and Fleischer, 2005; Sakakida et al., 2004; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; Trice, 2004; Williams and Johnson, 2011). However, Moline (2009) addresses the unique position of international education experiences by highlighting the connections between all experiences as:

...the participants inevitably combine elements of academic study (e.g., classes, exams, projects, special lectures, and field trips) with tourist activities (e.g., visits to museums, historic sites, unique restaurants, shopping districts). ... Yes, our students abroad are tourists at the same time as they are engaged in focused academic study. (p.101)

Furthermore, the noted premise of division in research with international students’ experiences (i.e. only focusing on either academic or social encounters) seems particularly faulty as:

Many international students consider interaction with students of other nationalities, university lecturers, administrators and the local community as part of their learning experience. (Arambewela and Hall, 2009, p.563)

Such personal interactions are considered important as they can further facilitate students’ positive emotional engagement in their educational experience, which subsequently is shown to have a positive impact on other educational outcomes (as mentioned in Section 2.3.2). This is important as although research generally indicates that all students need time to adjust to the HE environment, the social aspect of adjustment in the HE experience can often be more difficult for international students than it is for domestic students; for while previous studies (Bryson and Hardy, 2012; Milem and Berger, 1997; Rienties and Tempelaar, 2013; Stuart et al., 2011) indicate

that domestic students may feel well-adjusted socially but then be more concerned with their academic progress, the situation of international students seems to be the direct opposite as international students tend to focus on succeeding academically but then may feel less satisfied with their social situation (Choudaha et al., 2012, 2013; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Krause, 2005; Perrucci and Hu, 1995; Zhao et al., 2005a).

2.5.1 International Student Experiences: Noting Cultural Differences

Whereas domestic students may be primarily concerned with adjusting to new academic requirements in their transition to university (Astin, 1984; Clark et al., 2014; Gonyea, 2006; Krause and Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2001a, 2001b; Kuh et al., 2008; Lizzio and Wilson, 2013; Mehdinezhad, 2011), the experiences of international students are further complicated in that they are experiencing such transitions in HE outside of their home culture (Brodin, 2010; Byram and Feng, 2006; Carroll and Ryan, 2005; Chaban et al., 2011; Chapdelaine and Alexitch, 2004; Fritz et al., 2008; Glass and Westmont, 2014; Gu et al., 2010; HEA, 2013; King et al., 2010; Lewin, 2009; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Martin et al., 1995; Moores and Popadiuk, 2011; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007). Therefore, the issues commonly associated with transition experiences (i.e. stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychosomatic manifestations of physical and mental illness) can be further exacerbated for international students as they are physically separated from depending on their usual support systems of family members and friends due to geographical distance (ibid). However, research indicates that adjustment concerns related to stress, anxiety, and depression can be partially alleviated in cases where international students develop higher quality relationships with domestic students by forming close friendships or otherwise being involved in a club or society at the HEI (Abe et al., 1998; Anderson et al., 2009; Eller et al., 2011; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Hotta and Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kim, 1994; Li and Gasser, 2005; Moores and Popadiuk, 2011; Myles and Cheng, 2003; Poyrazli et al., 2004; UKCOSA, 2004). Yet, as aforementioned, many international students seem to prefer to socialise primarily with students from their own culture or with other international students and thereby form “cultural silos” (HEA, 2012; Iwasaki, 2008; Myles and Cheng, 2003; Montgomery, 2010; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; UKCOSA, 2004); this tendency is often explained as some students may find relating to others from similar cultural backgrounds to be easier and cause less initial anxiety.

Broadly, culture includes everything related to a society from language, symbols, religion, values, technology, economics, attitudes, customs, and education (Lewellen, 2002; Steger, 2003). Some aspects of culture are visibly apparent, such as manners of dress and other outward behaviours, whereas other aspects of culture are more deeply ingrained and internalised by individuals in society based on shared knowledge, ideas,

and experiences which may then affect certain accepted beliefs and values (Daft, 2008; Edfelt, 2010; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1997, 2001; Lee and Carter, 2009; Lewellen, 2002; Stewart and Bennett, 1991; Steger, 2003; Trompenaars, 1993). People from different cultures will subsequently have different experiences based on their expectations and reactions to a different culture (ibid). For instance, multiple studies indicate a noticeable difference between Western and Asian cultures, and how individuals from these cultures generally tend to develop expectations which when challenged can result in experiences of “culture shock” (Chapdelaine and Alexitch, 2004; Chen, 2001; Dong, 2006; Lang, 1996; Marlina, 2009; Samovar and Porter, 1991). Specifically, culture shock refers to an individual’s inability to cope with experiencing a different culture (ibid); the shock of experiencing so much “difference” may cause sensory overload for some people. It has also been noted (Hofstede, 1997; Pearce et al., 1998; Rogers and Steinfatt, 1999) that some individuals may be better able to cope with differences as they may already possess higher abilities from previous experiences or otherwise be more willing to learn skills and strategies for personal adaptation regarding how to appropriately address such differences in language, food, manners, dress, the environment, beliefs, or value systems.

As such, many research efforts regarding international students are apt to focus on the difficulties related to cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural communication competencies (Allen and Herron, 2003; Anderson et al., 2009; Behrmd and Porzelt, 2012; Braskamp et al., 2009; Brisset et al., 2010; Brodin, 2010; Chaban et al., 2011; Davis and Finney, 2006; Deardorff, 2006; Deloach et al., 2003; Dervin, 2009; Fischer, 2011; Hammer, 2008, 2011; Hammer et al., 2003; Hismanoglu, 2011; Jackson, 2008; McAllister et al., 2006; Norris and Gillespie, 2009; Pedersen, 2010; Pedersen et al., 2011; Reisinger, 2009; Sobré-Denton, 2011; Stewart, 2005; Williams, 2005; Yang et al., 2006). Much of the aforementioned research on international students (ibid) is focused on examining gains in intercultural competencies using models such as Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) which led to the intercultural development inventory instrument (IDI). Specifically, Bennett’s (1986) model posits that with time and some helpful guidance students can progress by developing intercultural skills, from feelings of ethnocentrism (i.e. preference for one’s own culture and defence against another culture) and transition towards heightened feelings of ethnorelativism (i.e. adapting and integrating with another culture). With this in mind, targeted and meaningful interactions with staff and other students can be a positive influence on broadening students’ outlooks and otherwise providing opportunities for personal development as previous research (Hadis, 2005a; Montrose, 2002; Trice, 2004) indicates that the act of going abroad to study does not automatically produce gains in intercultural skills. If students are not fully motivated or

engaged in their experiences abroad, they may miss out on the opportunity to make the most out of their experiences. Thereby, personal behaviours and motivations are essential to examining students' experiences; though some students may feel more comfortable with the host culture if they generally share similar characteristics such as language or manners (Pizam and Fleischer, 2005; Reisinger and Turner, 2003; Stephan and Stephan, 1985), other students may be motivated and then actively seek personal experiences with more "foreign" cultures (Byrnes, 2005; Chen, 2006; Gnoth and Zins, 2010; Iwasaki, 2008; Kay, 2009; Williams, 2002; Yakunina et al., 2012).

2.5.2 International Student Experiences: Noting Students' Motivations

Previous research (Yang et al., 2011) notes the wide prevalence of using the terms 'goals', 'expectations', and 'motives' interchangeably in international education research. In this study, however, the term 'motivation' is utilised in order to focus on the reasons for why international students choose to have an international component as part of their HE experience; furthermore, in agreement with previous research discussed throughout Section 2.3, this study considers motivation to be a precursor for exploring student engagement behaviours and outcomes. In broad terms, motivation is used to explain why individuals make certain decisions and why they choose specific actions as opposed to available alternatives. A significant amount of the research examining international students' motivations has concerned foreign language studies and second-language acquisition (SLA) (Allen and Herron, 2003; Cohen et al., 2005; Coleman, 1998; Dörnyei, 2003, 2005; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013; Engle and Engle, 2004; Freed, 1998; Fraser, 2002; Gardner et al., 1983; MacIntyre et al., 2002; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Noels et al., 2000; Yang et al., 2006; Yu and Shen, 2012). However, more general research has also been conducted to explore students' motivations for choosing an international education experience. While perceived barriers and risks associated with an international education experience may deter some students from studying abroad (Luethge, 2004; Paus and Robinson, 2008; Sánchez et al., 2006), a significant number of students worldwide choose to study outside their country of residence each year as mentioned earlier in Section 1.1. Previous research indicates students are motivated to have an international education experience based on a myriad of factors in relation to: opportunities to experience other cultures (Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Freestone and Geldens, 2008; King et al., 2010; Van Hoof, 2005); to potentially improve future career opportunities (Hamza, 2010; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009; Norris and Gillespie, 2009; Orahod et al., 2008; Relyea et al., 2008); and to engage in positive global citizenship behaviours through increased awareness and understanding of other cultures (Douglas and Jones-Ridders, 2001; McAllister et al., 2006; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009).

As international students must, by definition, travel for the purpose of the international education experience, there are also noticeable links to related literature which focuses on leisure, recreation, and tourism experiences. In fact, some (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Jianvittayakit and Dimanche, 2010; Kim et al., 2006, 2007; King et al., 2010; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Zemach-Bersin, 2009) argue that the inherent aspect of travel in the international education experience can be quite influential as:

...it seems that they are more highly motivated by the general experience of studying or working abroad, than they are by its intrinsic academic merit or even, in some surveys, by its employment pay-offs. (King et al., 2010, p.24)

In fact, the motivations behind studying abroad can be quite complex as research indicates that the choice of study destinations often occurs in stages as students first must make the decision to go abroad to study, then they may choose where they want to study based on deciding on a specific country before looking at HEIs or make these decisions independently (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Eder et al., 2010; Jones, 2006; King et al., 2010; Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Nyaupane et al., 2011; Pyvis and Chapman, 2007). Students may choose to study in a specific location because of a variety of both “push and pull factors” which refer to reasons why students may be motivated to leave their own country to study and the attraction they may feel towards going to study in another country or at a specific HEI (Eder et al., 2010; Gnoth, 1997; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Previous studies (ibid) indicate that students tend to be more confident and successful in their experiences abroad when they feel they are personally responsible for these choices – whether to study abroad, where to study, and what to do – as opposed to having an international education experience forced upon them as part of the curriculum or by others (i.e. parents, friends, etc.). These stages of decision making are crucial as students who gather more information regarding the location and their intended programme of study tend to be better prepared and have more realistic expectations, which may then subsequently lower levels of personal anxiety and other adjustment issues (Choudaha et al., 2012, 2013; UKCOSA, 2004). As stated earlier in previous sections of this chapter, managing expectations is an important consideration as international students who have particularly unfounded or high expectations are often harder to please; this is especially important as pre-existing expectations may affect how students engage, react, and evaluate their HE experiences in relation to perceptions of both satisfaction and quality (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Lamb and Huq, 2006; Martin et al., 1995; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009; Mendelson, 2004; UKCOSA, 2004; Yang et al., 2011).

2.5.3 International Student Experiences: Noting Meaningful Outcomes

Previous studies (Byram and Feng, 2006; Deardorff et al., 2012; Dwyer, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Lewin, 2009; Mendelson, 2004; Nunan, 2006; Oliver, 2008; Zemach-Bersin, 2009) indicate the multiple benefits related to positive outcomes of international education experiences, often in relation to the stated motivations in the previous section. Upon reflection, the students often become more personally self-aware and further develop their intercultural skills during their time abroad (ibid), whilst they enjoy what many advertise as once-in-a-lifetime experiences (British Council, nda, ndb; IES Abroad, 2014; University of Leeds, 2012a), going beyond satisfaction measures for HEIs emphasised by instruments such as the ISB (Archer, 2010, 2011; Garrett, 2014) and NSSE (Kuh et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2005). The European Commission (2013) succinctly summarises the wider benefits of international education experiences as:

Many studies show that a period spent abroad not only enriches students' lives in the academic and professional fields, but can also improve language learning, intercultural skills, self-reliance and self-awareness. Their experiences give students a better sense of what it means to be a European citizen. In addition, many employers highly value such a period abroad, which increases the students' employability and job prospects.

Accordingly, the benefits of international education experiences can actually be considered to mirror the earlier ethos of the traditional approach to HE as a 'positive transformational experience' (Altbach et al., 2009; BIS, 2013b; Gibbs, 2010; Ramsden, 2008; Sweeney, 2010; Teichler, 2004). Students who undertake an international education component as part of their HE experience are often given personal insight into how interconnected and varied the world is, as well as other benefits on a more individual or community level. In effect, international students are self-selected cultural ambassadors (Archer, 2010, 2011; Ault and Martell, 2007; Breuning, 2007; Hovey and Weinberg, 2009; Lewellen, 2002; Olson and Kroeger, 2001; Relyea et al., 2008; Stewart, 2005), traveling to different countries to learn, informally representing their own culture and background, and also taking their experiences of being abroad back with them to their home countries. Although a significant portion of available research tends to focus on the academic outcomes of the international HE experience (Böhm et al., 2002, 2004; Bracht et al., 2006; Brennan et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2014; Doyle et al., 2010; Forland, 2006; Hadis, 2005b; Hellstén and Prescott, 2004; Hyde, 2012; Kettle, 2011; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Presley et al., 2010; Sweeney, 2012), emphasising opportunities and strategies for academic and professional development which help to cultivate capable and responsible citizens as the European Commission suggests, non-academic experiences of international students are also influential as:

Experiences... can be any trip's most treasured souvenir. When we return home, we can put what we've learned – our newly acquired broader perspective – to work as citizens of a great nation confronted with unprecedented challenges. And when we do that, we make travel a political act. (Steves, 2009, p.iv)

With this in mind, the interactions previously noted in Chapter One between international students' experiences and the effects from (and on) politics, economics, and HE environments should not be underestimated. In addition, while previous research indicates the importance of extracurricular activities and social interactions for students to develop feelings of 'belonging' and 'identity' related to student engagement (Krause, 2007; Kuh, 1993, 1995; Lefever and Bashir, 2011; Milem and Berger, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998; Tinto, 1993, 1997; Williams and Johnson, 2011), the importance of social interactions for international students is especially noted as:

Their success depends not just on what happens at university but also in the broader university or local community; they travel to study not just for an academic qualification but also for the language and cultural experience. ... Like home students, international students lead multi-dimensional lives and being "international" may be just one factor amongst many that may (or may not) give rise to difficulties. (HEA, 2013)

As reviewed earlier in Section 2.2, students' experiences are complex and as the HEA emphasises in the quote above, for international students being international may be only one aspect; likewise, being a student may be only one aspect of the personal experiences of international students whilst abroad. Even as international students' experiences can be somewhat directed or facilitated by staff in traditional academic environments according to the set curriculum, international students are otherwise free to choose how they are involved in activities during their unstructured leisure time. This demonstrates the primary difference between what individual students may feel is being imposed upon them and what they choose to do, and as such some (Iwasaki, 2008; Manfredi et al., 1996; Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987) consider leisure experiences to be instrumental in producing outcomes related to personal growth and self-development. The World Leisure Organization (2000) affirms this stance, in conjunction with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, through the Charter for Leisure as:

Provisions for leisure for the quality of life are as important as those for health and education. ... Individuals can use leisure opportunities for self-fulfilment, developing personal relationships, improving social integration, developing communities and cultural identity as well as promoting international understanding and co-operation and enhancing quality of life.

Thus, in order to explore the experiences of international students, their motivations, and their perspectives on student engagement, it seems logical to recognise the potential influences from involvement in both academic and non-academic behaviours to explore their effects on international students' perceptions about their experiences.

2.6 Synthesising Previous Research and Reviewing Identified Gaps

It seems appropriate to conclude from the discussion throughout this chapter that the experiences of students, and those of international students in particular, are complex and multifaceted. Rather than examining each aspect of the international student experience separately (i.e. motivations, student engagement, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences) as others have done with many of the previous noted studies, it may be more useful to conceptualise the connections between the different aspects of international students' HE experiences as a process of convergence encompassing a multitude of different experiences as displayed below.

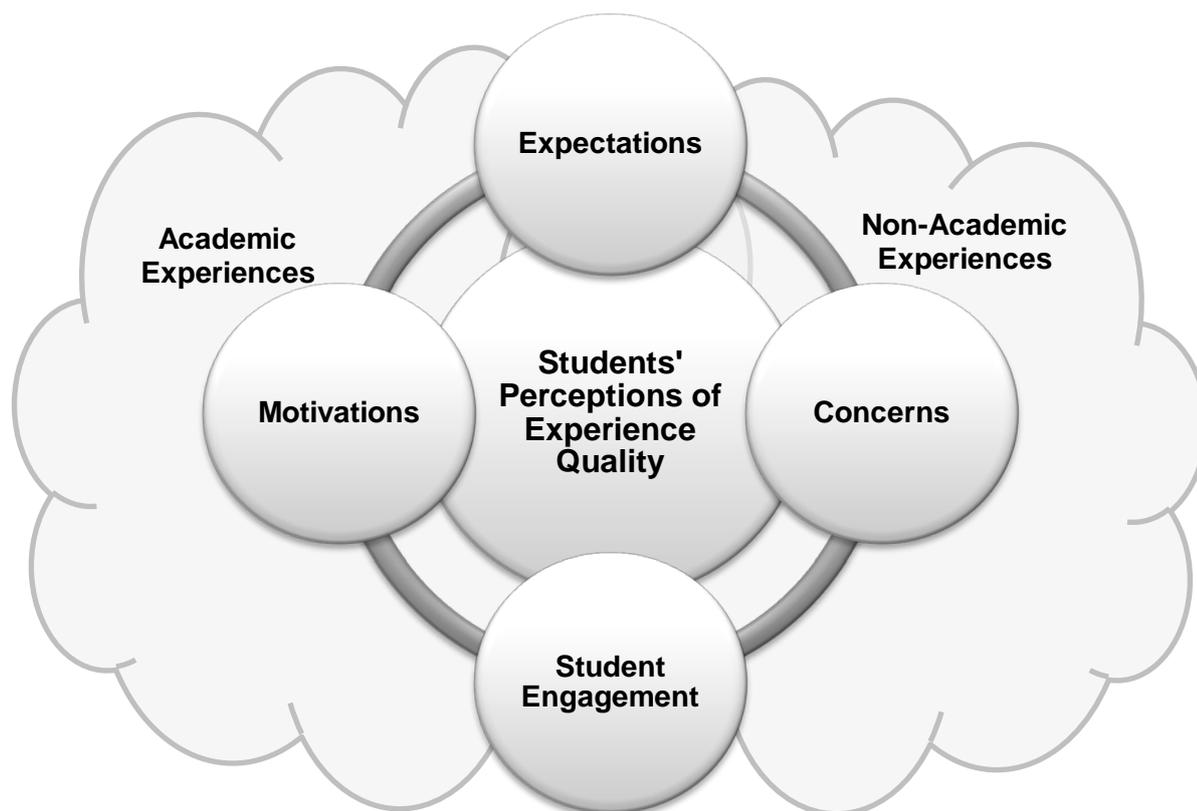


Figure 12. Connecting previously divergent areas of research

In so doing, the process of international students' experiences may be seen to include both academic and non-academic behaviours in relation to students' pre-existing motivations and expectations, students' ability to cope with different issues which may cause concern whilst abroad, and more holistic perceptive outcomes of quality which give students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences abroad. Furthermore, in line with previous research on student engagement, research needs to be conducted which recognises the students' perspective regarding their experiences; the student voice needs to be reflected in more than just "quotes with arguments made by others", it should be emphasised throughout the proposal, design, analysis, and interpretation of data collected. Thus as others (Bryson and Hand, 2008; Ramsden and Callender, 2014; Solomonides and Button, 1994) suggest, multiple methods (i.e. both quantitative

and qualitative methods) should be utilised in order to explore the concepts of interest more thoroughly and the relationships which may exist between them.

2.6.1 Synthesising Previous Research: Connecting Theory to Practice

As stated earlier, in trying to close identified gaps from the work of others, the proposed research may provide both theoretical and practical guidance for this area of interest in international education, particularly in regards to students' experiences by including both motivations and student engagement behaviours. However, trying to provide an exhaustive review of all potentially relevant theories with reference to international students' motivations, student engagement, and outcomes of HE and international education experiences would be impractical and beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, selected pertinent theories utilised in previous relevant research are reviewed briefly as to their potential application and noted limitations in exploring the identified concepts in relation to international students' experiences whilst studying abroad.

The theoretical models identified in previous sections in relation to student engagement (i.e. Astin's I-E-O model, Biggs' 3P model, and Tinto's model of persistence) mainly provide guidance to focus on measuring academic outcomes with academic success measured by engagement, performance, personal development, and persistence. However, in prioritising the outcomes, the contextual factors which can affect students' personal experiences (i.e. their motivations, expectations, and the process by which they become engaged or disengaged in their experience) are often relegated to a lesser position in the research. While motivation is considered related to student engagement (Bryson, 2014a; Bryson and Hand, 2008; QAA, 2012; Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012), they are actually separate concepts which deserve individual attention. Furthermore, even as Astin's (1984, 1993) Theory of Student Involvement posits the existence of a positive relationship between the level of students' motivation and engagement in their educational experiences with both time and energy, reviewing theories of motivation and student learning seems most appropriate for exploring how students are motivated, choose to engage, and develop perceptions about their experiences. As such, a brief overview of different theories in relation to students' motivation and learning is presented in Table 3.

As Table 3 shows, several previous studies have focused on examining and explaining parts of individual experiences in relation to learning using different psychosocial theories. Each theory emphasises the individual experience by recognising the importance of self-perceptions, personal beliefs, individual skills, and different types of motivations.

Table 3. Overview of Theories for Motivation and Learning

Theory	Main Premise and Elements	Previous Studies
Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997)	<p>Personal belief in one's own abilities to succeed in reaching goals and complete specified tasks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-perceptions and physiological factors • Direct Experiences • Vicarious Experiences • Social Persuasion 	Komarraju and Nadler, 2013; Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012
Self-Regulation Theory (Zimmerman, 1990, 2002)	<p>Students are active participants in their own learning experience. To be self-regulated, students must identify and recognize their goals, acknowledge personal responsibility for their attainment, and demonstrate actions of focus and effort to achieve the goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation • Goal-setting and planning • Self-monitoring and review 	Mega et al., 2014; Zuffianò et al., 2013
Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2012)	<p>Examining the reasons why individuals are motivated towards certain actions or behaviours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of Motivation (Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Amotivation) • Autonomy • Competence 	Reeve, 2012; Schuetz, 2008
Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975)	<p>Individuals' beliefs and attitudes towards specific behaviours, perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively affect individuals' intentions and future behaviours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural Beliefs and Attitudes • Normative Beliefs and Subjective Norms • Control Beliefs and Perceived Behavioural Control • Behavioural Intentions 	Ajzen and Driver, 1991, 1992; Bunch et al., 2013; Goel et al., 2010; Presley et al., 2010
Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989)	<p>Achieving balance between an individual's abilities and the level of challenge involved in order to have an "optimal experience", as opposed to apathy (low challenge/low skill), anxiety (high challenge/low skill), or relaxation (low challenge/high skill).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration • Interest • Enjoyment 	Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Shernoff et al., 2003
Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984)	<p>The process of deriving meaning from experiences as an individual is actively involved, able to reflect, and able to successfully transfer the knowledge gained from the experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete Experience • Reflective Observation • Abstract Conceptualization • Active Experimentation 	Holman et al., 1997; Yang et al., 2011

In applying each of the theories in Table 3 to the context of this study:

- Self-efficacy theory reasons that it is important for students to believe in their own abilities in order to reach specific goals and have positive experiences;
- Self-regulation theory posits that students must take responsibility for outcomes related to their experiences by identifying goals and then acting accordingly;
- Self-determination theory proposes that among the various reasons for why students may choose an international education experience, students will achieve more positive developmental outcomes as a result of internalised motivations and feelings related to personal autonomy and competence;
- The theory of planned behaviour suggests that students' pre-existing beliefs and attitudes about the experiences will affect their intentions and behaviours;
- Flow theory details the need for achieving balance between students' personal abilities and the level of challenge they face during their experiences abroad in order for them to develop positive perceptions of their experiences; and
- Experiential learning theory recommends looking at students' perceptions about their experiences as a cyclical process as students learn through direct experiences and personal reflections which then affect future behaviours.

In examining these theories in combination with Astin's (1984, 1993) theory of student involvement, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen and Driver, 1991, 1992; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) appears to be particularly useful in exploring potential variations in motivations, expectations, concerns, and engagement of international students during their experiences abroad. Although all of these theories seem compatible with one another in exploring international students' experiences from the students' perspective, when compared with the other theories listed, the theory of planned behaviour is the only theory which seems to consider the effects of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors which may affect students' motivations and behaviours in relation to the wider learning process. Moreover, the theory of planned behaviour effectively combines cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects in an attempt to explain human behaviour (ibid) which in doing so provides a stronger connection to the previous recommendations from research on student engagement and the need to explore students' experiences more holistically.

Although it has since been applied in many different contexts, the theory of planned behaviour originally comes from social psychology research conducted to explore individual motivations in relation to human social behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In general terms, the theory states that beliefs and attitudes can be used to explain and predict individuals' intentions and behaviours. According to the theory (ibid), beliefs are formed over time through direct observations, inferential

beliefs, previous experiences, and information gathered from additional sources such as the media or friends. The theory further posits that personal perceptions of and responses to experiences are mediated by information combined from both conscious and subconscious influences. In this way, social conditioning occurs over time via exposure to a range of different experiences which subsequently may have an effect on individual expectations, attitudes, and intentions regarding future experiences; based on such dynamic changes in beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, individuals may decide specific behaviours are more appropriate to certain situations than others.

The studies conducted by Ajzen and Driver (1991, 1992) which examined leisure behaviours of undergraduate students provide valuable evidence regarding how to connect theory with practice for the selected context of this research (i.e. examining students' motivations and expectations as precursors to their engagement behaviours and perceptions about their experiences). Specifically, these studies use targeted questionnaires to critically examine the involvement, attitudes, moods, subjective norms, intentions, and perceived behavioural control of university students. While 'involvement', 'attitudes', 'moods', and 'intentions' are widely understood concepts outside the realms of psychological research, an explanation is provided regarding both 'subjective norms' and 'perceived behavioural control'. Basically, 'subjective norms' is used to refer to the perceived pressure from society that students feel requires them to behave in a certain way (i.e. the need or desire to comply with sociocultural mores). In contrast, 'perceived behavioural control' addresses students' past experiences which have an effect on the perceptions of difficulty associated with the behaviour, or as the researchers state:

The more resources and opportunities individuals believe they possess, and the fewer obstacles or impediments they anticipate, the greater should be their perceived control over the behavior. (Ajzen and Driver, 1991, p.188)

After conducting a pilot study in order to refine their methods, Ajzen and Driver (1991, 1992) collected data about leisure experiences from 146 university students for their main study using both pre- and post-engagement questionnaires. Specifically, the questionnaires asked students about beliefs regarding six different leisure activities commonly identified across the university student population at their HEI (i.e. spending time at the beach, outdoor running, mountain climbing, boating, and cycling).

The findings suggest that students' attitudes are not always reflected in their actual behaviours: although students may consider some leisure activities to be more beneficial than others according, this does not mean that they will necessarily choose to engage in the more beneficial activity. As such, personal preferences (i.e. attitudes), outside influences such as family and friends (i.e. subjective norms), and perceptions regarding barriers and/or enabling factors (i.e. perceived behavioural control) may

interact and subsequently affect specific student behaviours. Their findings indicate that measures of students' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control may be used to positively predict intentions and future behaviours as according to their data, students are generally more likely to engage in certain behaviours if they feel that they will derive emotional benefits (i.e. enjoyment) from the activity and when they believe that the advantages of participating will outweigh the disadvantages.

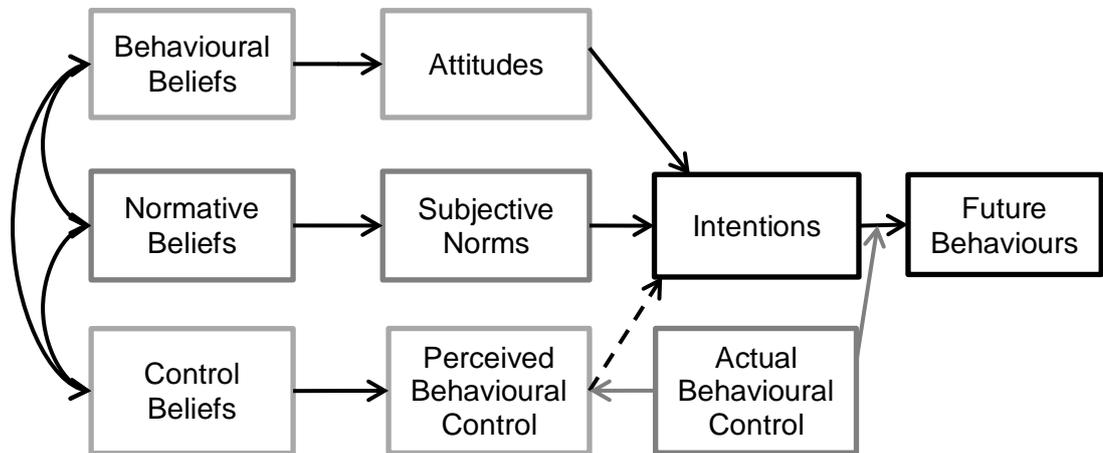


Figure 13. Model of the theory of planned behaviour
(taken from Ajzen, 2006)

A visual representation of the theory of planned behaviour as conceptualised by Ajzen (2006) is provided in Figure 13. In examining the model as a conceptual process, the precursors to intentions and future behaviours may be conceptualised as: attitudes represent students' motivations in relation to perceptions of value and pre-conceived expectations of outcomes towards specific behaviours with reference to value, subjective norms represent students' motivations towards behaviours with reference to compliance, and perceived behavioural control represents students' motivations towards behaviours with reference to personal autonomy. It is noted, however, while the theory of planned behaviour seems useful as a basis for this research regarding motivations and behaviours, the theory primarily has been used to predict intentions for behaviours rather than investigating actual behaviours and their consequences. Thus while the theory of planned behaviour may be utilised as a conceptual framework for the initial part of this examination, the model needs to be adapted in order to address students' actual engagement behaviours and their perceptions about their experiences.

By examining the interdependent relationships between theory and practice from available literature regarding student engagement and international students' experiences, the following conceptual model is proposed to address salient aspects of international students' experiences (see Figure 14). The model effectively synthesises the review of the literature presented in this chapter by focusing on the implications from previous relevant research focused on students' HE experiences, student

engagement, and international students' motivations, as well as an adaptation of previously identified theoretical models [i.e. the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2006), Biggs' (1993) 3P model and Clewes' (2003) student-centred model, Tinto's (1997) model of student persistence, and Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience framework] to build on the research in this area and in relation to the experiences of international students in particular. The model is further conceptually supported by both the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2006; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and the theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984, 1993) by addressing not only the precursors to the international experience (IE) (i.e. previous experiences, student characteristics, identified motivations and concerns, as well as IE programme specific attributes), but also international students' actual engagement behaviours (i.e. academic, social, and travel experiences), as well as their concerns whilst abroad, in addition to reported outcomes of the IE in relation to students' perceptions of transactional satisfaction with specific elements combined with their perceptions about the overall quality of their international experiences.

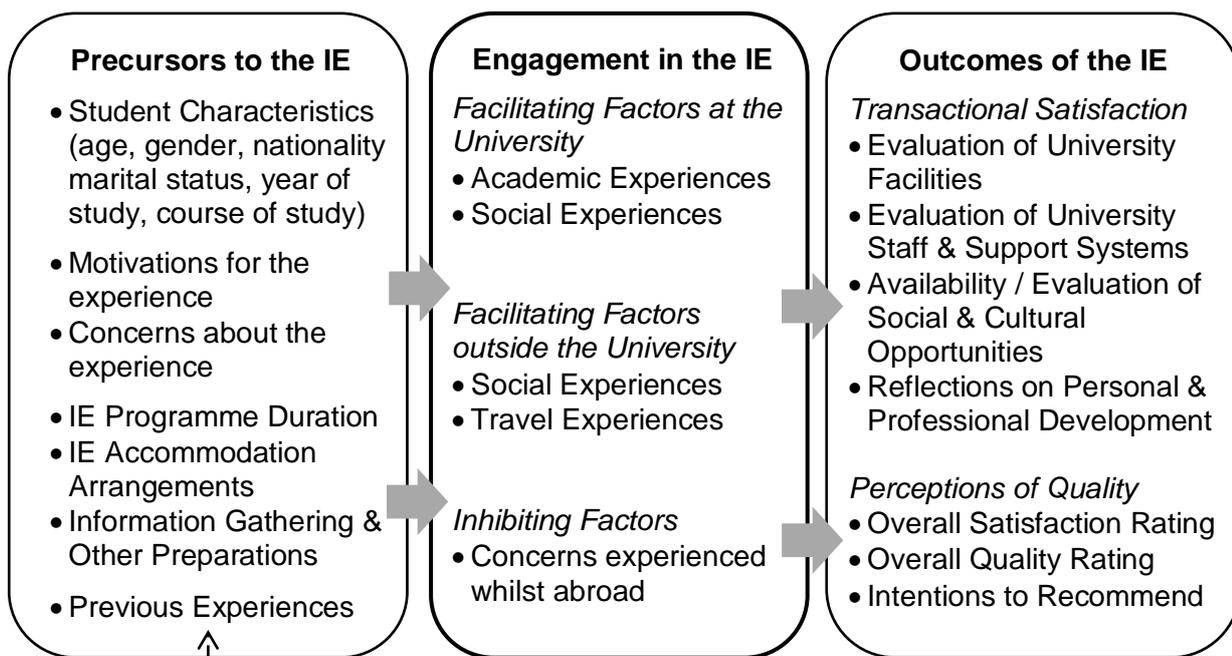


Figure 14. Conceptual model regarding the experiences of international students

2.6.2 Synthesising Previous Research: Research Objectives and Questions

In order to address the noted gaps in the literature for international students' experiences regarding their motivations, student engagement, concerns, and perceptions of quality (as opposed to only transactional measures of satisfaction) from the students' perspective, this thesis aims to explore the experiences of international students at one HEI in the UK during the 2012/13 academic year, hereafter referred to as the University; this pseudonym has been used to preserve the anonymity of both the participants and the HEI where the research took place. The University identified for

this study has a prestigious reputation as one of 24 HEIs in the Russell Group, is among the world's top 100 universities, and has been awarded numerous accolades for student satisfaction and positive student experiences based on reports from both the ISB and the NSS. Considering the rationale for this research and noted gaps in the available literature, the primary objectives of this study are:

- To build upon the findings of previous research regarding motivations and student engagement in relation to international students' experiences in HE.
- To identify factors that might contribute to student engagement for international students in HE, from the perspective of the students.
- To determine whether there is a relationship between international students' motivations and student engagement behaviours.
- To determine the relationship between international students' motivations, student engagement behaviours, identified concerns about the IE experience, and perceptions about their experiences in terms of quality.
- To identify whether there are differences in international students' perceptions about their experiences in terms of quality based on individual characteristics such as socio-demographics (i.e. age, gender, marital status, nationality), student characteristics (i.e. education level, academic faculty, living arrangements), or previous experiences and engagement behaviours.

In order to provide more information from the students' perspective regarding the experiences of international students in HE, this study will utilise mixed methods to focus on the following three research questions in relation to the stated objectives:

1. What motivates international students to study abroad as part of their HE experience?
2. How do international students engage in their HE experience whilst abroad?
3. How do different motivations and engagement behaviours influence international students' perceptions of their HE experience whilst abroad?

2.7 Summary of the Literature

Based on the research available for review, it seems likely that the experiences of international students may be best conceptualised as a process, predicated on a number of interrelated factors related to multiple stages of experience – motivations and expectations before arrival, the process and context of actual experiences abroad, and subsequent reflections upon the experience. Previous research has been useful in identifying these specific stages relative to international student experiences without making the subsequent effort to link them together. Furthermore, while the theory of planned behaviour identifies potential relationships between motivations and intentions regarding behaviour, the theory does not progress to the point of investigating actual

behaviour in relation to individuals' motivations and expectations from the experience. In relation to students' actual engagement behaviours, the review of pertinent literature also indicates a particular deficiency regarding research which includes both academic and non-academic experiences of students. While the HEI may provide specific programmes and services to help students adjust and engage in the HEI environment, individual students are ultimately responsible for making their own decisions regarding what to do, where to go, who to interact with, and how they will engage in their international experience. Thus, in evaluating previous research, there seems to be a need for more holistic examinations of the student experience and the experiences of international students in particular. Further in-depth analysis of the international student experience is also desired as most of the available research regarding the importance of engagement in the student experience has not been presented using information collected, analysed, and interpreted from the student perspective. The current research effort therefore attempts to fill the gaps identified in the available literature for international education regarding student engagement.

This study endeavours to provide a more holistic conceptualisation of engagement from the students' perspective in relation to the experiences of international students at a single HEI in the UK. Primary factors identified for investigation are focused on students' reported motivations and expectations, experiences with different types of engagement, reported levels of concern with different aspects of their experiences abroad, and multiple outcomes in order to go beyond transactional measures of satisfaction to a more holistic conceptualisation of the experience regarding perceptions of quality. These measures are included based on examples from previous independent research efforts in order to examine the relationships between and among the different factors. Previous research further indicates the advantages of different methods for exploring the experiences of international students in relation to examining their motivations, student engagement, and perceptions about their experiences. Quantitative methods may indicate statistical trends and differences within the greater population while qualitative methods may be used to further explore the personal experiences of individual students. The use of mixed methods therefore seems most appropriate in examining the experiences of international students in order to provide both subjective information about individual experiences and potentially generalizable information in relation to the wider international student population. As such, applicable perspectives for this study regarding research methodology and specific methods are discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As the literature review in the previous chapter has focused on relevant background information and multiple indicators for potential impacts from previous research, this chapter presents the methodology and methods for designing and implementing this study and subsequently analysing the research findings. Primary sections focus on restating the research questions, discussing the researcher's theoretical paradigm, presenting the research design and methodology, and examining the methods chosen for data collection and subsequent data analysis. The chapter further includes a section on common issues in research regarding reliability and validity as well as ethical issues considered in this study.

3.1 Research Questions and Design

This research is focused on three primary research questions based on synthesising previous studies and identifying particular gaps in the existing literature:

1. What motivates international students to study abroad as part of their HE experience?
2. How do international students engage in their HE experience whilst abroad?
3. How do different motivations and engagement behaviours influence international students' perceptions of their HE experience whilst abroad?

As such, the design for this study follows that of Maxwell and Loomis (2003) below.

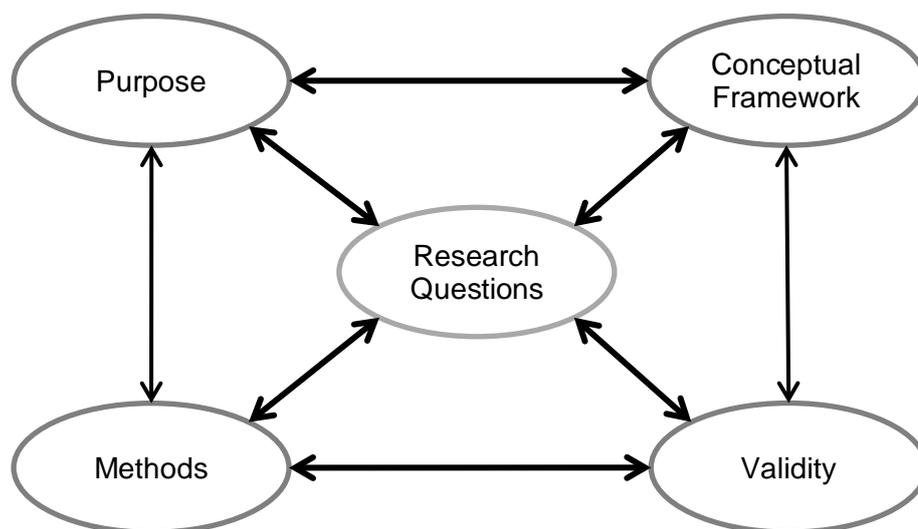


Figure 15. Interactive model of research design
(adapted from Maxwell and Loomis, 2003)

In their original model depicting an interactive research design, Maxwell and Loomis (2003) did not focus on the interactions between a study's purpose and methods or between the conceptual framework and the validity of a study. However, these

connections are considered important to this study as the four outside elements (i.e. purpose – conceptual framework – methods – validity) are also systematically related to each other and therefore the model has been adapted as shown in Figure 15. As Chapter Two considers the purpose behind this study and relevant theories from previous research, with the research questions guiding this research as stated above, the following sections focus on discussing the conceptual framework which supports the design and interpretation of the study, the methodology and methods used in collecting and analysing the data, and identified threats to the study's validity.

3.2 Research Paradigms

It is important to be aware of one's own personal worldview or paradigm when conducting any form of rigorous research effort (Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). A variety of views are reflected through a wide range of paradigms which are commonly considered useful in the social sciences for individuals exploring human social life (Cohen, L. et al., 2005). Each paradigm considers the nature of social reality differently in an attempt to identify "what is real, what is true, what is most acceptable, what and who are most powerful, and even the very nature of people, objects, and events in the world" (McMurray et al., 2004, p.9). By identifying what the researcher believes to be valuable, paradigms provide useful information about the context surrounding any critical research effort since individuals will approach and conduct research differently based on how they view the world.

A brief introduction for conceptualising common paradigms is provided here for the reader's reference as a full discussion of these paradigms is beyond the scope of this thesis. Contemporary paradigms or worldviews are grounded in philosophical assumptions and observations which have developed over time from theories of realism, empiricism, rationalism, pragmatism, positivism, and postpositivism (Cohen, L. et al., 2005; Goodale and Godbey, 1988). Each of these theories suggests using distinctive foci to gain knowledge via scientific inquiry. Realism insists on evidence produced by sensory observations (i.e. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching). Empiricism requires researchers to conduct experiments and then report on their observations. Rationalism upholds using reason and logic whilst acknowledging the effects of independent pre-existing factors that affect people's perceptions of actual experiences. Pragmatism advocates using both objective and subjective concepts based on their practical consequences, as illustrated by social reform movements which insist that "learning, intelligence, thoughts and ideas are instruments to be used to consciously shape and improve individual and social life" (Goodale and Godbey, 1988, p. 146). Positivism compels researchers to use the scientific method with observations, hypotheses, predictions, and experiments. Conversely, postpositivism

declares that human knowledge may change over time with evidence based on personal experience.

Most modern researchers in the social sciences tend to subscribe to four main paradigms comprising postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy or participatory approaches, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2009). Rather than one 'absolute truth' for everyone, postpositivists argue that there may be many truths for different people. Constructivism also affirms that reality is subjective and further proposes that there are multiple, socially constructed realities depending on various contexts associated with specific situations. The advocacy or participatory paradigm connects research with political reality to fight social justice issues and improve circumstances for marginalised individuals in society. As previously mentioned, pragmatism recommends approaching research from diverse perspectives with whatever resources are available and are considered most suitable at the time. Pragmatism thereby encourages researchers to make use of other relevant paradigms, multiple assumptions, and various methods for data collection and analysis to increase knowledge and understanding.

While different recognised paradigms are available, the most appropriate paradigm for any given study is ultimately determined by the researcher and the research problem being investigated (ibid). Every researcher approaches research differently predicated on a diversity of previous experience. As such, the background and experiences of the researcher are considered useful for understanding and rationalising the chosen methodology for a study.

3.2.1 Applied Paradigm

The title of this thesis is 'A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of international students'. In basic terms, phenomenology focuses on how individuals experience the world (Newby, 2010). Conducting phenomenological research can be difficult as Riddick and Russell (2008) note:

Only those who share an experience are fully knowledgeable about the experience under study. That is, researchers are limited in their ability to grasp the meanings of the experiences of other people. (p.161)

However, the nature of this research provides a uniquely serendipitous opportunity for me, as a researcher, to connect theory with practice. Currently, I am an American citizen enrolled as an international postgraduate student at a university in the UK. My interest in this area of research has developed over time based on a plethora of personal and professional experiences. These include a year as an undergraduate studying abroad at an Austrian university, involvement in individual and collaborative research projects focused on various interdisciplinary issues, as well as disparate work and volunteer experiences performed in customer service/management,

leisure/recreation, and HE settings. Upon closer personal reflection, I have been personally engaged in my own HE experience as an international student through various means including student representation roles on departmental and faculty academic committees, involvement in clubs and societies associated with the students' union, part-time employment with the University's International Student Office, frequent interactions and personal connections with staff and other students, and participation in wider community activities beyond the university campus. This amalgamation of experiences gives me a somewhat unique perspective but I also recognise the need to be pragmatic with the research regarding both feasibility and limitations.

I have chosen to adopt a phenomenologically-informed pragmatic approach in designing and conducting my research for a number of reasons related to ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). In ontological terms, this study is focused on investigating both individual and collective interpretations of international students' experiences. Moran (2002) emphasises this importance of recognising both private and communal aspects of lived experiences by stating, "Our natural life is a life in community, living in a world of shared objects, shared environment, shared language, shared meanings" (p. 175). Therefore, multiple perspectives are used in this study to explore potential answers to the research questions. Phenomenologically-informed pragmatism also has advantages for epistemological reasons as I am part of the target community being investigated. Consistent with the previous quote on phenomenological research from Riddick and Russell (2008), I have experienced living and studying abroad myself and thus have a primarily student-centred (rather than a staff or institution oriented) independent perspective with a broader understanding of what it means to be an international student. However, to increase objectivity and impartiality for the study, I have focused on the views of other students and have utilised and adapted methods from previously validated research. Finally, the chosen methodology justifies a phenomenologically-informed pragmatic viewpoint as both quantitative and qualitative data from research subjects are considered valuable in this research. The presentation of data and findings from this study are based on my interpretation of chosen research foci, recognising the limitations and strengths of my concurrent position as both a researcher and as an international student familiar with the targeted research community (see Section 6.6).

As presented in Chapter Two, previous research focused on international student experiences and student engagement has been conducted with both quantitative and/or qualitative methods using either large scale surveys (see HEFCE, 2014; i-graduate, 2012; NSSE, 2014) or individual student narratives (see Borsos et al., 2014;

Freestone and Geldens, 2008). From a pragmatic point of view, this study is focused on exploring student engagement and the experiences of international students at one university in the UK. Thus, I recognise the practical value of utilising mixed methods for the purposes of answering the different research questions, triangulating the individual results to approach greater validity and generalizability, and providing a more complete perspective and contextualisation of international students' engagement and experiences.

3.3 Research Methodologies

There are many different methods which have been considered useful for designing and conducting this research. Drawing further on the theoretical and methodological implications from previous research presented earlier in Chapter Two, there are distinct advantages to using both quantitative and qualitative methods for examining experiences, as various statistical comparisons may be gathered from quantitative data and additional in-depth insights may be acquired from qualitative data (Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Quantitative methods are particularly useful in surveying large populations and also help to compare concepts as variables and identify statistical trends. Depending upon the research topic, questionnaires may be developed to gather a wide range of data based on responses from participants in a larger population (Johnson and Turner, 2003). Questionnaires are used widely in quantitative research as the data may be analysed quickly and then integrated in providing meaningful insights based on statistics. They are relatively inexpensive and participants can retain a greater sense of anonymity when compared to interviews and case studies (ibid). However, there are also important points regarding the effective use of questionnaires in collecting research data. First, the researcher must understand why they choose to ask specific questions and not others. Questionnaires may contain items with both open-ended and closed-ended responses; however, as questionnaires are completed in a single sitting by respondents, the potential for the researcher to ask follow-up questions is not always possible. Therefore, in order to be effective, the researcher must acknowledge and assess the backgrounds and general competence levels of their research participants and be clear and precise with the questions asked to avoid confusion or disinterest (ibid). This can result in a conundrum for the researcher as shorter questionnaires are more easily administered and quicker for participants but may not include all possibly relevant data whereas longer questionnaires may address more salient points but then suffer from higher dropout and nonresponse rates. Thus, it is important to pilot questionnaires in order to determine their relevance and reliability in responding to the objectives of the research (ibid).

Qualitative methods are also beneficial as they allow for an in-depth focus on the international student experience. Commonly used qualitative methods include observations and interviews which may be administered in structured, semi-structured, or open formats (Creswell, 2009). The semi-structured interview format allows the researcher to explore and discuss issues with individual participants using key themes with the potential for further clarification via follow-up questions (Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). As such, the key themes have been identified before the interview but the semi-structured format allows the researcher more flexibility in conducting the interviews than a structured format. For instance, the order of questions can be altered and impromptu follow-up questions can be added in the course of conversation in order to further clarify the information participants have given in various answers (ibid). Additionally, it is generally accepted that there is a point of saturation in qualitative research at which the researcher is unable to gather new information from their subject/s on a topic (ibid). Responses are considered and analysed individually and collectively for trends and patterns demonstrated within and between the subject/s. By taking a semi-structured approach, the primary foci of the interviews can remain consistent without imposing strict constraints on the subject/s for what is to be considered relevant or not. While examples of previous in-depth case studies exist which focus on the results gathered from a small homogenous sample, conducting more interviews is preferable for research which involves groups considered to be more diverse such as international students.

3.3.1 Applied Methodology

As experiences are inherently subjective, this study considers the impacts of individual students' interpretations of their experiences in combination with relevant trends amongst the wider international student population. This is important for the research as Moran (2002) states,

the whole point of phenomenology is that we cannot split off the subjective domain from the domain of the natural world... Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity. (p. 15)

Thereby, the phenomenological nature of the study is strengthened by asking students to consider and reflect on different relevant aspects of their international experiences. Furthermore, in conducting mixed methods research, the definition of 'engagement' can be more thoroughly explored from the student perspective whilst also making connections with relevant areas of existing academic research.

This study uses a mixed methods design in order to gain a broader interpretation of international students' engagement in their HE experience. Mixed methods are considered particularly useful when there are time limitations for collecting data and when quantitative and qualitative data are considered to be of equal value (Creswell

and Plano Clark, 2011: p. 77). This design involves an iterative process of collecting data sequentially while concurrently working on the analysis, meaning subsequent stages of data collection and analysis have an impact on the additional analysis and interpretation of data collected previously. Mixed methods designs are also considered useful in pragmatic terms of efficiency, validity, and reliability as data may be collected around the same time and results may be used together but the individual data sets may also be analysed separately. Figure 16 provides a diagram of the research design.

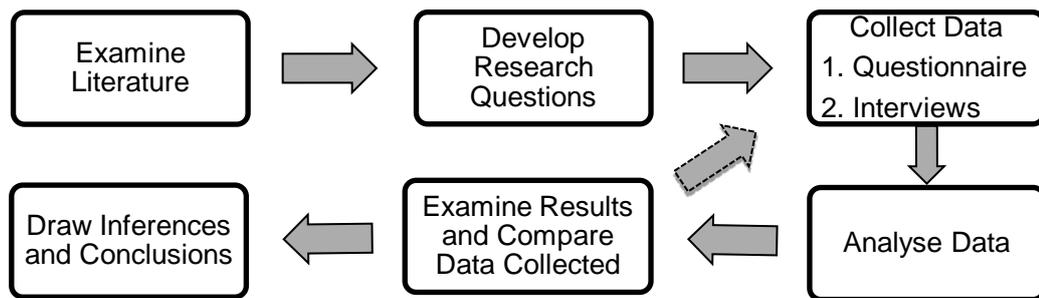


Figure 16. Research process

In order to further the phenomenologically-informed pragmatic design of the study, it was important to become familiar with the research setting. Similar to a case study approach, this process required gathering a wide range of information relative to a small geographical area (specifically the University and the surrounding city) and acknowledging my own personal reflections. The information gathered was then used to inform the research design – from piloting methods to conducting the main study. Namely, I observed and participated in a wide range of activities during 2011/12, which included attending university orientation programmes, living in university accommodation, and becoming involved in academic, professional, and social activities at the University and in the wider community. By being fully immersed in the research environment, I gained additional knowledge about the international student experience which was then helpful in designing the questionnaire and connecting with participants during the semi-structured interviews.

3.3.2 Study Population and Sample

According to published statistics for the 2012/13 academic year, the University had more than 30,000 students enrolled in more than 900 different programmes and representing more than 145 countries. This included almost 7,000 international students (21.9% of the total student population) enrolled at the University across multiple degree programmes (undergraduate, postgraduate taught, or postgraduate research), Foundation Year, and through temporary programmes (i.e. study abroad and other university exchanges or Erasmus schemes). Potential participants for the first stage of the research involving an online questionnaire were recruited via multiple

methods, including: social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, where individuals participating in activities through the students' union or the International Student Office regularly communicate with one another in an open forum; personal communication and interactions between the researcher and participants; information flyers distributed to attendees of the weekly Global Café; as well as emails containing invitations to participate sent to the International Student Office, individual departments, and student union clubs/societies which were then forwarded to students. Rather than an isolated research environment, the more informal settings for recruiting participants (i.e. social media, Global Café, contacts through student union clubs and societies) were preferred in this case as they provided opportunities to interact with a more representative population; the highest concentrations of international students from various academic backgrounds, representing many different countries, and at all levels of study ranging from pre-degree (Foundation Year) to postgraduate research degrees.

As stated earlier (see Section 3.4.1.2), the pilot study further indicated the potential for snowball sampling to occur based on the interactions between individual students. Students who had already filled out the online questionnaire then forwarded the link to other students and online groups to which they belonged. Consistent with commonly accepted practice (see Blunch, 2011; Byrne, 2001; Hoyle, 1995; Kline, 2005), a minimum of 200 responses to the questionnaire were needed to conduct the intended quantitative analysis appropriately using structural equation modelling (SEM). Thus, an initial target for data collection for the main study was set for 500 participants to answer the online questionnaire with an additional 20 follow-up interviews to be conducted.

Inclusion criteria, beyond willingness to participate, for this study consisted of:

1. being an international student at the University in the 2012/13 academic period,
2. being at least 18 years of age, and
3. being able to read and write in English.

For the purposes of this study, all students who have identified themselves as not originating from the UK are considered to be international students, regardless of fee status. This designation aligns with the earlier definitions for international students from the UKCOSA (2004) report and the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2012). In order to obtain more representative data than that which is gathered for the University via the ISB, the population sample for the study includes undergraduate students at the University in attendance for either the Academic Year or a single semester (Semester 1 or Semester 2). International students enrolled with the intention to complete their entire degree at the University (i.e. Foundation Year, undergraduate, taught postgraduate, and postgraduate research students) are also included in the sample population as part of the Academic Year group.

Table 4: Research Design and Implementation

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Research Focus</i>	<i>Stages of Data Collection and Analysis</i>
1. What motivates international students to study abroad as part of their HE experience?	Results based on presenting and comparing descriptive information from data collected (quantitative and qualitative)	a. Quantitative data collected via Online Questionnaire Analysed using SPSS® 21 b. Qualitative data collected via Semi-Structured Interviews Analysed using NVivo® 10
2. How do international students engage in their HE experience whilst abroad?	Results based on presenting and comparing descriptive information from data collected (quantitative and qualitative)	a. Quantitative data collected via Online Questionnaire Analysed using SPSS® 21 b. Qualitative data collected via Semi-Structured Interviews Analysed using NVivo® 10
3. How do different motivations and engagement behaviours influence international students' perceptions of their HE experience whilst abroad?	Results based on examining proposed Structural Equation Model (SEM) as a combination of measuring quantitative relationships between variables with additional qualitative insights gathered from students' comments	a. Quantitative data collected via Online Questionnaire Analysed using AMOS® 21 b. Qualitative data collected via Online Questionnaire and Semi-Structured Interviews Analysed using NVivo® 10

3.4 Methods for Data Collection

As previously stated, the primary efforts of this study have involved incorporating a mixed methods research design with data collected from both a questionnaire (see Appendix A and Chapter Four) and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C and Chapter Five) in order to evaluate the conceptual framework for the experiences of international students proposed by Figure 14. The different sections of the questionnaire consider multiple aspects of the international student experience similar to previous studies regarding multiple stages of motivation (see Ajzen, 2006; Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998), interaction (see Daengbuppha et al., 2006; Rossman and Schlatter, 2008), and the international student experience (see Arambewela and Hall, 2006; Martin et al., 1995). The semi-structured interviews then afforded an opportunity to delve further into participants' answers from the questionnaire and provide additional information about their personal experiences. Table 4 outlines the adopted research design for this study providing specific reference to research questions, their focus, and relevant stages of data collection and analysis. For the main study, students first participated in the questionnaire and were asked at the end if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview about their experiences. The questionnaire remained open through July 2013 for additional participants while interviews were arranged and conducted with individual students.

3.4.1 Developing the Questionnaire – Constructs and Items

As mentioned previously, conducting research on student engagement can be complicated in that the same term has been used to refer to different concepts from either behavioural, psychological, or socio-cultural perspectives; reviews indicate that holistic perspectives should be increasingly adopted with specific reference to “a lack of distinction between the state of engagement, its antecedents and its consequences” in previous studies (Kahu, 2013, p.758). However, as discussed earlier throughout Chapter Two, this study is intended to address multiple concepts (i.e. international students' motivations and expectations, student engagement behaviours, concerns whilst abroad, and perceptions about their experiences abroad) which have been drawn from professionally disparate fields (i.e. international education, recreation and tourism, and HE research and policy); as such, there was not a suitable template readily available for the questionnaire design based on previous research in this area. Therefore, this study has focused on exploring the experiences of international students holistically using a questionnaire which was developed using constructs identified in the literature and adapted from previous research which has focused on motivation, student engagement, leisure behaviour, and/or international student experiences (Astin, 1984; Carr and Axelsen, 2009; Chaban et al., 2011; Hosany and Witham, 2009; Kim et al., 2006, 2007; Ku et al., 2008; Martin, 2007; Martin et al., 1995;

McLeod and Wainwright, 2009; Millem and Berger, 1997; Pace, 1984; Pegg and Little, 2008; Pegg and Patterson, 2010; Pizam and Fleischer, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000; Sánchez et al., 2006; Tinto, 1993; UKCOSA, 2004). The questionnaire was presented in a similar format to national surveys such as NSSE in the USA (NSSE, 2012), the AUSSE (ACER, 2014; Coates, 2009, 2010) and the CEQ (Wilson et al., 1997) in Australia, and the NSS in the UK (HEFCE, 2014), as well as the ISB which is used by universities across the world (Archer et al., 2010; i-graduate, 2012) (see Sections 2.2.1.1, 2.2.1.2, and 2.3.1.1 for more details regarding the individual instruments). The key difference between this study and its predecessors is the inclusion of multiple aspects of student engagement in exploring the experiences of international students along with questions about their previous experiences, motivations, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences whilst abroad at the University.

The questionnaire for this study (see Appendix A) included a total of forty questions which collected information from international students according to the following sections.

- Student characteristics
 - Age (Q2)
 - Gender (Q3)
 - Marital status (Q4)
 - World region and Nationality (Q5, Q5a)
 - Current year of study (Q6)
 - Programme duration (Q8)
 - Academic faculty at the University (Q9)
 - Living arrangements (Q10)
 - Information sources used (Q13)
 - Arrival experience (Q14)
- Previous experiences
 - Previous study abroad (Q7)
 - Previous travel to Europe (Q11)
 - Previous travel to England (Q12)
- Motivations (Q15a-q, Q16a-q)
- Concerns (expected concerns Q17a-p, experienced concerns Q22a-p)
- Students' engagement at home (Q18-Q21)
- Students' engagement at the University (Q23-28)
- Reflective perceptions about their experiences (Q29-Q34)

The design of the first section to identify and compare particular student characteristics (i.e. age, gender, area of study, etc) mainly utilises items taken from the ISB instrument (i-graduate, 2012). However, some items have been changed to reduce any potential confusion with the phrasing of the question and/or responses. Specifically, the item on programme duration (Q8) has been modified from the question "What is your study type? Student Exchange/Erasmus, Study Abroad, or Full-time" (i-graduate, 2012);

instead Q8 asks “How long is your period of study at the University?” with four response options of ‘Semester 1 (September-January)’, ‘Semester 2 (January-June)’, ‘Academic Year (September-June)’, and ‘Entire Degree’. The response options for academic faculties at the University (Q9) and living arrangements (Q10) have also been modified to refer specifically to those available at the University. The items which refer to students’ previous experiences of studying abroad (Q7) and traveling (Q11 on Europe and Q12 on England) were included to assess students’ previous exposure to such cross-cultural experiences prior to studying abroad at the University; as mentioned earlier in Section 2.5.1, such experiences have been shown to have a positive impact on international students’ ability to adjust to new cultural environments (see Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012; Chapdelaine and Alexitch, 2004; Pedersen, 2010; Williams and Johnson, 2011).

As discussed in the literature review (refer to Sections 2.3.3 and 2.5.2), individual motivations can be complex reflecting various “psychological” and “socio-cultural” antecedents for student engagement (see Kahu, 2013). Therefore, the questionnaire assessed students’ motivations by focusing on 34 items incorporating personal development motivation, social motivation, travel motivation, and destination motivation based on distinctions and categories from previous studies (Allen and Herron, 2003; Cole and Illum, 2006; Doyle et al., 2010; Kay, 2009; Presley et al., 2010). To be more specific, the motivation items in the questionnaire (Q15a-q and Q16a-q) were selected based on comparing items from questionnaires used in particular studies focused on international students in HE and other tourist and recreational experiences in consideration of the intended research foci for this study. Based on their results, the study conducted by Presley and colleagues (2010) on business students’ choice to study abroad indicated the utility of adapting ten items for the questionnaire:

- 15a. I wanted to improve my language skills.
- 15c. I wanted to take interesting classes.
- 15e. I wanted to develop new skills.
- 15k. I wanted to be challenged.
- 15l. I wanted to gain experience.
- 15n. I wanted to enhance future career opportunities.
- 15p. I wanted the opportunity to grow and develop as a person.
- 15q. I wanted to learn more about myself.
- 16l. I wanted a new experience.
- 16o. I wanted to experience everyday life in England.

Similar items had been used by others in study abroad and motivational research with international students (Allen and Herron, 2003; Baker and MacIntyre, 2000; Chirkov et al., 2007, 2008; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006). In another study, Doyle and colleagues (2010) further identified four primary motivations in their investigation of factors associated with students’ attitudes and participation in study abroad programmes. As such, four items were incorporated into the questionnaire design as:

- 15d. I wanted to study subjects not available at my university.
- 15i. I wanted to be able to pursue extracurricular interests at the University.
- 15m. I wanted to be able to list a semester/year at an overseas university on my CV.
- 16p. I wanted to experience the English education system.

Recognising such a diversity of motivational orientations is important in examining experiences, as acknowledged by Pine and Gilmore's (1999) earlier experiential framework. Thus, additional motivation items considered relative to the experiences of international students whilst abroad (as discussed earlier in Section 2.5) were then identified from the field of leisure and tourism; this was considered important as other studies (British Council, 2010; Eder et al., 2010; Nyaupane et al., 2011; Sánchez et al., 2006) have indicated the relative importance of students' orientations towards travel, as well as perceptions of personal and professional value attributed to an international education experience expressed by students' motivations to meet people, for personal development and achievement, and to improve future career prospects. Kay's (2009) study on cultural tourism experience motives utilised 31 items in total, which when analysed exhibited four primary motives for cultural experiences which focused on social consumption, novelty, learn local culture, and relaxation. Fourteen items were subsequently chosen and adapted for inclusion in the questionnaire to be used in this study in order to represent such motives:

- 15g. I wanted to be with friends.
- 15j. I wanted to be able to tell my friends and relatives about my experience.
- 15o. I wanted to do something by myself.
- 16b. I wanted a change from my daily routine.
- 16c. I wanted to relax.
- 16e. I wanted to have fun.
- 16g. I wanted to have a thrilling and exciting experience.
- 16h. I wanted to try new foods.
- 16i. I wanted to travel.
- 16j. I wanted to see famous cultural places.
- 16k. I wanted to buy goods and souvenirs.
- 16m. I wanted to learn more about English culture.
- 16n. I wanted to learn more about English history.
- 16q. I wanted to meet English people.

In a similar fashion, the findings from Cole and Illum's (2006) study on visitors' behavioural intentions referred specifically to socialization and enjoyment factors. This indicated the reliability of several items to focus more on the experiential nature of the international students' experiences whilst abroad. Six items were consequently adapted for the questionnaire as follows:

- 15b. I wanted to learn new things.
- 15f. I wanted to meet new people.
- 15h. I wanted to be with other students who share similar interests.
- 16a. I wanted to get away.
- 16d. I wanted to enjoy a friendly atmosphere.
- 16f. I wanted to have a good time.

In reviewing the literature (see Section 2.5), it seems that while certain motivations may contribute to students' engagement behaviours international students' may also have various concerns about their international HE experience which may either hinder their willingness to engage or otherwise have a negative effect on their overall perceptions. With this in mind, the questionnaire measured students' self-reported concerns twice using 16 items identified in previous research (Martin et al., 1995; Presley et al., 2010; Robertson et al., 2000; UKCOSA, 2004). In particular, as a predecessor for the development of the ISB instrument, the UKCOSA (2004) report assessed international students' concerns before and during their time studying in the UK according to 19 different issues. When compared to other research on international students' issues with personal and academic adjustment and development of intercultural skills (as mentioned above and reviewed previously in Section 2.5), similar concerns have been identified as causes of anxiety for international students when either choosing to study abroad and/or during their experiences abroad as international students. Thus, the primary issues for concern for international students have been represented in two parts of the questionnaire (Q17a-p and Q22a-p) to focus on students' expectations and experienced concerns through the following items:

- a. Learning and/or using English as a foreign language
- b. Coping with academic coursework
- c. Managing my time
- d. Meeting people
- e. Making friends
- f. Issues related to accommodation
- g. Maintaining my health
- h. Being away from home
- i. Being away from family and friends
- j. Adapting to the local climate
- k. Using the local currency
- l. Having enough money
- m. Adjusting to English customs
- n. Adapting to local foods
- o. Using local transportation
- p. Traveling on weekends and/or during holidays

By measuring the items twice, comparisons could be made between students' reported levels of expectations before arriving and their reported levels of experienced difficulty whilst abroad similar to previous longitudinal research (Allen and Herron, 2003; Braskamp et al., 2009; Gu et al., 2010; Martin et al., 1995; Ryan and Twibell, 2000).

As discussed earlier (see Section 2.3), student engagement is seen as a critical element in the student experience, yet there has been much debate about its conceptualisation. Two sections of the questionnaire were created to focus on the "behavioural" and "socio-cultural" aspects of student engagement (refer to Section 2.3.1; see Abe et al., 1998; Astin, 1984; Brennan et al., 2009; Kuh et al., 2008; Milem and Berger, 1997; Pace, 1984). Though the College Student Experiences

Questionnaire instrument (Pace, 1984) addressed students' reported involvement in 142 activities, some of the items were considered irrelevant in the context of this study. However, in reviewing other instruments such as the AUSSE (Coates, 2010), the CEQ (McInnis et al., 2000), the NSS (Ramsden et al., 2010), and the NSSE (Kuh, 2001b), common items were identified regarding students' engagement behaviours; as such, various measures for reporting students' engagement behaviours have been incorporated into the questionnaire to include:

- 1 item about academic contact hours (Q18 / Q23);
- 4 items for involvement with the students' union based on membership in clubs and/or societies (Q19 / Q24), Give-It-A-Go sessions, club nights, live performances or gigs (Q25a-c);
- 2 items for attendance at either university careers fairs or advice/skills sessions (Q25d-e);
- 2 items for attendance at activities hosted by the International Student Office involving Global Café and Global Saturdays trips (Q26-27); and
- 23 items regarding involvement in activities outside of the University (Q21 / Q28).

Measuring the items twice – both in their home country and whilst abroad at the University – was considered useful to increasing understanding of students' experiences based on comparing data for student engagement from both a baseline or control context (i.e. in their home country) and an experimental context as international students (i.e. at University). The items specific to the University were chosen based on information gathered in 2011/12 from the students' union and the International Student Office. However, the 23 items inquiring about outside activities were derived and adapted largely from those used by Carr and Axelsen (2009) in their study comparing international and domestic students' leisure behaviours in Australia; the chosen items were comparatively identified with those utilised in other studies regarding students' academic and social integration (Milem and Berger, 1997; Pizam and Fleischer, 2005; Stuart et al., 2011; Teichler, 2004; Williams, 2005). As recent research has not examined students' experiences by considering both academic and non-academic behaviours of students in this manner (Clark et al., 2014; Lizzio and Wilson, 2014; Milem and Berger, 1997), examining student engagement required a more exploratory approach.

The questionnaire also asked students to reflect upon their experiences and respond to 51 items encompassing various perceptions about their international experience based on previous research (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Hosany and Witham, 2009; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Kuh, 1995; McInnis et al., 2000; Perrucci and Hu, 1995; Yang et al., 2006; Williams, 2005). The 41 items of student satisfaction from the ISB instrument (i-graduate, 2012) and the five constructs identified by Arambewela and Hall (2006) in their study of international student satisfaction using the SERQUAL

framework (i.e. Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, and Tangibles) were considered especially helpful in this endeavour, as well as the six dimensions of experiences identified by Hosany and Witham (2010) which directly relate back to Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience framework (i.e. Education, Entertainment, Esthetics, Escapism, Memory, and Arousal). Additionally, rather than only measuring students' reported satisfaction with their experience, it was considered essential to demarcate the overall quality of the students' experiences based on their overall perceptions (as discussed throughout Section 2.1); as such, students' overall perceptions were examined in three areas – overall satisfaction (Q32), willingness to recommend (Q33a-c), and overall experience quality (Q34). The three items on students' willingness to recommend were included as other studies have indicated personal referrals as primary indicators for recruiting potential students (Douglas et al., 2006, 2008; Doyle et al., 2010; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The inclusion of separate items for overall satisfaction and experience quality similarly followed previous research (Chen and Chen, 2011; Cole et al., 2002; Hosany and Witham, 2010). There were also additional questions included at the end of the online questionnaire incorporating individual open-ended response items about what was most memorable, surprising, and disappointing about the students' experience, as well as what enhanced their personal experience and what they felt could be improved. The open-ended responses were examined using content analysis and coded according to emergent themes in the qualitative analysis along with the interviews.

Although the original plan for data collection proposed opening the questionnaire at the start of November 2012, active recruitment for participants during first term was delayed partially in agreement with staff from the University's International Office. This was done in order to not detract from students' participation in the bi-annual ISB survey administered by the University's International Office from mid-November through 7 December 2012 (which had been delayed from the original time period of October-November). However, this change in timing consequently meant limited access to students during first term as exams for taught students followed immediately after the Christmas holidays in January 2013. Access to the questionnaire was provided in both paper formats and online through Bristol Online Surveys from November 2012 until June 2013, with more active recruitment after January 2013. Periodic reminders were regularly posted from January–June 2013 via social media and email communication asking for additional participants. All of the participants in this study chose to complete the questionnaire online rather than fill out the paper forms. Additionally, in order to increase participation to achieve at least the minimum sample required, a prize draw for two £10 Amazon vouchers was offered as a bonus incentive for students beginning in March 2013.

3.4.1.1 Pilot Study of the Questionnaire

Following the initial period of immersion and informal observation at the University, a process of pre-testing and piloting the instrumentation for this study began. As Cohen et al. (2005) state, “the wording of questionnaires is of paramount importance and that pretesting is crucial to its success” (p.260). Accordingly, the early development and pretesting of the questionnaire involved presenting the proposed questionnaire to a selected number of international students from various nations (i.e. Spain, Lebanon, and Japan) to review and identify any potential problems. Based on their feedback, modifications were made to verify time required for completion, correct translations, and ameliorate potential comprehension issues (Newby, 2010). Additionally, the Likert scales used for multiple items in the questionnaire were altered from 5-point and 7-point to 4-point responses in order to prevent indecisive participants from choosing an impartial middle option (Williams and Johnson, 2011). While 5-point and 7-point Likert scales are more common, the 4-point scale has been reliably used in other research (Deardorff, 2006; i-graduate, 2014; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; Pace, 1984; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2004). I initially contacted potential respondents online using Facebook via the Global Community group page by posting an invitation to participate in the study with a secure link to the questionnaire which had been created through the Bristol Online Survey system. The Bristol Online Survey system displayed the questionnaire in an easy-to-read format by separating different sections into individual pages (20 pages altogether, including the introduction to the study with a participation agreement and a final page thanking participants and providing them with my contact details if they wanted more information) and further provided a secure means of collecting and storing data from students. I was already a member of this free access online social community (the Global Community group on Facebook) and postings regarding research are quite common in such forums.

A pilot study was conducted during the summer of 2012 in order to test the questionnaire intended for use in the main study. Specifically, the pilot aimed to:

- Check the clarity and comprehension of the items used in the questionnaire
- Gain feedback regarding questionnaire content and design
- Verify the time needed to complete the questionnaire
- Conduct trial analyses on the data in preparation for the main study

The pilot sample included data collected from surveys completed by 15 international students from the 2011/12 academic year. The developed questionnaire was distributed online and was made available from July to August 2012. Participants for the pilot were contacted via the Global Community group page on Facebook. Additional responses were also obtained via a snowballing effect when the initial request was

then forwarded by individual group members and those participants who had completed the questionnaire. The initial target for the pilot study had been for between 100 and 200 participants. The low response rate may potentially have been attributed to the possibility that most international students had either returned to their home country or went travelling after their studies ended in June, resulting in less frequent contact with the University or limited internet access. Initially a three stage data collection process for questionnaires was proposed; this was subsequently reduced to a single questionnaire format as a result of the pilot as students were found to be less likely to respond once their courses end and they have returned home. While the data from the pilot were limited due to the small sample size, there were useful findings which influenced the methodology adopted for the main research effort and indicated issues which could be explored further in the semi-structured interviews.

Participants in the pilot study represented a range of various socio-demographic characteristics with a reported age range of 18-39 and the majority of responses from individuals over the age of 21. Altogether, the pilot data included data from 2 Foundation Year students, 6 Undergraduates, 5 postgraduate taught students, and 2 postgraduate research students. More women participated in the pilot than men (10 compared with 5) and a significant proportion of the participants were single ($n=11$) with few married respondents ($n=4$). Participants in the pilot study came from all over the world including Africa ($n=1$), the Americas ($n=2$), Asia ($n=7$), Australia ($n=2$), and Europe ($n=3$). The majority of participants were at the University for an entire year ($n=12$) as opposed to a single semester ($n=3$). Reported academic faculty enrolments were distributed across the University in Arts and Humanities ($n=4$), Business ($n=2$), ESSL ($n=5$), Engineering ($n=1$), Environment ($n=1$), and cross-faculty disciplines ($n=2$).

As the intended subscales for the main study were developed using and adapting items from previous studies, the data from the pilot study further indicated the questionnaire had good reliability with high internal consistency (i.e. Cronbach alphas over .70) between items from the online questionnaire (Pagano, 2010; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Also, while SEM makes it possible to quantify the relationships between individual items, the small sample size of the pilot indicated a potential need to calculate additional summative scores for students' motivation, engagement, and perceptions. Basically, complicated SEM analysis cannot be reliably completed if the study sample is too small. In this case, contingent summative scores can be used to combine items to measure concepts for either correlation or regression analysis (Cole et al., 2002; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Hosany and Witham, 2009; Pegg and Little, 2008). Based on comparing overall mean scores for items in the pilot, students reported that they had come to the University mostly in order to grow and develop

personally, gain experience, enhance future career opportunities, develop new skills, and have a new experience. The students were also engaged in their HE experiences in a variety of ways – through the students' union, the International Student Office, within their academic faculty, and informal activities on an individual basis. Average reported scores comparing expectations and experienced concerns for most items indicated either a reduction or remained relatively constant as concerns about time management displayed the only increase in the average scores. Most of the students were positive about their experiences, with only one negative response; however, the students unanimously stated they would recommend studying abroad to others.

3.4.1.2 Pilot Study: Lessons Learned and Implications for the Main Study

The piloting process had multiple implications for the methods used in the main study (i.e. participant recruitment, instrument design and administration, and data analysis procedures) which warrant consideration. The pilot indicated that participants from the intended study sample (i.e. international students at the University) could be effectively recruited via social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) and at the weekly Global Café events. The pilot also indicated that snowball sampling was likely to occur as students recommended the questionnaire to others through personal contacts and social networks. Additional recruitment could then possibly occur by sending emails through academic departments, through clubs and societies at the students' union, and posting recruitment flyers around the University. The pilot also identified an average time of 15 minutes for participants to complete the questionnaire. A few participants in the pilot provided comments on the overall length of the study, as well as their general approval of the content used. Finally, the pilot indicated that the scales adapted for use in the questionnaire with specific items to address the primary concepts of interest to the study (i.e. students' motivations, engagement behaviours, concerns, and perceptions about their international experiences) exhibited good reliability with alpha scores over .70. The pilot further indicated that there was potential in using bootstrapping methods and summative scores for scales in the SEM analyses if the final sample size in the main study would not permit examination of the relative effects of individual items.

3.4.2 Developing the Interviews – Preliminary Interview Schedule

Unlike the questionnaire, there was not a full separate piloting effort conducted for the interviews. Rather, the year of immersion provided multiple opportunities to pretest the qualitative methods developed for the study which included:

- Discussions with University staff from the International Office and individual academic departments regarding issues with engaging international students;
- Ethnographic observations of opportunities for international students at the University and in the wider community; as well as,

- Conversational interviews conducted with the three students who had been involved in the pretesting of the questionnaire.

Thus, the year of immersion provided an opportunity for pretesting to identify issues of interest and further clarification in the semi-structured interviews. Such issues were then compared back to other qualitative research on international students' experiences (Doyle et al., 2010; Freestone and Geldens, 2008; Moores and Popadiuk, 2011; Murphy-LeJeune, 1995) and student engagement (Kuh, 1993; NUS and HSBC, 2008; Tinto, 1997). A preliminary interview schedule was formed initially from the review of the literature and then refined with the feedback and recommendations from the pretesting effort. The revised schedule thus provided a basic outline of possible questions to be asked within the semi-structured format of the main study including:

- Why did you choose to come to the University?
- What were some of your first impressions (of the city/of the University)?
- What do you enjoy doing here in the city, or in your home country?
- How would you describe your experiences as an international student?

Considering the extensive amount of information collected by the questionnaire, it was important that the interviews did not merely serve to reiterate the students' previous responses but rather complemented the questionnaire data by providing more clarification and understanding regarding their given answers and personal experiences in relation to the primary research questions for this study. The first two interviews included in the main study were also conducted with acquaintances which encouraged a more open discussion between participant and researcher without needing to establish a rapport first, whilst offering an additional opportunity to gain feedback and evaluate the interview process.

In order to recruit participants for the semi-structured interviews, a question was included in the questionnaire asking participants if they would be willing to be interviewed about their experience. Students who indicated that they would be willing to participate in the interviews were then contacted via email and phone calls with interview invitations. The interviews were conducted in a variety of formats including one-to-one conversations between myself as the researcher and the student participants, one email conversation managed through multiple emails with questions for and responses from a student participant, and one interview held in a University department which involved one student participant, a member of staff, and myself. I had been invited by the staff member to attend a focus group with international students from their department and only one of the invited students came. When asked, both the staff member and the student gave their consent to include the interview data in my PhD research.

All of the interviews asked similar questions based on the interview schedule with opportunities for students to reflect and expand on various aspects of their personal experiences. As a fellow student rather than someone in a more authoritative position, I did not intend to impose a formal or hierarchical structure on participants. However, I did attempt to maintain the primary focus for discussion in the interviews on the topics of interest to this study. As Wragg (1984) states,

A semi-structured interview schedule tends to be the one most favoured by educational researchers as it allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling. (p.184)

Most of the interviews (i.e. aside from the first two conducted with acquaintances) started by establishing a rapport between myself as the researcher and the student as a participant. All of the interviews then subsequently incorporated an open discussion of motivations, expectations, engagement, and perceptions. While the students generally determined the flow of conversation in most of the interviews I administered alone, the interview with the staff member also focused on specific aspects related to the department and its aims to improve programming and opportunities.

As the interviews followed students' participation in the questionnaire, I tried to ask questions which related to the individual student's experiences based on their previous answers. Before each interview, I examined the individual student's responses to the questionnaire and made notes of any noticeable trends in their answers. For example, one student indicated an involvement in multiple activities through the students' union and generally positive responses about their experiences. Another student was similarly positive but indicated no involvement in such activities. I tried to refer back to students' answers during the interviews as much as possible in order to ask them to elaborate on why they had answered particular items in the questionnaire as they did. Before conducting the interviews, I also reviewed general trends from on-going preliminary analysis of the questionnaire data.

Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder. I also took additional notes by hand to record personal thoughts and reflections during the interviews and note any follow-up questions for participants. Participants were asked for their consent before the recorder was turned on as well as given the opportunity to provide additional information and feedback to the researcher after the interview was finished. I transcribed all of the interviews verbatim using basic word processing software (Microsoft Word). In accord with University ethical procedures for research, outside transcription services were not used; allowing the researcher to maintain confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants. Furthermore, transcription software (i.e. Dragon) was also dismissed as unreliable as it is based on voice recognition and the interviews were conducted with multiple individuals. Instead, the transcribed interviews were

repeatedly double-checked by the researcher for errors or omissions by comparing them to their respective recordings (both in part and in full).

Each participant was identified in the interviews with a code (S1, S2, S3, etc.) rather than using their actual name. This ensured anonymity of participants and confidentiality according to the ethical guidelines set by the University. The entire process of transcribing interviews took a total of two months to complete and resulted in 87 pages of transcribed speech and 45,218 words (A4, single-spaced). More detailed information (i.e. linguistic notations, semantic abstractions) was not included in the transcripts as this study was not focused on examining indicators of non-verbal communication, perceived emotions, or tone of voice (Krippendorff, 2004). Rather, the focus of transcription was to record the content of the interviews and to present the personal individual perspectives of the international students' experiences. As such, transcription did not involve correcting the language, expressions, or grammar students used in their speech. Furthermore, non-verbal aspects of communication were not noted in the transcripts aside from pauses and laughter.

3.5 Methods for Data Analysis

Analysis of the research data was conducted using multiple computer software programmes with quantitative data analyses being conducted in SPSS[®] 21.0 and Amos[®] 21, and qualitative data analyses conducted in NVivo[®] 10. Understanding the intended methods for analysis was important as:

In designing a questionnaire or interview schedule, the investigator must plan for the analysis stage in case the point is reached where the data collected are unsuitable for the method of analysis required. (Goulding, 1984, p.231)

As aforementioned, I had previous experience working with SPSS[®] to manage and analyse data and subsequently completed additional training to become more familiar with both multivariate statistics (Amos[®]) and qualitative coding and analysis procedures (NVivo[®]). While the Bristol Online Survey system allowed for initial explorations of trends among the questionnaire data, more complex statistical analysis required importing and coding the data for use in other programmes.

3.5.1 Quantitative Analyses

Quantitative analysis of the data collected incorporated a range of simple and complex techniques conducted in concurrent stages. The first stage of data analysis involved exploring the data set in SPSS[®] for any missing data and potential outliers. Incomplete questionnaires were ultimately removed from the final analysis. Conducting initial exploratory analysis provided the opportunity to examine descriptive statistics regarding the profile of international students participating in the research and to gain broader insights into the pattern of responses. Student characteristics such as current

year of study, school or department, marital status, gender, age, and nationality were used to make comparisons within and between groups. SPSS® 21.0 was chosen to analyse the quantitative data as it can be used in conducting various analyses including descriptive statistics for the sample, correlations between variables, calculating scale reliability through factor analysis, and evaluating regression models. While I recognised a chance of experiencing Type I errors in the analysis (i.e. finding significance where it does not necessarily exist due to using multiple tests), corrections such as Bonferoni adjustments have not been done in this study as then there could be an alternative chance of encountering Type II errors (i.e. not identifying differences in the data where they do exist) (Pagano, 2010). In order to address this potential problem, effect sizes for the data have been reported along with interpretations of magnitude where applicable in addition to values for statistical significance (p), observing standard conventions for social sciences research (ibid).

Exploring the variables of interest for this study (i.e. different types of motivations, engagement, and perceptions) involved utilising a combination of items in creating individual subscales rather than a single observed measurement. Based on reviewing previous literature, I expected that through a series of regression models the elements of planned behaviour (i.e. motivations and expectations) would be found to influence student engagement and perceptions and furthermore that student engagement would affect perceptions. Regression analyses were used to determine the level to which one variable or outcome could be predicted based on measurements gathered from one or more other variables (Bartholomew et al., 2008; Pagano, 2010). Furthermore, as the sample incorporated multiple categories of interest based on socio-demographic differences, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to indicate the total variance between mean values measured within and between different groups (ibid). Both regression and ANOVA statistics are used to indicate causal relationships (also known as paths) which exist between different variables and/or identified subscales. However, this study intended to incorporate a more complex analysis using individual items as well. Namely, structural equation modeling (SEM) provides an opportunity for quantitative testing of theoretical models and further increases researchers' understanding of complex statistical relationships which exist between various constructs (Byrne, 2001; Hoyle, 1995; Kline, 2005; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Based on creating quantifiable estimates for linear and non-linear relationships grounded in theory, SEM is flexible as analysis can be conducted in both exploratory and confirmatory contexts on either experimental or non-experimental data (ibid). SEM further builds on regression and ANOVA by identifying and accounting for errors in individual items in addition to calculating standard errors for the variables and

subscales within the model, as well as comparing individual and mean values between and within-groups (ibid).

As I intended to use SEM for exploring the relationships between the multiple aspects of the international students' experiences, additional software beyond SPSS® was also required. SEM involves analysing data using complex multivariate statistics conducted with the assistance of computer software programmes such as Amos®, CALIS®, EQS®, R®, and LISREL® (Blunch, 2011; Kline, 2005). Amos® was used in conjunction with SPSS® in order to create and evaluate the SEM(s) used in this research. Amos® is designed for SEM and provides a special multivariate estimation method based on maximum likelihood estimation to avoid problems associated with deleting cases with incomplete records or individually inputting missing information (Kline, 2005, p.56). Using SEM requires the researcher to understand the theoretical background of the research, as well as how to apply analysis and interpret relevant findings (Blunch, 2011; Kline, 2005). The output of SEM analysis can be quite complex displaying results from multiple analyses simultaneously.

The variables identified for the purposes of this research were based upon previous research in international education, student engagement, and international student experiences which have included a focus on the theory of planned behaviour and the theory of student involvement for grounding the research (as presented in Chapter Two and synthesised by the proposed conceptual framework for the experiences of international students in Figure 14). Figure 17 graphically illustrates the basic identified model to be further explored and examined in this study using proposed relationships between the variables of interest.



Figure 17. Proposed model for exploring international student experiences

Data collected from individual items in the questionnaire was imported into the model and analysed considering SEM output of correlations, regressions, and factor scores. As Figure 17 displays, different relationships were examined: between students' motivations and student engagement; between students' engagement and their concerns; between students' engagement and their perceptions about their experiences; and between students' concerns and their perceptions. The model in

Figure 17 was examined for goodness of fit in relation to the most commonly used estimates for SEM, namely the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Blunch, 2011; Byrne, 2001; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). According to standards for commonly accepted practice (ibid), when a proposed model initially displays poor fit to the data, it needs to be re-specified based on changes following the modification indices and then applied to the data once again. This process is controlled as any modifications should correspond to the theoretical background underpinning the research; modifications which would directly conflict with the theory should not be implemented (ibid). Finally, the parameter estimates for an acceptable model are examined and interpreted for any practical meanings related to previous literature and/or theories.

SEM has been found to be helpful in more in-depth studies as it allows for the statistical examination of dynamic relationships between both observed (manifest) and unobserved (latent) variables. Manifest variables are those which can be observed and/or measured directly, whereas latent variables (or factors) may represent indirect measurements and/or theoretical constructs (Blunch, 2011; Byrne, 2001; Kline, 2005; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). For example, SEM has been used to predict students' Verbal and Quantitative abilities (latent variables) based on an accumulation of different test scores (manifest variables) (Bartholomew et al., 2008). This research has followed the recognised standard for SEM models in Amos[®] by representing manifest variables with rectangles and latent variables with ovals. Students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions are all based on personal assessments within a particular context (see Bryson, 2014a; Kahu, 2013). Therefore, exploring these latent constructs has involved exploring the effects of multiple indicators for better measurement of the variables of interest to this study.

3.5.2 Qualitative Analyses

Whereas the questionnaire asked participants to provide specific information on several previously identified indicators for the variables of interest for this study (i.e. students' motivations, engagement behaviours, concerns, and perceptions), the interviews were more open for students to reflect on their experiences and provide in-depth information explaining and justifying their previous responses. The process of qualitative data analysis was iterative as the data needed to be explored first for emergent themes and potential relationships (Creswell, 2009). The data from the interview transcripts and questionnaire comments was examined using content analysis, which involved coding and organising the data into significant themes. This included noting information which either supported or refuted the previously proposed relationships between the variables from the questionnaire.

Methods for content analysis have been used in both quantitative and qualitative research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004, 2009; Ryan and Bernard, 2000). According to Krippendorff (2004), qualitative approaches to content analysis include the following:

- *They require a close reading of relatively small amounts of textual matter.*
 - *They involve the rearticulation (interpretation) of given texts into new (analytical, deconstructive, emancipatory, or critical) narratives that are accepted within particular scholarly communities that are sometimes opposed to positivist traditions of inquiry.*
 - *The analysts acknowledge working within hermeneutic circles in which their own socially or culturally conditioned understandings constitutively participate.*
- (p.17)

The data collected for this study has been examined using these characteristics of content analysis: focus on the qualitative data collected, interpreting students' comments in relation to the research, and subsequently acknowledging my role as the researcher in presenting one understanding of the findings from the data.

The data collected could have multiple meanings ascribed depending on the stance of the researcher, or as Krippendorff (2004) states:

A text does not exist without a reader, a message does not exist without an interpreter, and data do not exist without an observer. In a content analysis, it is methodologically trained researchers who, being familiar with their texts, design the analysis, instruct their coders to describe textual elements, and end up interpreting the results – always in the expectation of others' understanding. (p.22)

While I acknowledge that the coding categories and meanings that have been ascribed to the data collected are not the only possible interpretation, I have examined the data in response to the stated research questions for this study and framed my interpretations within this context. The process of content analysis used in this study is explored further in Chapter Five along with a discussion of the findings.

As aforementioned, transcribing the interviews took approximately two months as the complete dataset contained over four hours of recorded conversation. Each of the ten interview transcripts was imported directly into NVivo® so their contents could be coded into themes and analysed. As Ryan and Bernard (2000) state, "codes act as *tags* for later retrieval or indexing... they can mark simple phrases or extend across multiple pages" (p.782). Data was examined through multiple readings and codes were modified accordingly. At first, multiple categories for codes were created for individual comments which were then altered as a result of considering similarities between different codes (Boulton and Hammersley, 2006; MacQueen et al., 2009). The themes used in the coding process were examined by reflecting on the collective qualitative data set and reviewing sections of the transcripts with others. As others indicated similar topics for thematic codes, these were deemed acceptable. The frequencies of different themes were then explored using overall coding summaries.

As previously stated, the information gathered from the ten interviews was used to refine the proposed SEM model(s) as well as to provide further information, clarification, and an opportunity to triangulate the results obtained from the online questionnaire. While an initial structural model was proposed based on previous research (see Figure 17), I acknowledged the possibility that this could change based on the iterative process of reviewing the data both individually and in its entirety.

3.6 Issues for Consideration in Research

Every research endeavour includes individual issues which should be considered based on the chosen methodology and methods (Creswell, 2009; Johnson and Turner, 2003). In particular, the researcher should consider issues related to reliability and validity as well as ethical implications for both the researcher and participants.

3.6.1 Reliability and Validity Issues

Issues related to reliability and validity are important matters of concern in every research effort (Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Krippendorff, 2004, 2009). In their most basic forms, reliability refers to whether results are trustworthy and can be replicated while validity focuses on whether the data collected accurately represents the problem being studied (ibid). As indicated throughout the literature review in Chapter Two, this study has been based upon filling perceived gaps in previously disparate areas of validated research (i.e. motivation, student engagement, student experience, leisure/recreation and tourism, and international students). Positive feedback was provided by various participants during the pre-testing, piloting, and data collection phases. For example, a student posted the following comment “I liked that I have been asked these questions” in response to a thread which had included the link to the questionnaire on Facebook. Other students gave positive verbal feedback and encouragement saying they were interested in the study, wished me good luck with the PhD, and wanted to know what would ultimately be done with the results (i.e. publications). In general, these positive responses from students were taken to indicate the validity of the research as feedback showed the questions asked in the questionnaire and the conversations during the semi-structured interviews were personally relevant, focused on exploring international students’ experiences and their perspectives of student engagement. Additionally, in terms of reliability, all of the methods used in this study for analysing the quantitative and qualitative data and interpreting the findings are presented within this thesis (Chapters Four and Five) in order to allow other researchers to replicate the techniques in other research endeavours and assess the results.

Beyond concerns regarding replicability of research methods, reliability is also used in this study with reference to more specific statistical terminology standard for

quantitative research. In the quantitative analyses for the questionnaire, all scale and subscale reliability measurements were calculated using a Cronbach's coefficient alpha (α) for data collected. In quantitative statistics, values above .70 are generally considered to indicate good reliability for the instrument (Pagano, 2010; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Since the items used for variables of interest in the questionnaire have been mostly adapted from those used in previous research (see Section 3.4.1 addressing the inclusion of particular items for students' motivations, engagement behaviours, concerns, and perceptions about their experience), significant problems with scale validity and reliability were not expected. The pilot study of the questionnaire further indicated acceptable reliability measures for the individual scales and subscales for the variables of interest in this study. As this questionnaire is newly formed for the purposes of this study however, in assessing each of the variable scales and subscales using data from the main study, individual items found to reduce the alpha scores were re-evaluated and considered for removal from later analyses. This was done in reference to the reviewed theories grounding the research and according to the general guidelines for reliability of models and statistical fit in SEM as explained earlier in Section 3.5.1.

Additional issues related to validity were considered as the sample population for the study were self-selected and the chosen research environment did not involve isolating participants from one another. These limitations were inherent to the chosen study design as the research involved exploring individual attitudes and social interaction was considered to be a primary part of student engagement. Additionally, a recognised issue in student engagement research has been identified as participants in studies tend to be at extreme ends of engagement from either 'disengaged' or 'super-engaged' segments of populations (Bryson, 2014a). Gaining data from disengaged students was considered especially difficult as the research could not identify or contact these individuals specifically. Furthermore, although an incentivised research plan may have garnered greater participation numbers, this could have also resulted in participants providing responses which were more focused on providing answers they thought were desired rather than answers based on participants' personal opinions and experiences. Likewise, data collected by staff members and/or at other universities may elicit different responses from students with varied interpretations. Even when unintended, there is often a perceived divide or dissociation between students and staff (i.e. a conscious or unconscious 'us' versus 'them' mentality) that may have adverse effects on other research efforts focused on student engagement and students' experiences, basically skewing results towards what students decide is 'appropriate' to discuss with the staff member. Thus, while the presentation of data and analysis for this study refer to general trends and interpretations based on the data generated from the students,

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wide generalisations have mostly been avoided in recognising the limitations of this study (see Section 6.6) and identifying implications and areas for future research (see Sections 7.3 and 7.4).

3.6.2 Ethical Issues

As this study was focused on exploring student engagement from the international student perspective, it has been important to consider not only what the research was about but also the purpose for conducting it. Of primary import was that this research was conducted for academic purposes and administered independently from the University and the students' union. Potential participants for the study were recruited from informal settings and participation was not connected in any way to individual students' academic progress or assessments. The potential for inherent researcher bias has also been addressed as the research design incorporated mixed methods adapted from previous research, collected data based on the experiences of other students, and interpreted findings in reference to previous research. Thereby, the study was conducted with an aim towards impartiality and collaboration with student participants, without influences from staff or University administration (Simons, 1984).

Authorisation for the study was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University (Ethics Reference: LTEDUC-022), recognising the requirements for safe and secure data collection and storage. Participants were asked to acknowledge their awareness and understanding with signed consent agreements before participating in both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, all results from this research have been anonymised for confidentiality and have not been intended to identify any individual. This study was considered as having low-risk consequences for the researcher and participants; none of the questions were intended to create stress or increase anxiety among participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As stated earlier in Section 3.3.2, the study was focused on HE students and has not included responses from anyone under the age of 18. While the research has been intended to reach a wide representative sample of the University's international student population, participants' knowledge and comfort using English was necessary both for obtaining consent and avoiding problems in comprehension.

3.7 Summary of Methodology

This study focuses on data collected from the international student population at the University during the 2012/13 academic period. A pilot study was conducted in Summer 2012 which indicated the instruments would be relatively reliable and valid in addressing the research targets of exploring student engagement and the experiences of international students. The results then informed the main study, incorporating a mixed methods design with a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to collect

data from November 2012 to July 2013. This study was conducted according to University ethical procedures and has acknowledged the impact of various factors which have both constrained and enhanced the research process. Analysis of the individual data sets was conducted separately using multiple software packages, as well as combining the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data in order to examine and interpret the proposed SEM for the variables concerned. Accordingly, results from the data are organised into separate chapters focused on presenting quantitative (Chapter Four) and qualitative data (Chapter Five) with a subsequent discussion of findings (Chapter Six).

Chapter Four: Results from Quantitative Analyses

This study includes mixed methods data from an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews in order to answer the primary research questions:

1. What motivates international students to study abroad as part of their higher education experience?
2. How do international students engage in their higher education experience whilst abroad?
3. How do different motivations and engagement behaviours influence international students' perceptions of their HE experience whilst abroad?

Results from analysing the data are presented in two chapters based on exploring the individual findings. This chapter focuses on the results from the quantitative analyses of students' responses to questions from the questionnaire. Chapter Five will then focus on the results of qualitative analyses of students' responses to open-ended questions from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire has incorporated questions on student characteristics, previous experiences and planned behaviours (motivations and expectations), engagement behaviours (both in their home country and whilst abroad), concerns whilst abroad, and reflective perceptions encompassing various aspects of students' experiences whilst abroad. From a total of 444 responses, 249 students completed all items in the questionnaire, representing a 56% completion rate. The online format of the questionnaire required students to provide responses to all items on a page before continuing to another section. Thus, in an effort to avoid making inferences from missing or incomplete data, the analyses presented focus on students' responses from the fully completed questionnaires. Based on the methodology presented in Chapter Three, results have been gathered from different statistical analyses conducted using IBM SPSS[®] Statistics 21.0 and Amos[®] 21 software. Appendix A provides an aggregated compilation of the questionnaire responses.

4.1 Descriptive Analyses

A summary of demographic information and characteristics for participants in the questionnaire is provided in Table 5. From the 249 students who completed the questionnaire, student ages ranged from 18-42 with a mean of 24.49 years (SD= 4.37). The majority of students reported an age range from 20-27 representing 76.7% of all responses (N=191), with 52.2% of the total sample population (N=130) being between the ages of 21 and 24.

Table 5: Summary of Student Characteristics for the Questionnaire

Demographic Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
18-22	101	40.6%
23-27	100	40.2%
28+	48	19.3%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	86	34.5%
Female	163	65.5%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single (never married)	232	93.2%
Married	17	6.8%
<i>World Region</i>		
Africa	12	4.8%
Americas	45	18.1%
Asia	77	30.9%
Australia	3	1.2%
Europe	112	45.0%
<i>Year of Study</i>		
Foundation Year	7	2.8%
Undergraduates	141	56.6%
Postgraduates	101	40.6%
<i>Programme at University</i>		
Semester	42	16.9%
Academic Year	207	83.1%
<i>University Faculty</i>		
Arts	81	32.5%
Biological Sciences	19	7.6%
Business	48	19.3%
ESSL ^a	41	16.5%
Engineering	16	6.4%
Environment	18	7.2%
MAPS ^b	10	4.0%
Medicine & Health	8	3.2%
PVAC ^c	8	3.2%
Total Participants	249	100.0%

^a ESSL represents Education, Social Sciences and Law

^b MAPS represents Maths and Physical Sciences

^c PVAC represents Performance, Visual Arts and Communications

In order to analyse the data further, age groups have been used to represent traditional students between the ages of 18-22, older students between the ages of 23-27, and mature students over the age of 28. Based on these age groupings, 40.6% were traditional students aged 18-22, 40.2% were older students aged 23-27, and 19.3% were mature students over the age of 28.

More women completed the questionnaire than men as responses included 163 female students compared with 86 male students. As more female students tend to choose to study abroad than male students (HESA, 2014; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Nunan, 2006; Presley et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2009, 2011; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013), a gender bias among the participants may have been expected to some extent. Comparing gender differences between age groups (see Figure 18), the data showed higher participation rates from women than men in both the traditional (78 females: 23 males) and older student (68 females: 32 males) age groups. However, the mature student age group included responses from more men than women with 31 males: 17 females. There was also an interesting connection between students' gender and marital status. The majority of the students in this study were single (93.2%) with a much smaller proportion being married (6.8%); most of the married participants were male with 13 men compared to 4 women. None of the participants in this study reported being either separated, divorced, or widowed.

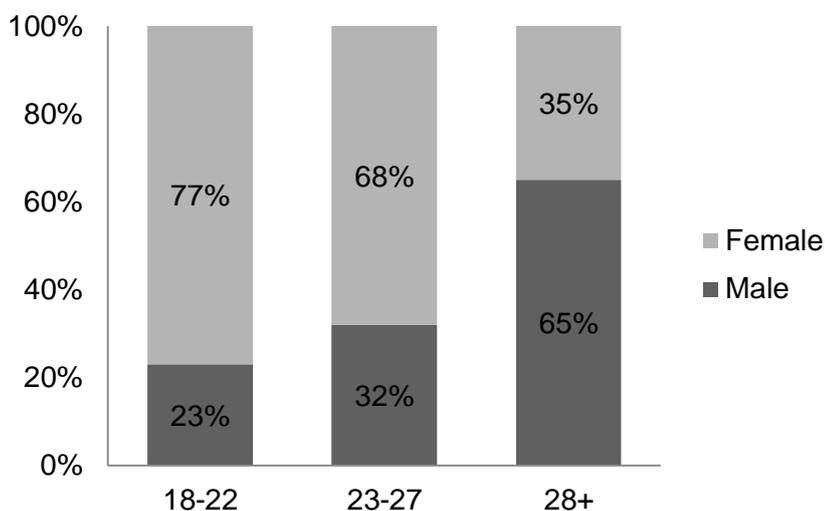


Figure 18. Comparing gender across age groups

The international students in this study came from all over the world, including 12 from Africa, 12 from Central and South America, 33 from North America, 59 from East Asia, 18 from Western Asia, 3 from Australia, 33 from Eastern Europe, and 79 from Western Europe. For further comparative analysis, these regions have been condensed to Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe as shown in Table 5 and displayed in Figure 19. Europe and Asia were the two most represented regions with 76% of all the international students who participated in the questionnaire.

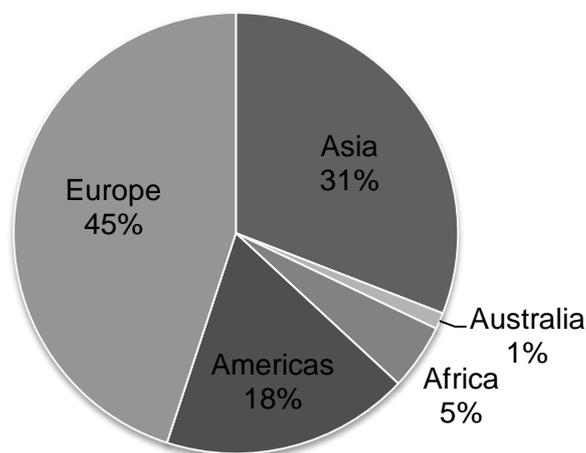


Figure 19. World regions represented by students

The study sample included respondents from 68 different countries with 3 students claiming dual citizenship. As shown in Table 6, six countries represented 39.0% of the students in this study as there were 23 students from Germany, 20 from China, 15 from France, 14 from Canada, 13 from the United States of America, and 12 from Italy. In order to maintain students' anonymity, countries represented by fewer than five students have not been listed in the table.

Table 6: Student Representation by Country

Country	N	Percent of Sample	Cumulative Percent
Germany	23	9.2%	9.2%
China	20	8.0%	17.3%
France	15	6.0%	23.3%
Canada	14	5.6%	28.9%
United States of America	13	5.2%	34.1%
Italy	12	4.8%	39.0%
Greece	8	3.2%	42.2%
Taiwan	8	3.2%	45.4%
India	7	2.8%	48.2%
Netherlands	7	2.8%	51.0%
Mexico	6	2.4%	53.4%
Japan	5	2.0%	55.4%
Saudi Arabia	5	2.0%	57.4%
Spain	5	2.0%	59.4%
Sweden	5	2.0%	61.4%
Others (<5 students)	96	38.6%	100%

The international students in this study represented all academic levels from Foundation Year students doing a prerequisite course before starting an undergraduate degree through Postgraduate Research students working on a PhD, EdD, or equivalent qualification. Altogether there were 7 Foundation Year students, 141 Undergraduate students, 61 Postgraduate Taught students, and 40 Postgraduate Research students. In order to do further comparative analysis across the groups, Postgraduate Taught

and Postgraduate Research have been combined as Postgraduate students as per Table 5. Consequently, all academic levels have been represented in this study as a 56.6% majority of the students were Undergraduates, 40.6% were Postgraduates, and 2.8% were in their Foundation Year.

Students chose to be abroad for part of their higher education experience for different lengths of time. This study has included responses from 42 students at the University for a single academic semester (including 3 students from first term and 39 students from second term) and 207 students attending for the entire academic year of 2012/13. The 207 academic year students included both students directly enrolled at the University in full degree programmes and students at the University for only one year as part of an academic exchange to complete a degree from their home university.

All nine academic faculties at the University were represented by the students who answered the online questionnaire. A majority of participants (68.3%) came from the three faculties of Arts, Business, and ESSL which tend to attract high numbers of international students. The Faculty of Arts had the highest response with students representing 32.5% of the total sample. The Faculty of Arts at the University includes both the Schools of English and Modern Languages and Cultures which may be of particular interest to international students. The Business School was also well represented in this study with the second highest number of students.

Overall, the participants in this study are considered to be fairly representative of the greater international student population at the University. The demographics presented above for the international students participating in this study are generally similar to international student demographics presented in marketing materials for the University with:

- More undergraduates than postgraduate students;
- Large numbers of European and Asian international students; and
- High participation rates for students from the Business School or the Faculties of Arts and ESSL.

4.1.1 Descriptive Analyses: Planned Behaviours

Students reported having a wide range of personal previous experiences, consulting different information sources, and decisions on or before arrival as shown in Table 7. When asked about previous international education experiences, 29.3% studied abroad before whereas 70.7% had not. Of the 73 who studied outside their home country previously, 11 were on short programmes lasting less than 3 months, 11 were involved in longer programmes of 4-6 months, nine were on extended programmes for 6-9 months, and 41 were involved in programmes lasting longer than 9 months.

Table 7: Previous Experiences and Preparations

Previous Experiences and Preparations	Number	Percentage
<i>Studied Abroad Before</i>		
No	176	70.7%
Yes	73	29.3%
<i>Been to Europe</i>		
No	74	29.7%
Yes	63	25.3%
From Europe	112	45.0%
<i>Been to England</i>		
No	123	49.4%
Yes	126	50.6%
<i>Information Sources</i>		
University website/print materials	198	79.5%
Internet Sources	188	75.5%
University's International Office	123	49.4%
Friends and Relatives	121	48.6%
Previous Trips	66	26.5%
Television or Movies	23	9.2%
Travel Books or Brochures	20	8.0%
National Embassy or Tourism Office	15	6.0%
Magazines	8	3.2%
2012 London Olympics	2	0.8%
Travel Agent	2	0.8%
<i>Arrival Experience</i>		
Alone	170	68.3%
With other students from home university	23	9.2%
With family or friends	56	22.5%
<i>Living Arrangements in the city</i>		
Private Accommodation	131	52.6%
University Accommodation	118	47.4%
Total Participants	249	100.0%

Students also had a variety of previous travel experiences both in Europe and England. Of the 249 students participating in the questionnaire, 45.0% were from Europe, 25.3% had visited Europe previously, and 29.7% had not been to Europe before. Slightly over half of the students (50.6%) had been to England at least once before coming to the University. For the rest of the students (49.4%), their arrival at the University was also their first experience of being in Britain.

Students used various sources of information to prepare themselves for coming to the University as shown in Table 7. The top three information sources for students preparing to study abroad at the University were the University website or printed materials (79.5%), the Internet (75.5%), and the University's International Office website or printed materials (49.4%). Word-of-mouth also played a role as 48.6% of the students said they had asked friends and relatives about their experiences. The 2012 London Olympics were included as a source of information for prospective students as the University had Olympic and Paralympic connections. Namely, members of the British national team regularly trained at the University's sport facilities and the University also hosted athletes from both the Chinese and Canadian national teams during summer 2012, which may have attracted some students through marketing these connections. In addition to the different sources listed in Table 7, students also said they gathered information via the study abroad office at their home university, other students who have studied abroad, prior work experience, and even English podcasts from BBC News.

Students' arrival experience at the University also varied. Some students arrived at the University at the start of term with other students from their home university (9.2%), whereas more students chose to arrive in the company of either family members or friends (22.5%). This was not unusual as many students may feel safer in a new environment when they arrive as part of a group. However, the majority of the students (68.3%) came to the University by themselves. Students chose from a variety of living arrangements for their international HE experience. In this study, slightly more students (52.6%) chose to rent a private flat or house or were otherwise living with friends and/or family members than students living in University accommodation (47.4%). Of the 131 students in private accommodation, 61 were living with other students, 21 lived alone, 21 lived with family members, 17 were living with friends from home, and 11 lived with non-students. For the 118 students in University accommodation, 49 indicated that they were mainly living with other international students, 35 lived with a mix of British and international students, and 34 said they were living with mostly British students.

In order to ascertain students' motivations for choosing to study internationally in 2012/13 as part of their HE experience, the online questionnaire included multiple items using a 4-point Likert scale (see Questions 15 and 16 in Appendix A). The measurement scale asked the students to rate each factor as affecting their decision to study abroad either 'Not At All', 'A Little', 'Somewhat', or 'Very Much' which have then been coded as values ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Very Much). Of 34 items presented in the questionnaire, the ten top motivating factors for the international students to study abroad in 2012/13 based on mean scores were as follows:

1. I wanted to gain experience [15l] (M=3.73, SD=.61);
2. I wanted to learn new things [15b] (M=3.63, SD=.67);
3. I wanted a new experience [16l] (M=3.55, SD=.77);
4. I wanted the opportunity to grow and develop as a person [15p] (M=3.51, SD=.77);
5. I wanted to meet new people [15f] (M=3.46, SD=.78).
6. I wanted to enhance future career opportunities [15n] (M=3.46, SD=.85);
7. I wanted to develop new skills [15e] (M=3.44, SD=.78);
8. I wanted to take interesting classes [15c] (M=3.33, SD=.90);
9. I wanted to be challenged [15k] (M=3.33; SD=.85); and
10. I wanted to travel [16i] (M=3.22, SD=.96).

As the 34 individual items are indicators of subscales representing different types of motivation, instead of discussing each item individually the scales and their reliability statistics are discussed further in Section 4.2 along with other scales for the variables of interest to this study.

Students' concerns with studying abroad were initially rated in the online questionnaire based on an expected level of difficulty for 16 items (see Appendix A, Question 17). Each item was rated using a 4-point Likert scale for whether the student had expected to experience difficulty either 'Not At All', 'A Little', 'Somewhat', or 'Very Much'. Based on mean scores, the top five concerns for students before arriving were:

1. Coping with academic coursework [17b] (M = 2.68, SD =.94);
2. Having enough money [17l] (M = 2.65, SD =1.07);
3. Time management [17c] (M = 2.50, SD =.96);
4. Being away from family and friends [17i] (M = 2.45, SD =1.08); and
5. Making friends [17e] (M = 2.43, SD =.95).

Subsequent measures considered students' concerns with studying abroad as to how much difficulty they had actually experienced with the 16 items using the same aforementioned 4-point scale (see Appendix A, Question 22). The students' responses were similar to their expected levels of concerns identifying the same five items with the highest mean scores. At this point however, concerns regarding time management rose above having enough money.

1. Coping with academic coursework [22b] (M = 2.57, SD =.98);
2. Time management [22c] (M = 2.56, SD =1.06)
3. Having enough money [22l] (M = 2.42, SD =1.08);
4. Being away from family and friends [22i] (M = 2.36, SD =1.05); and
5. Making friends [22e] (M = 2.29, SD =1.05).

A paired sample t-test was used to compare responses from students' expectations and experienced levels of concern for the 16 items (expectations minus realised concerns), as shown in Table 8. The table displays mean differences, standard deviations (SD), t values, significance (p), and effect sizes along with interpretations. While p values less than .05 indicate a significant difference (i.e. values are not equal),

effect sizes specify the magnitude of the difference (Pagano, 2010). Larger effect sizes indicate the differences in values have a more noticeable consequence or impact (ibid).

Table 8: Comparing Expectations and Experienced Levels of Concern

Item of Concern	Mean	SD	t	p	effect size (interpretation)
Issues related to accommodation	.26	.99	4.08	.00*	0.25 (moderate)
Having enough money	.24	.77	4.86	.00*	0.29 (moderate)
Adapting to local foods	.23	.82	4.32	.00*	0.26 (moderate)
Adjusting to English customs	.22	.82	4.28	.00*	0.26 (moderate)
Using local transportation	.17	.78	3.49	.00*	0.22 (small)
Adapting to the local climate	.16	.84	2.96	.00*	0.18 (small)
Using the local currency (£)	.15	.75	3.05	.00*	0.19 (small)
Meeting people	.15	.97	2.49	.01*	0.16 (small)
Making friends	.14	1.04	2.07	.04*	0.13 (small)
Learning and/or using English as a foreign language	.11	.61	2.90	.00*	0.18 (small)
Being away from home	.11	.77	2.23	.03*	0.14 (small)
Coping with academic coursework	.11	.83	2.14	.03*	0.13 (small)
Traveling on weekends and/or during holidays	.10	.81	1.88	.06	0.12 (small)
Being away from family and friends	.09	.82	1.79	.08	0.11 (small)
Maintaining my health	.06	1.01	1.00	.32	0.06 (no effect)
Managing my time	-.06	.91	-.98	.33	0.06 (no effect)

* significant difference indicated by $p < .05$

In examining Table 8, positive mean differences indicate that students reported that they had expected to experience more difficulty with an item than they had actually experienced. In contrast, negative mean differences indicate that students reported experiencing more difficulty with an item than they had expected to. Excepting problems with managing their time which indicated a rise in difficulty after arrival ($M = -.06$), it appears that the students did not experience as much difficulty with the different items as they had expected to. Upon closer inspection, there was a statistical difference ($p < .05$) between the students' answers for expectations and actual levels of concern for each of the items in Table 8 aside from time management and maintaining personal health (indicating no effect). Other items which were found to be non-significant with small effects included being away from family and friends and traveling on weekends and/or during holidays. Issues related to accommodation, money, food, and customs displayed the largest effects. Measuring their expected versus realised concerns provided a comparison for expectations as well as identified additional factors which may impact students' engagement in their international experience and perceptions regarding their experiences.

Table 9: Comparing Student Involvement in Activities between the University and in Student's Home Country

Student Involvement / Activities (<i>University vs Home</i>)		Mean	SD	t	p	effect size (interpretation)	
Pair 1	Socializing with international students (Q21u / Q28u)	1.08	1.10	15.53	.00*	0.70	(large)
Pair 2	Sightseeing (Q21f / Q28f)	.48	.99	7.70	.00*	0.44	(moderate)
Pair 3	Socializing with friends from my accommodation (Q21t / Q28t)	.41	1.37	4.71	.00*	0.29	(moderate)
Pair 4	Traveling by myself (Q21g / Q28g)	.17	1.10	2.48	.01*	0.16	(small)
Pair 5	Cooking for fun (Q21q / Q28q)	.17	1.13	2.30	.02*	0.14	(small)
Pair 6	Partying or going to clubs (Q21v / Q28v)	.15	.96	2.52	.01*	0.16	(small)
Pair 7	Traveling with friends (Q21w / Q28w)	.15	1.08	2.11	.04*	0.13	(small)
Pair 8	Are you involved in any clubs or societies on campus or through the students' union? (Q19 / Q24)	.04	.57	1.11	.27	0.07	(no effect)
Pair 9	Studying or doing coursework (Q21a / Q28a)	.03	1.00	.44	.66	0.03	(no effect)
Pair 10	Reading (Q21e / Q28e)	-.06	.79	-1.13	.26	0.07	(no effect)
Pair 11	Playing on the internet (Q21d / Q28d)	-.09	.80	-1.75	.08	0.11	(small)
Pair 12	Exercising (Q21i / Q28i)	-.12	.90	-2.04	.04*	0.13	(small)
Pair 13	Participating in activities to enhance spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer, etc) (Q21r / Q28r)	-.19	.78	-3.76	.00*	0.23	(small)
Pair 14	Shopping for fun (Q21n / Q28n)	-.23	.78	-4.62	.00*	0.28	(moderate)
Pair 15	Doing arts and crafts (Q21p / Q28p)	-.26	.88	-4.71	.00*	0.29	(moderate)
Pair 16	Attending an art exhibit, play, dance, music, theatre, or other performance (Q21o / Q28o)	-.30	1.00	-4.69	.00*	0.29	(moderate)
Pair 17	Playing video or computer games (Q21c / Q28c)	-.32	.86	-5.88	.00*	0.35	(moderate)
Pair 18	Playing competitive sports (Q21j / Q28j)	-.33	.92	-5.63	.00*	0.34	(moderate)
Pair 19	Socializing with friends from my course (Q21s / Q28s)	-.34	1.06	-5.09	.00*	0.31	(moderate)
Pair 20	Watching television or listening to music (Q21b / Q28b)	-.36	.87	-6.49	.00*	0.38	(moderate)
Pair 21	Playing non-competitive sports (Q21k / Q28k)	-.39	1.01	-6.06	.00*	0.36	(moderate)
Pair 22	How many contact hours do you spend in lectures, seminars, tutorials, or completing laboratory requirements during a typical week? (Q18 / Q23)	-.45	.96	-7.38	.00*	0.42	(moderate)
Pair 23	Talking with friends and family (Q21h / Q28h)	-.53	.85	-9.80	.00*	0.53	(large)
Pair 24	Volunteering (Q21m / Q28m)	-.66	1.11	-9.39	.00*	0.51	(large)
Pair 25	Working for pay (Q21i / Q28i)	-1.04	1.36	-12.11	.00*	0.61	(large)

* significant values indicated by $p < .05$

4.1.2 Descriptive Analyses: Student Engagement

In order to examine the individual experiences of international students more thoroughly, the questionnaire asked students about their involvement in a range of activities – both as a student in their home country and then about their involvement in various activities at the University (see Appendix A for individual items). Identifying students' behaviours in both contexts (students' engagement at home and abroad) permitted an exploration of how students choose to engage in their experiences and whether this may change as a result of being abroad. Results from a paired sample t-test displayed in Table 9 show significant differences ($p < .05$) between 21 of the 25 paired items examined, apart from Pairs 8-11. For reference, positive mean values refer to an increase in students' engagement in the individual behaviour whilst abroad whereas negative mean values indicate students were less likely to engage in that behaviour whilst abroad. The various items were intended to reflect academic as well as non-academic engagement in social and community activities. Items were also included for more individualised interests along with activities and travel behaviours commonly associated with visiting another country (i.e. sightseeing and traveling).

Academic engagement included time spent reading, studying or doing coursework and average weekly contact hours spent in lectures, seminars, tutorials, or completing laboratory requirements. University contact hours were indicated by four categories of 1-5 hours, 5-10 hours, 11-16 hours, and 17 or more hours spent per week in lectures, seminars, or tutorials. Time spent reading, studying or doing coursework was measured based on a 4-point Likert scale with choices of 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Sometimes', and 'Very Often'. The results in Table 9 show that the academic requirements for many students changed when they were abroad but did not necessarily change all behaviours. In their home country, students reported a higher average of contact hours with 62.7% of the students in lectures for more than 11 hours; students then had fewer contact hours at the University as only 39.8% had more than 11 hours of taught instruction (see Pair 22, $p < .05$ with a moderate effect). Although the students reported having fewer contact hours abroad, the majority of students spent a significant amount of their spare time studying or doing coursework (over 86%) or reading (over 81%) on a regular basis in both at home and at the University (see Pairs 9 and 10, $p > .05$ with no effect). Whilst at the University, the concept of academic engagement was expanded to also include two items for academic and professional development by considering students' attendance at careers fairs and advice and skills sessions offered by the University and the students' union. However, most of the students in this study indicated low attendance at these types of events as 71.5% either 'Rarely' or 'Never' attended careers fairs and 72.3% have either 'Rarely' or 'Never' gone to free advice and skills sessions.

Measures of social and community engagement for the students focused on extracurricular behaviours which included involvement in clubs or societies, volunteering, playing sports, and socialising with friends from the student's course, accommodation, and with other international students. In comparing students' involvement in different activities between their home country and at the University, traveling abroad to study at the University seems to have changed some aspects of the students' behaviours. Based on the t-test results in Table 9, only two items were not statistically different (Pairs 8 and 11, $p > .05$ with negligent effects) representing students' involvement in clubs or societies and spare time spent playing on the internet. Though there was not a statistical difference, slightly more students (55.0%) reported being involved in clubs or societies with the students' union at the University than reported being involved in similar activities in their home country (51.0%). The effects of students' involvement in clubs and/or societies are explored further in Section 4.1.4.

Volunteering (Pair 24) saw a significant decrease as only 14.5% of the students reported that they were involved in these types of activities at the University compared with 34.9% in their home country. The significant decrease shown in students working for pay whilst abroad was also identified as many students are limited by visa restrictions if they are not from the EU (Pair 25). Sport also showed a change in behaviour (Pairs 18 and 21, $p < .05$ with moderate effect) as fewer students reported being involved in both non-competitive sports (31.3% vs 43.0%) and competitive sports (18.9% vs 26.5%) at the University than when in their home country. The results also indicated that socialisation patterns (Pairs 1, 3, and 19) may change as a result of being abroad with the largest difference involving interactions with international students. In their home countries, a majority of the students socialised with friends from their academic course (73.5%) and slightly over half of the students socialised with friends from their accommodation (51.0%). A much lower percentage of the students regularly socialised with international students at their home universities (33.7%). However, at the University, students socialised more frequently with other international students (79.9%) and friends from accommodation (65.5%) than with friends on their academic course (59.8%). The questionnaire also asked students whether they have been involved with the international student community in their home country, to which 88.8% reported that they had not. Examining the open responses from the 28 students who were involved with the international student community at their home university, the students said they had previously been involved in buddy schemes, attended compulsory intercultural meetings with the international office, or gained experience as mentors and tutors.

Additional items were included for social activities at the University as the students' union encourages students to try a wide range of activities from over 250 different clubs and societies each term through the Give-It-A-Go (GIAG) programme. A majority of the students (65.1%) reported they had participated in GIAG at least once whilst at the University. The University's International Office also offers a weekly meet and greet called Global Café every Monday from 5-7pm during term time. The Global Café is advertised as an embodiment of the internationally diverse environment at the University with the opportunity to meet people and added incentives of free biscuits, tea, and coffee. Yet, fewer students chose to attend Global Café, as 42.2% said they never went and 28.9% went on the rare occasion. Only 10% of the students said they were at Global Café very often though another 18.9% went sometimes.

As a large part of the international student experience was considered to involve being away from one's home and traveling, the questionnaire included items to represent travel behaviours such as sightseeing, traveling alone, and traveling with friends. In their home countries, many students regularly spent their spare time traveling with friends (57.4%), sightseeing (46.6%), and traveling on their own (37.3%). These travel behaviours then showed an increase whilst the students were abroad (see Pairs 2, 4, and 7 in Table 9, $p < .05$) as students were generally more inclined to go sightseeing (71.1%), travel with friends (65.5%), and travel independently (49.8%) than they were in their home country. An item was also included for time spent talking with family and friends (Pair 23) in order to gauge whether students may have possibly felt homesick whilst abroad. In their home country, 95.6% of the students talked with their friends and family on a regular basis. Although students had less direct or face-to-face contact with these individuals while living abroad, most of the students (81.1%) still maintained fairly regular contact with family and friends back home via social media, texting, phone calls, and Skype.

4.1.3 Descriptive Analyses: Perceptions about the International Experience

In total, 50 items in the questionnaire have been used to measure students' reflective perceptions regarding their experiences of being an international student as adapted from previous research (see Chapter Three). Items related to student satisfaction with the experience were centred on students' emotive and cognitive responses regarding education outcomes, personal development, interactions with staff and support systems, entertainment, social and cultural experiences, aesthetic responses to the environment and perceived personal safety, and how the students felt they would remember their experiences. The individual items are discussed further in terms of subscales and their reliability in Section 4.2.4. Items of key concern for this study involved comprehensive qualitative measures (see Figure 20) which focus on students'

reported satisfaction with their experience at the University (Q32), whether they would recommend studying abroad to other students (Q33a, Q33b, and Q33c), and an overall evaluation of the quality of their experiences as an international student (Q34).

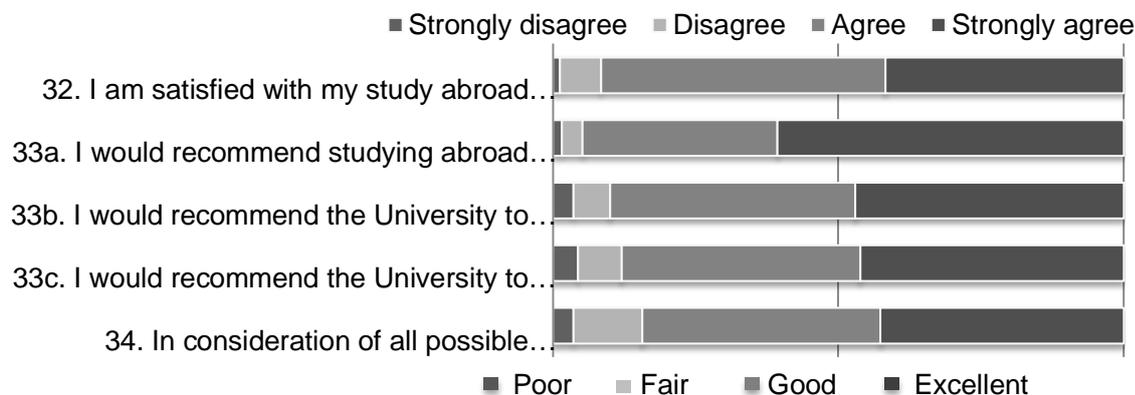


Figure 20. Student evaluations of experience quality

The students were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences as demonstrated in Figure 20. The first four items asked students to rate their agreement with specific statements using a 4-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree). Responses showed that 91.6% of the students were satisfied with their experience (answers of 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'), meaning only 8.4% of the students reported they were dissatisfied with their experience. Three items were used to ascertain whether the students would recommend studying abroad, studying abroad at the University to other international students, and studying abroad at the University to fellow students at their home university. A majority of the students (94.8%) said that they would recommend studying abroad in general. Students were slightly less, though still overwhelmingly, enthusiastic about whether they would recommend studying abroad at the University to other international students with 90.0% agreement followed by 88.0% of the students saying they would recommend studying abroad at the University to other students at their home university. Finally, the students were asked to rate their overall experience as being either 'Terrible', 'Poor', 'Fair', 'Good', or 'Excellent'. None of the students in this study replied that they had had terrible experiences. In examining the answers, most students were pleased with their experiences overall (84.4%, with 41.8% 'good' and 42.6% 'excellent') compared with a small number of students who reported having fair (12.0%) or poor experiences (3.6%).

4.1.4 Descriptive Analyses: Student Involvement in Clubs and/or Societies

Within the questionnaire, students were asked whether they were involved in any clubs or societies through the students' union at the University. As previously noted, the data indicates that there was not a statistically significant difference between students' reported involvement in clubs and societies whether in their home country or at the University. However, another matter of interest has involved examining whether

students' responses differed according to their reported involvement in clubs or societies; their responses in the questionnaire to question 24 indicated that 137 students were involved in clubs and/or societies and 112 were not. According to the results of a t-test which compared responses from those students who stated they were involved in clubs or societies and those students who stated they were not, various differences were noted between these two groups of students.

Firstly, the data were examined based on students' demographic information. The students who chose to be involved in clubs or societies were slightly younger on average than those who did not (average age of 24 years compared to 25 years old, $p < .01$). Gender also seemed to be a factor as more female than male students chose to be involved in clubs and societies at the University (ratios of 97:66 for female and 40:46 for male students who were in clubs/societies compared with those who were not; $p < .01$). Students' marital status did not seem to have an effect on their involvement with the students' union ($p > .05$). However, the data did show a noticeable difference ($p < .01$) based on where students had come from as shown in Figure 21 as students from Europe were more likely to join clubs or societies with the students' union than students from Africa, Asia, or Australia and Oceania. Students from the Americas were more evenly split between their responses than the other groups.

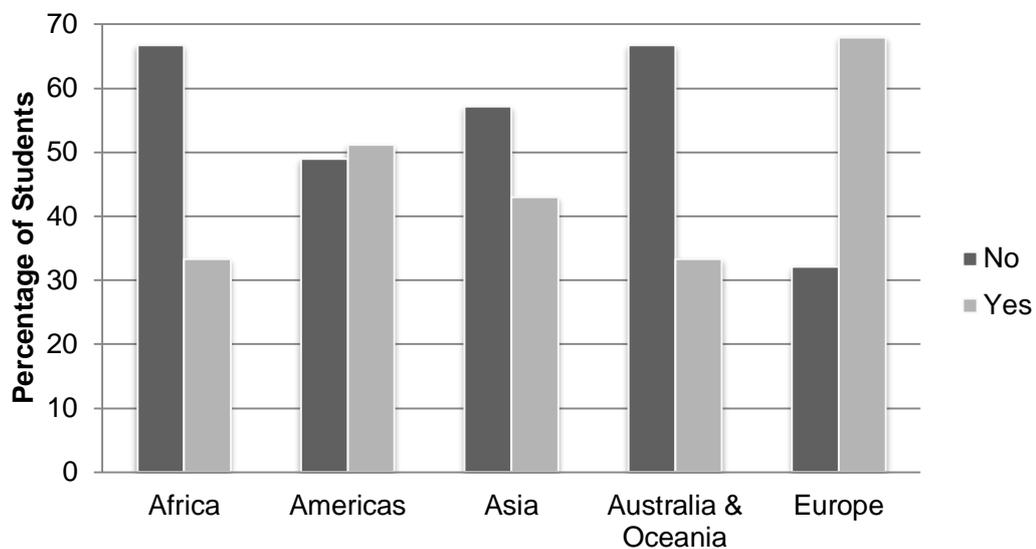


Figure 21. Student involvement in clubs/societies according to world regions

The data indicated that there was not a noted difference ($p > .05$) between students based on the duration of their international experience (whether they were at the University for a single semester or the entire academic year). However, there was a noticeable difference ($p < .05$) based on what academic level the students were at as Foundation Year and Undergraduate students were much more likely to join clubs and societies than Postgraduate students, as shown in Figure 22.

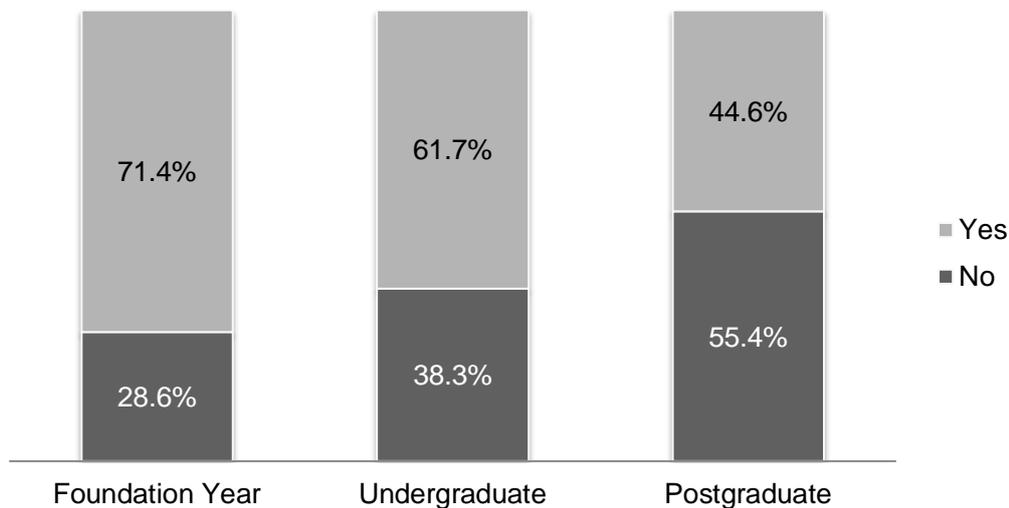


Figure 22. Student involvement in clubs/societies according to academic level

Students' choice of academic discipline did not seem to affect whether the students were involved in clubs or societies ($p > .05$), as Figure 23 shows most faculties aside from PVAC (Performance, Visual Arts and Communications) had more students in clubs and societies; although Business and ESSL (Education, Social Science and Law) students seemed to be more evenly divided than the other faculties.

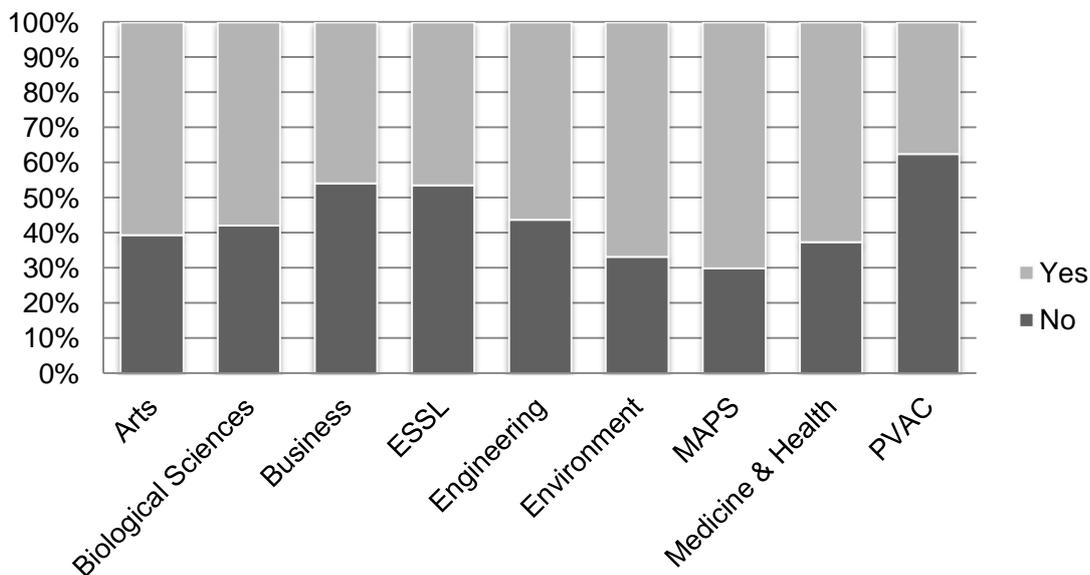


Figure 23. Student involvement in clubs/societies according to faculty

Based on their responses, students who had visited England prior to coming to the University for their international HE experience reported being more likely to be involved in clubs and societies than those who had not (64.3% compared with 45.5%, $p < .01$). Furthermore, more students who had arrived at the University with either family or friends (61.8%), or with other students from their home university (65.2%) reported being in clubs or societies at the University than not, whereas students who had travelled independently were more evenly divided (51.5% in societies, 48.5% not).

Another statistical difference ($p < .05$) between the two groups of students was noted based on students' choice of accommodation whilst abroad. While students in private accommodation were split as to whether they were or were not involved in clubs or societies, more students in University-run accommodation (61.9%) reported being involved in clubs or societies than not (38.1%).

Next, students' responses were examined regarding their planned behaviours, namely their reported motivations and expectations regarding the international experience. Among the 34 items included to measure students' motivations as detailed earlier in Section 4.1.1, data indicated differences ($p < .05$) for seven items with higher average scores for students involved in clubs or societies for five items:

- I wanted to learn new things (15b);
- I wanted to be able to pursue extracurricular interests at the University (15i);
- I wanted the opportunity to grow and develop as a person (15p);
- I wanted a change from my daily routine (16b); and
- I wanted to experience everyday life in England (16o).

In contrast, students in clubs or societies reported lower average scores for two items:

- I wanted to relax (16c); and
- I wanted to buy goods and souvenirs (16k).

According to the data, none of the items referring to expected concerns for the international experience exhibited any differences ($p > .05$) based on students' involvement in clubs or societies.

Then students' responses were compared according to their engagement behaviours and concerns whilst studying abroad at the University. Based on the data, students' involvement in clubs or societies did not seem to statistically affect individual items of potential concern. However, students involved in clubs and societies did indicate lower average levels of concern in responses to items regarding meeting people and traveling on weekends and/or during holidays. The data from the two groups of students also indicated a difference ($p < .05$) in various items related to students' engagement behaviours. Students who chose to get involved in clubs or societies at the students' union tended to have more weekly contact hours at the University (i.e. time spent in lectures, seminars, tutorials, or completing laboratory requirements) and also attended Give-It-A-Go sessions more often than those who did not have a club or society affiliation. Students in clubs or societies also reported spending a larger portion of their spare time studying or doing coursework and socialising with friends from their accommodation or with other international students, whereas students not involved in clubs or societies spent a larger portion of their spare time playing video or computer games and shopping for fun.

Finally, students' perceptions about various aspects of their international experiences were examined regarding students' reported involvement in clubs or societies.

According to the data, students involved in clubs or societies were more likely to be positive about their experiences in general than those not engaged in this manner with higher average ratings for nearly every item except one (Transportation here is efficient). The data further indicated statistical differences between the groups as students in clubs and/or societies tended to agree more with the following statements regarding their international experiences than those who had not joined such groups:

- It is easy to get involved as a student here. (30b)
- Activities at the University are enjoyable. (30e)
- This experience has been interesting. (31d)
- The study abroad experience has been valuable to me. (31e)
- I won't forget my experience at the University. (31j)

Compared with the responses of their peers, students in clubs or societies also indicated that they were more likely to be satisfied with their study abroad experience (32), to recommend studying abroad to other students (33a-c), and to have had better quality international experiences (34) (all significant at $p < .05$).

4.2 Scale Reliability Analyses

In order to conduct further statistical analyses such as correlation, regression, and SEM in later sections for assessing relationships between variables, reliability scale analysis has been utilised on the four sets of variables integral to this study representing students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions about their international experiences. Individual items have been grouped together with corresponding titles based on an analysis of the literature using methods validated in previous studies. As a reminder, most of the items in the online questionnaire have used 4-point Likert scales so higher mean values indicate students' concurrence with concepts measured (i.e. more motivated, more engaged, more concerned, more satisfied). Cronbach's alpha scores (α) have been used to indicate internal consistency comparing reliability of items within specific scales and subscales with values ranging from 0 to 1.

Altogether the questionnaire gathered responses from students on a total of 132 items in regards to different types of motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions of the students' experiences. However, based on the results from analysing respective scale reliability statistics for internal consistency (α), some items have been removed from individual subscales in order to increase scale reliability for further use in subsequent statistical procedures. Results from these analyses which correspond to each of the individual variables pertinent to this study are described further in more detail, noting individual items which have been removed as applicable.

4.2.1 Scale Reliability Analyses: Student Motivations

As mentioned previously in Section 4.1.1, a total of 34 items have been included in the questionnaire which describe different types of motivation identified from the literature. An overall scale was first calculated including all 34 items and indicating a high degree of reliability ($\alpha = .93$). However, the results of the analysis indicated a divergence between items (i.e. negative correlations and other conflicting statistics). Therefore, the overall scale was disregarded in further analysis in favour of grouping items into distinct subscales based on a review of literature as displayed in Table 10. Each of the items was measured using a 4-point Likert scale (1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Somewhat, 4=Very much) in response to the degree to which students felt 'This factor affected my decision to study abroad in 2012/13'. As stated previously, items considered to relate to the same type of motivation were initially grouped together based on a review of the literature.

Using subscales guided further analysis as individual factors within the greater construct of motivation could then be examined with more precision. Table 10 displays reliability statistics for items and subscales which were calculated after removing four individual items which displayed poor fit within the individual subscales:

15a. I wanted to improve my language skills.

15d. I wanted to study subjects not available at my university.

15g. I wanted to be with friends.

15h. I wanted to be with other students who share similar interests and/or values.

Although these items were validated by previous literature, they were not consistent with students' answers to other items in the respective subscales for the dataset.

Based upon the literature presented in Chapter Two, five types of motivation have been included in this study which represent students' motives for either Personal Development ($\alpha = .83$; 3 items), Academic and Professional Development ($\alpha = .79$; 7 items), Socialisation ($\alpha = .85$; 6 items), Travel ($\alpha = .85$; 9 items), or Location ($\alpha = .90$; 5 items). As each of the alpha values (α) were well above the minimum standard for internal consistency as shown in Table 10, they have been considered acceptable for further use. In examining the individual mean scores for the subscales, students' reported motivations may be ranked in the following order:

1. Academic and Professional Development (M=3.42, SD =.55);
2. Personal Development (M=3.28, SD =.78);
3. Location (M=2.91, SD =.85);
4. Socialisation (M=2.80, SD =.73); and
5. Travel (M=2.67, SD =.68).

Table 10: Motivation Subscales and Items

List of Subscales and Individual Measurement Items	M	SD	Corrected item-total correlation
<i>Personal Development</i> ($\alpha=.83$)	3.28	.78	
15o. I wanted to do something by myself.	3.21	.93	.69
15p. I wanted the opportunity to grow and develop as a person.	3.51	.77	.70
15q. I wanted to learn more about myself.	3.12	.98	.71
<i>Academic & Professional Development</i> ($\alpha=.79$)	3.42	.55	
15b. I wanted to learn new things.	3.63	.67	.64
15c. I wanted to take interesting classes.	3.33	.90	.43
15e. I wanted to develop new skills.	3.44	.78	.57
15k. I wanted to be challenged.	3.33	.85	.51
15l. I wanted to gain experience.	3.73	.61	.61
15m. I wanted to be able to list a semester/year at an overseas university on my CV.	3.04	1.02	.45
15n. I wanted to enhance future career opportunities.	3.46	.85	.55
<i>Socialisation</i> ($\alpha=.85$)	2.80	.73	
15f. I wanted to meet new people.	3.46	.78	.53
15i. I wanted to be able to pursue extracurricular interests at the University (sport /cultural activities).	2.23	1.01	.56
15j. I wanted to be able to tell my friends and/or relatives about my experience.	2.61	1.01	.59
16d. I wanted to enjoy a friendly atmosphere.	2.57	1.00	.65
16e. I wanted to have fun.	2.86	1.01	.77
16f. I wanted to have a good time.	3.10	.97	.75
<i>Travel</i> ($\alpha=.85$)	2.67	.68	
16a. I wanted to get away.	2.60	1.13	.43
16b. I wanted a change from my daily routine.	2.79	1.09	.59
16c. I wanted to relax.	1.94	1.03	.58
16g. I wanted to have a thrilling and exciting experience.	3.14	.95	.62
16h. I wanted to try new foods.	2.17	1.09	.53
16i. I wanted to travel.	3.22	.96	.63
16j. I wanted to see famous cultural places.	2.80	1.09	.69
16k. I wanted to buy goods and souvenirs.	1.82	.98	.51
16l. I wanted a new experience.	3.55	.77	.54
<i>Location</i> ($\alpha=.90$)	2.91	.85	
16m. I wanted to learn more about English culture.	2.89	1.00	.80
16n. I wanted to learn more about English history.	2.56	1.04	.75
16o. I wanted to experience everyday life in England.	3.07	.99	.81
16p. I wanted to experience the English education system.	3.00	1.01	.65
16q. I wanted to meet English people.	3.03	.98	.77

4.2.2 Scale Reliability Analyses: Student Concerns

Sixteen items have been included in the online questionnaire describing different types of concerns for international students whilst abroad, as specified earlier in Section 4.1.1. Each item was measured using a 4-point Likert scale rating students' agreement with the statement 'I have experienced difficulty with the following factor' (1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Somewhat, 4=Very much). The alpha value for the overall scale was more than adequate ($\alpha = .87$), with positive inter-item correlations between all 16 items, indicating all items converged on a single factor. As such, none of the items were removed. The reliability statistics for the scale and individual items representing students' concerns whilst studying abroad at the University are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Experienced concerns scale and items

List of Subscale and Individual Measurement Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation
<i>Experienced Concerns</i> ($\alpha=.87$)	2.08	.58	
22a. Learning and/or using English as a foreign language	1.94	1.02	.35
22b. Coping with academic coursework	2.57	.98	.50
22c. Managing my time	2.56	1.06	.46
22d. Meeting people	2.13	.99	.56
22e. Making friends	2.29	1.05	.57
22f. Accommodation	2.04	.97	.42
22g. Maintaining my health	1.91	.98	.59
22h. Being away from home	2.12	1.03	.58
22i. Being away from family and friends	2.36	1.05	.47
22j. Adapting to the local climate	2.07	1.06	.49
22k. Using the local currency (£)	1.67	.91	.55
22l. Having enough money	2.42	1.08	.37
22m. Adjusting to English customs	1.90	.93	.63
22n. Adapting to local foods	1.88	1.02	.50
22o. Using local transportation	1.73	.88	.62
22p. Travelling on weekends and/or during holidays	1.71	.91	.56

As presented earlier in Section 4.1.1, when examining the individual mean scores for the subscales as displayed in Table 11, students' responses indicated that their experienced concerns whilst abroad may be ranked in the following order:

1. Coping with academic coursework [22b] ($M=2.57$, $SD =.98$);
2. Managing my time [22c] ($M=2.56$, $SD =1.06$);
3. Having enough money [22l] ($M=2.42$, $SD =1.08$);
4. Being away from family and friends [22i] ($M=2.36$, $SD =1.05$); and
5. Making friends [22e] ($M=2.29$, $SD =1.05$).

4.2.3 Scale Reliability Analyses: Student Engagement

One function of this study was to examine student engagement in multiple forms which are considered relevant to the experiences of international students in HE. The questionnaire included 32 items for engagement both from previously validated

research and information gathered on-site at the University as previously explained in Chapter Three. Thus, student engagement in this study has been considered in both academic and non-academic (or recreational) settings. As stated in Section 4.1.2, students were asked to provide responses to the following types of questions:

- How many contact hours do you spend in lectures, seminars, tutorials, or completing laboratory requirements during a typical week at the University? (Q23)
- Are you involved in any clubs or societies on campus or through the students' union? (Q24)
- How often do you attend these types of activities hosted by the University and/or students' union? (Q25a-e)
- How often do you attend activities hosted by the University's International Office? (Q26, Q27) and
- How often are you engaged in the following activities in your spare time? (Q28a-w)

For reference, weekly contact hours at the University were measured by four levels (1= <5hrs, 2= 6-10hrs, 3= 11-16hrs, 4= >17hrs); involvement in clubs or societies was a dichotomous question (1 =No, 2 =Yes); and attendance at or involvement in activities hosted by the University and/or the students' union, through the University's International Office, and in students' spare time was measured using a 4-point Likert scale (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Very Often).

The data showed students were engaged in a variety of ways as part of their international student experiences. When examining individual mean scores of items, students had reported being most frequently involved in the following ten activities:

1. Studying or doing coursework [28a] (M=3.37, SD =.74);
2. Reading [28e] (M=3.16, SD =.78)
3. Talking with friends and family back home [28h] (M=3.14, SD =.76)
4. Socialising with international students [28u] (M=3.13, SD =.89);
5. Sightseeing [28f] (M=2.86, SD =.79);
6. Watching television or listening to music [28b] (M=2.84, SD =.95)
7. Socialising with friends from my accommodation [28t] (M=2.84, SD =.97);
8. Traveling with friends [28w] (M=2.78, SD =.91).
9. Socialising with friends from my course [28s] (M=2.68, SD =.94); and
10. Exercising [28l] (M=2.61, SD =.99).

As discussed previously in Chapters Two and Three, this study was designed to explore the different facets and types of student engagement and then identify where relationships exist and to what extent. First, an overall scale was tested utilising all 32 items from the questionnaire. After examining reliability indices, ten items were omitted from further consideration based on their tendency to reduce scale reliability and/or negative correlations with other items. The removed items included:

- 28b. Watching television or listening to music
- 28c. Playing video or computer games
- 28d. Playing on the internet
- 28e. Reading
- 28h. Talking with friends and family back home

- 28i. Working for pay
- 28j. Playing competitive sports
- 28n. Shopping for fun
- 28q. Cooking for fun
- 28r. Participating in activities to enhance spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer)

Both items for activities hosted by the University's International Office (i.e. Q26 for attendance at the Global Café and Q27 for participation in Global Saturdays trips) were also removed from further analysis as these responses were not found to be correlated to any of the other engagement items.

Three subscales have been identified for engagement, as shown in Table 12, in relation to Academic Engagement ($\alpha=.53$; 4 items), Social and Community Engagement ($\alpha=.75$; 13 items), and Travel Behaviours ($\alpha=.63$; 3 items) for international students utilising students' responses for 20 items from the online questionnaire. The values for both Academic Engagement and Travel Behaviours were lower than desired in social sciences research, but this has been taken into account in further analyses and discussion. In examining the results, Travel was an important aspect of the students' experiences abroad with the highest reported mean score (2.69, SD =.66) followed by Academic Engagement (M=2.36, SD =.60) and Social and Community Engagement (M=2.16, SD =.45).

Table 12: Student Engagement Subscales and Items

List of Subscales and Individual Measurement Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation
<i>Academic Engagement</i> ($\alpha=.53$)	2.36	.60	
23. Weekly contact hours at University	2.66	.99	.17
25d. Attending careers fairs	1.84	.97	.47
25e. Attending advice and skills sessions	1.86	.97	.43
28a. Studying or doing coursework	3.37	.74	.22
<i>Social & Community Engagement</i> ($\alpha=.75$)	2.16	.45	
24. Involvement in clubs and/or societies	1.55	.50	.25
25a. Attending Give-It-A-Go sessions	2.15	.99	.44
25b. Attending club nights at the students union	1.78	.87	.47
25c. Attending live performances or gigs	1.68	.86	.42
28k. Playing non-competitive sports	1.90	1.02	.42
28l. Exercising	2.61	.99	.30
28m. Volunteering	1.44	.79	.27
28o. Attending an art exhibit or theatre performance	2.24	.89	.29
28p. Doing arts and crafts	1.68	.93	.35
28s. Socialising with friends from my course	2.68	.94	.27
28t. Socialising with friends from my accommodation	2.84	.97	.34
28u. Socialising with international students	3.13	.89	.44
28v. Partying or going to clubs	2.45	1.01	.56
<i>Travel Behaviours</i> ($\alpha=.63$)	2.69	.66	
28f. Sightseeing	2.86	.79	.60
28g. Traveling by myself	2.42	.92	.36
28w. Traveling with friends	2.78	.91	.39

4.2.4 Scale Reliability Analyses: Students' Perceptions about their Experiences

Students' satisfaction with different aspects of their international HE experience has been evaluated using 45 items in the questionnaire addressing different emotive and cognitive components; these items have been validated in previous research as explained previously in Chapter Three. The questionnaire asked students to rate their agreement with statements for each individual item according to a 4-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree). Altogether, seven subscales related to students' satisfaction with their experiences have been identified from previous research. Two items were removed from the subscales as they were found to decrease overall scale reliability:

- 29q. Transportation here is efficient.
- 30n. I have enjoyed the weather here.

The individual subscales are shown in Table 13 along with item statistics.

Table 13: Satisfaction Subscales and Items

List of Subscales and Individual Measurement Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation
<i>Education</i> ($\alpha=.70$)	3.23	.49	
29a. My university coursework is challenging.	3.09	.72	.47
29b. I am enjoying my classes.	3.08	.66	.56
29c. The module leaders are very knowledgeable about the course subjects.	3.32	.64	.54
29m. I have learned a lot during this experience.	3.44	.65	.40
<i>Personal Development</i> ($\alpha=.84$)	3.44	.48	
29j. Coming to the University has let me experience a different style of education.	3.48	.65	.60
29k. This experience has made me more knowledgeable.	3.37	.73	.64
29l. This experience will help me in my future career.	3.38	.68	.61
30p. Coming to the University has let me experience a different way of life.	3.39	.65	.66
30q. Having a study abroad experience was important to me.	3.63	.57	.65
31e. The study abroad experience has been valuable to me.	3.56	.63	.59
31h. I have learned a lot about myself because of this experience.	3.32	.72	.48
<i>Staff & Support Systems</i> ($\alpha=.92$)	3.21	.55	
29d. University staff are helpful.	3.31	.63	.80
29e. University staff are understanding.	3.25	.66	.85
29f. University staff are available when I need assistance.	3.24	.65	.81
29g. University staff are considerate of my needs.	3.14	.64	.81
29h. I have received the support I need to succeed academically.	3.12	.70	.70
29i. There is a supportive campus environment at the University.	3.23	.64	.70

(Table 13 continued)

List of Subscales and Individual Measurement Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation
<i>Entertainment</i> ($\alpha=.92$)	3.24	.48	
30a. Events at the university are scheduled well.	3.02	.55	.52
30c. Activities at the university are entertaining.	3.11	.61	.65
30d. Activities at the university are fun.	3.08	.59	.63
30e. Activities at the university are enjoyable.	3.12	.58	.65
30o. I feel like I have had a unique experience.	3.27	.70	.58
31a. This experience has been stimulating.	3.39	.64	.69
31b. This experience has been exciting.	3.36	.65	.81
31c. This experience has been enjoyable.	3.37	.65	.79
31d. This experience has been interesting.	3.50	.60	.73
31f. My study abroad experience has been delightful.	3.20	.76	.76
31g. My study abroad experience has been excellent.	3.14	.80	.75
<i>Aesthetics</i> ($\alpha=.83$)	3.22	.58	
29n. I have felt safe at the University.	3.33	.71	.76
29o. University facilities are well maintained.	3.24	.66	.64
29p. The setting of the University is attractive.	3.21	.73	.64
30m. I feel safe here.	3.10	.74	.61
<i>Social & Cultural Experiences</i> ($\alpha=.87$)	3.15	.66	
30b. It is easy to get involved as a student here.	3.09	.70	.50
30f. I feel like I have been able to experience British culture.	2.98	.75	.51
30g. I have been exposed to many different cultural experiences here.	3.14	.74	.58
30h. People here have been friendly and accommodating.	3.11	.69	.62
30i. I have made many new friends.	3.15	.81	.68
30j. Other students are supportive.	3.05	.73	.66
30k. Other students are friendly.	3.15	.65	.69
30l. I feel like I belong to the University student community.	2.91	.78	.70
<i>Memory</i> ($\alpha=.91$)	3.49	.60	
31i. I will have wonderful memories about this experience.	3.40	.70	.82
31j. I won't forget my experience at the University.	3.61	.59	.78
31k. I will remember many positive things about this experience.	3.45	.68	.86

The seven subscales depicted in Table 13 have been used to reflect students' satisfaction with different aspects of their experiences including Education ($\alpha=.70$, 4 items), Personal Development ($\alpha=.84$, 7 items), Staff and Support Systems ($\alpha=.92$, 6 items), Entertainment ($\alpha=.92$, 11 items), Aesthetics ($\alpha=.83$, 4 items), Social and Cultural Experiences ($\alpha=.87$, 8 items), and Memory ($\alpha=.91$, 3 items). As each of the seven subscales scores were above the acceptable value of 0.70 as identified for use in social sciences (George and Mallery, 2003), they have been considered valid for use in this study.

A final subscale has also been included representing students' perceptions regarding the overall quality of their experience (see Section 4.1.3). The questionnaire included

five items focused on: a rating of overall satisfaction; three items based on students' intentions to recommend either studying abroad in general, studying abroad at the University to other international students, or studying abroad at the University to other students from their home university; and a final measure which asked students to rate their overall experience in consideration of all possible factors. The overall subscale for the five items initially displayed poor internal reliability. The three items (33a, 33b, and 33c) identifying students' willingness to recommend studying abroad at different levels have subsequently been reduced to provide more discretion between students' answers in further analyses; namely, the removal of the item indicating students' willingness to recommend studying abroad in general (33a) was found to increase overall reliability of the subscale and no statistical difference seemed to exist between the second and third items (33b and 33c) ($p > .05$). Therefore, the final subscale for Experience Quality ($\alpha = .87$) was based on three items as shown in Table 14, showing an acceptable alpha value for the subscale which was determined valid for this study.

Table 14: Experience Quality Subscale and Items

List of Subscale and Individual Measurement Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation
<i>Overall Experience Quality</i> ($\alpha = .87$)	3.28	.67	
32. I am satisfied with my study abroad experience at the University.	3.32	.66	.76
33c. I would recommend studying abroad at the University to other students from my home university.	3.30	.79	.75
34. Overall experience rating	3.23	.80	.75

A brief presentation of the individual variables and subscales which have been used in further statistical analyses (i.e. correlations, ANOVA, multiple regression) based on results from the reliability analyses is displayed in Table 15.

4.3 Correlation Analyses

In order to further examine the relationships between the variables of interest in this study, correlational analyses have been conducted using summative scores for each of the primary scales and subscales as shown in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**. The summative scale for students' Motivations has included all 30 items from the five subscales and exhibited a high internal reliability ($\alpha = .93$). A summative scale for students' Engagement has also been identified which included 20 items from the three subscales and also displayed reasonable internal reliability ($\alpha = .75$). Students' Concerns have been measured using a summative scale for all 16 items as discussed previously in section 4.2.2 which indicated good reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .87$). The variable for students' Satisfaction used 43 items from seven subscales and showed high internal reliability ($\alpha = .96$).

Table 15: Reliability Statistics for Variables and Subscales

	Items Measured	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Mean (M)
Motivation	30	.93	2.97
<i>Academic & Professional Development^a</i>	7	.79	3.42
<i>Location^a</i>	5	.90	2.91
<i>Personal Development^a</i>	3	.83	3.28
<i>Socialisation^a</i>	6	.85	2.80
<i>Travel^a</i>	9	.85	2.67
Engagement	20	.75	2.28
<i>Academic Engagement^b</i>	4	.53	2.36
<i>Social & Community Engagement^b</i>	13	.74	2.16
<i>Travel Behaviours^b</i>	3	.63	2.69
Concerns ^a	16	.87	2.08
Satisfaction	43	.96	3.25
<i>Aesthetics^c</i>	4	.83	3.22
<i>Education^c</i>	4	.70	3.24
<i>Entertainment^c</i>	11	.92	3.23
<i>Memory^c</i>	3	.91	3.49
<i>Personal Development^c</i>	7	.84	3.45
<i>Social & Cultural Experiences^c</i>	8	.87	3.07
<i>Staff & Support Systems^c</i>	6	.92	3.22
Experience Quality	3	.87	3.28

^a Items measured using 4-point Likert scale (1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Somewhat, 4=Very much)

^b Items measured using 4-point Likert scale (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Very often)

^c Items measured using 4-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly agree)

^d Item measured using 4-point Likert scale (1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent)

Finally, Experience Quality has been measured using three items as mentioned in Section 4.2.4 and displayed good internal reliability ($\alpha = .87$). Correlations between each of the summative scales of the primary variables for this study have been calculated as presented in Table 16. Determining correlations between the variables was considered necessary in order to test the proposed SEM (Section 4.5) and answer the third research question for this study. In social science research, correlations above 0.30 between items may be considered to exhibit a statistically significant effect (Pagano, 2010).

Table 16: Correlations between Motivation, Engagement, Concerns, Satisfaction, and Experience Quality

	Motivation	Engagement	Concerns	Satisfaction
Motivation	-			
Engagement	.25**	-		
Concerns	.12	-.04	-	
Satisfaction	.43**	.33**	-.21**	-
Experience Quality	.32**	.25**	-.29**	.80**

** Correlation was determined to be significant ($p < .01$).

According to the data in Table 16, students' Motivations were found to be significantly related to students' Satisfaction ($r = .43$) and Experience Quality ($r = .32$), but not to their Concerns ($r = .12$). The output from the conducted analyses also indicated that the correlation between students' Motivations and reported Engagement ($r = .25$) was significant although admittedly below the aforementioned 0.30 threshold for social sciences research. Students' Engagement was further found to have a positive relationship with both Satisfaction ($r = .33$) and Experience Quality ($r = .25$), while being negatively correlated with students' reported Concerns ($r = -.04$). Subsequently, students' Concerns were found to have negative relationships with both Satisfaction ($r = -.21$) and Experience Quality ($r = -.29$). And finally, Satisfaction displayed the strongest correlation with Experience Quality ($r = .80$) amongst the variables of interest to this study. In examining these results, it seems that students' Engagement may decrease their Concerns ($r = -.04$) in general whereas students' Concerns may have a negative impact on their reported Satisfaction ($r = -.21$) and overall Experience Quality ($r = -.29$). The relationships between these variables have been further explored using ANOVA and multiple regression in order to determine how appropriate the items and subscales were to use in later SEM analysis.

4.4 ANOVA and Multiple Regression Analyses

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been used to examine the demographic profile of the students in this study and determine whether different characteristic variables were statistically related to students' perceptions of their international HE experience. The variables of interest for the students' profiles have included socio-demographic information as presented in Section 4.1 – including students' age, gender, marital status, world region and nationality, year of study, duration of international experience at the University, and academic faculty at the University; previous experiences – studying abroad, visiting Europe, and visiting England; whether students arrived alone or with others; and accommodation arrangements. According to the ANOVA analysis as displayed in Table 17, only the students' year of study and choice of accommodation were significant ($p < .05$) in predicting overall perceptions of Experience Quality as related to the three items representing overall satisfaction, willingness to recommend studying abroad at the University, and overall experience quality. However, post-hoc analyses (i.e. examining Bonferroni adjustments and effect sizes) indicated that the significance of these two items should be discounted as a result of conducting multiple tests simultaneously.

Table 17: ANOVA for Student Characteristics compared with Experience Quality

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Effect size (interpretation)
Age (Q2)	Between Groups	5.11	9	.57	1.02	.42	.04 (no effect)
	Within Groups	132.61	239	.56			
	Total	137.72	248				
Gender (Q3)	Between Groups	1.89	9	.21	.92	.51	.03 (no effect)
	Within Groups	54.41	239	.23			
	Total	56.30	248				
Marital Status (Q4)	Between Groups	.80	9	.09	1.41	.18	.05 (no effect)
	Within Groups	15.04	239	.06			
	Total	15.84	248				
World Regions (Q5)	Between Groups	27.57	9	3.06	1.76	.08	.06 (no effect)
	Within Groups	416.17	239	1.74			
	Total	443.74	248				
Year of Study (Q6)	Between Groups	14.399	9	1.60	2.70	.01	.09 (no effect)
	Within Groups	141.489	239	.59			
	Total	155.888	248				
Duration of IE (Q8)	Between Groups	1.19	9	.13	.93	.50	.03 (no effect)
	Within Groups	33.73	239	.14			
	Total	34.92	248				
University Faculty (Q9)	Between Groups	50.95	9	5.66	1.14	.33	.04 (no effect)
	Within Groups	1185.06	239	4.96			
	Total	1236.01	248				
Accommodation (Q10)	Between Groups	5.26	9	.58	2.46	.01	.08 (no effect)
	Within Groups	56.82	239	.24			
	Total	62.08	248				
Previous Study Abroad (Q7)	Between Groups	.92	9	.10	.48	.89	.02 (no effect)
	Within Groups	50.68	239	.21			
	Total	51.60	248				
Previously been to Europe (Q11)	Between Groups	5.48	9	.61	.86	.56	.03 (no effect)
	Within Groups	168.91	239	.71			
	Total	174.39	248				
Previously been to England (Q12)	Between Groups	2.13	9	.24	.94	.49	.03 (no effect)
	Within Groups	60.12	239	.25			
	Total	62.24	248				
Arrival Experience (Q14)	Between Groups	3.81	9	.42	.99	.45	.04 (no effect)
	Within Groups	102.22	239	.43			
	Total	106.03	248				

Obtaining these conflicting results thus indicated inconsistencies in the data with the potential for increasing chances of either Type I (false positive) or Type II (false negative) errors. Ultimately, as shown in Table 17, each of the characteristics and previous experiences were found to have no significant effect on the students' overall Experience Quality; thus, further examinations involving modeling the data collected for this study have not included students' characteristics or previous experiences.

A subsequent step in analysing the data has involved using regression analyses in order to determine whether students' perceptions of Experience Quality could be accurately predicted by the subscales from items for students' Motivation, Engagement, Concerns, and Satisfaction. As presented earlier in Table 15, summative scores have been used for each of the subscales for Motivation, Engagement, and Satisfaction as well as summative measures for students' Concerns and perceptions of

Experience Quality. Therefore, the regression model investigated in this study (see Table 18) has included all 5 Motivation subscales, 3 subscales for student Engagement, 1 summative measure for Concerns, and 7 subscales for Satisfaction to predict students' perceptions of Experience Quality.

Table 18: Multiple Regression Coefficients for Predicting Experience Quality

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	-0.66	0.78		-0.85	.40
Motivations	<i>Personal Development</i>	-0.00	0.04	-0.00	-0.02	.98
	<i>Academic & Professional Development</i>	-0.01	0.03	-0.02	-0.38	.70
	<i>Socialisation</i>	-0.02	0.03	-0.05	-0.81	.42
	<i>Travel</i>	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.84	.40
	<i>Location</i>	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.40	.69
Engagement	<i>Academic Engagement</i>	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.64	.52
	<i>Social & Community Engagement</i>	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.13	.90
	<i>Travel Behaviours</i>	-0.03	0.04	-0.03	-0.58	.56
<i>Concerns</i>		-0.03	0.01	-0.12	-3.13	.00
Satisfaction	<i>Education</i>	0.08	0.053	0.07	1.46	.15
	<i>Personal Development</i>	-0.01	0.04	-0.02	-0.31	.76
	<i>Staff & Support Systems</i>	0.04	0.031	0.06	1.13	.26
	<i>Entertainment</i>	0.14	0.03	0.37	4.75	.00
	<i>Aesthetics</i>	0.15	0.05	0.17	3.24	.00
	<i>Social & Cultural Experiences</i>	-0.01	0.03	-0.03	-0.46	.65
	<i>Memory</i>	0.36	0.07	0.32	5.02	.00

As a reminder, the subscales for motivations and satisfaction use headings adapted from previous research according to key items:

- Motivations
 - Personal Development – *I wanted the opportunity to grow and develop as a person.*
 - Academic and Professional Development – *I wanted to gain experience.*
 - Socialisation – *I wanted to meet new people.*
 - Travel – *I wanted to travel.*
 - Location – *I wanted to experience everyday life in England.*
- Satisfaction
 - Education – *I have learned a lot during this experience.*
 - Personal Development – *I have learned a lot about myself because of this experience.*
 - Staff and Support Systems – *I have received the support I need to succeed academically.*
 - Entertainment – *This experience has been enjoyable.*
 - Aesthetics – *I have felt safe at the University.*
 - Social and Cultural Experiences – *It is easy to get involved as a student here.*
 - Memory – *I will remember many positive things about this experience.*

In examining the results, the regression model shown in Table 18 displayed overall significance ($F_{16,232}=34.27$, $p < .05$, R Square = .70, Adjusted R square = .68). According to these results, 70.3% of the variance in students' reported perceptions of Experience Quality could be explained by students' answers for Motivations, Engagement, Concerns, and Satisfaction. Upon further examination of the model coefficients for the subscales as shown in Table 18, three Satisfaction measures were found to be statistically significant predictors of Experience Quality ($p < .05$): Entertainment, Aesthetics, and Memory – meaning students were more positive about their experiences (i.e. regarding satisfaction, willingness to recommend, and overall rating of experience quality) if they had reported having had more fun and/or enjoyable experiences, had felt safe and appreciated the physical environment of the University, and felt more likely to retain positive memories about their international experience. Concerns were also found to have a significant, and negative, effect on students' general perceptions about Experience Quality whilst abroad.

4.5 Structural Equation Modeling

One purpose of this study has been to determine whether a structural equation model (SEM) of the international students' experiences could be created using the variables of motivation, engagement, and concerns to predict students' perceptions of their experience. Compared to the earlier correlation, ANOVA, and regression analyses which have used summative scores for the subscales of the variables, SEM has allowed a more complex investigation of the interrelationships between individual items from the questionnaire. The summative scales used earlier have thus been transformed into latent variables for grouping individual items as explained in Chapter Three. Specifically, individual items have been grouped as indicators of their respective latent variables based on the literature and the previous results from the scale reliability analyses. The SEM has also allowed a more thorough analysis of the system by including items which were excluded from earlier analyses due to their seeming divergence from other items in order to improve individual scale reliability scores.

As SEM involves testing theories, assumptions regarding the data have been tested resulting in either confirming or rejecting specific causal relationships (Byrne, 2001; Hoyle, 1995). Theories are examined using acceptable models until data has been produced which provides contrary evidence, indicating a need to either further adjust or reject the model (ibid). This study has focused on examining a proposed SEM structure based on reviewing previous research (as described in Chapters Two and Three), rather than comparing results with a previously established SEM. As such, multiple preliminary models have been tested in order to examine each of the variables included in the overall SEM model examined in this study based on recommendations

for model specification (see Bartholomew et al., 2008; Byrne, 2001; Blunch, 2011; Kline, 2005; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). In examining the relationships between the items, the results from previous analyses have been considered in addition to suggested modifications produced within the Amos[®] output. The results presented thus represent the individual and overall SEM models after respective modifications have been made according to accepted standards for SEM practice (ibid). As chi-square statistics are dependent on sample size, alternative fit statistics have been utilised considering the data available for analysis. While many of the fit statistics were not as good as may be desired (see Section 3.5.1), all of the models tested have produced better fit statistics than the independence model, meaning that the proposed models depicted relationships which displayed better results than analysing the items freely without a proposed model structure.

The SEM analysis of models tested for this study used a total of 131 items from the questionnaire. Only one item has been removed as students' answers were dichotomous (either Yes or No):

24. Are you involved in any clubs or societies through the students' union?

This item could not properly be analysed as a part of the overall SEM system within Amos[®] but has been reviewed earlier in this chapter (in Section 4.1.4) regarding students' responses to various items in the questionnaire.

4.5.1 Structural Equation Modeling: Individual SEM Components

Each of the individual variables of interest to this study have been analysed separately before combining them in the overall model. Due to the complexity of the models, figures have been included which show the respective variables (i.e. Motivation, Engagement, and Perceptions) and related factors but not individual items. Based on the results, Motivation was found to be a 2nd order variable encompassing 34 items for five factors related to Personal Development, Academic and Professional Development, Socialisation, Travel, and Location (CMIN/DF= 2.39; GFI=.77; CFI=.85; RMSEA=.07), as displayed in Figure 24. (For reference, model fit in SEM is commonly determined based on low values for CMIN/DF, below 5, and RMSEA, below .08, and high values for both GFI and CFI, each approaching 1.0) Similar to analyses for subscales presented earlier in Section 4.2.1, measurements of individual variables corresponding to students' general Motivation were reflected in multiple items – Personal Development (4 items), Academic and Professional Development (8 items), Socialisation (5 items), Travel (12 items), and Location (5 items).

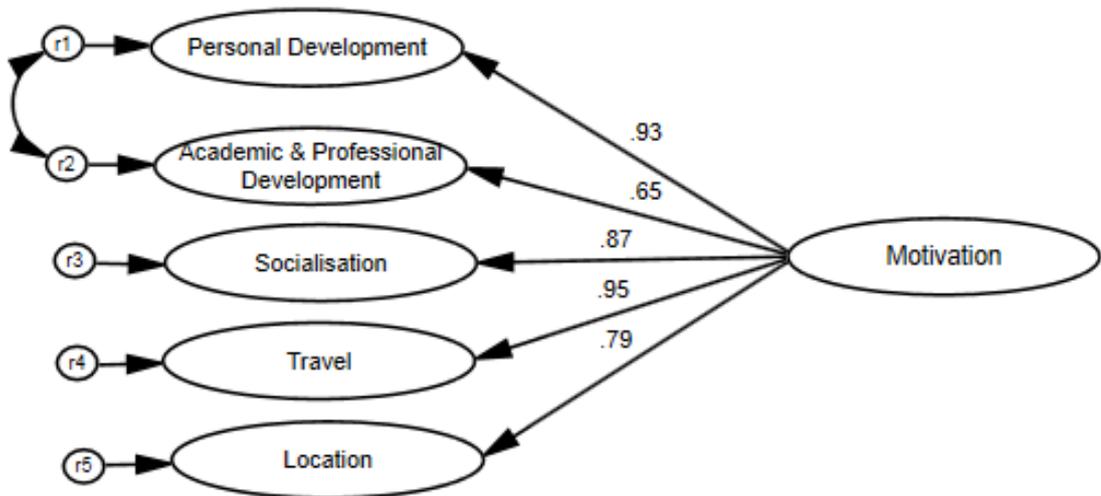


Figure 24. Motivation reflecting five factors

According to the standardised estimates displayed in Figure 24, Travel ($\beta=.95$) and Personal Development ($\beta=.93$) indicators had the greatest influence on students' Motivation, whereas Academic and Professional Development showed the least impact ($\beta=.65$). Additionally, a correlation was noted between students' motivations for Personal Development and Academic and Professional Development ($r=1.02$).

According to the research reviewed, student engagement has not been examined using the same procedures as this study. Therefore, the analyses involving student engagement needed to be tested using exploratory rather than confirmatory techniques (Blunch, 2011; Kline, 2005). Compared to previous analyses in Section 4.2.3, Engagement was found to be more adequately considered in the SEM as two 1st order variables for 31 items reflecting Academic Engagement (5 items) and Recreational Engagement (26 items); this change meant effectively combining both the Social and Cultural Engagement and Travel Behaviours subscales (CMIN/DF= 2.22; GFI=.79; CFI=.66; RMSEA=.07). This change has been reflected in Figure 25.

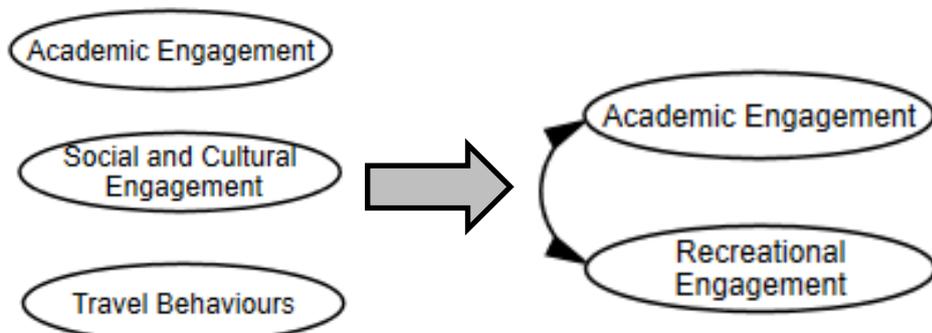


Figure 25. Student Engagement as two variables

The original three factor model from Section 4.2.3 (Academic Engagement, Social and Cultural Engagement, and Travel Behaviours) was thus discarded as it showed worse fit than the revised two factor model described above (CMIN/DF= 2.26; GFI=.79;

CFI=.65; RMSEA=.07). With the two variables for student engagement, a slight correlation was found between Academic Engagement and Recreational Engagement ($r=.02$). Using two variables for students' Engagement was further examined by comparing students who were involved in clubs and/or societies with the students' union (N=137) and students who were not (N=112). By extrapolating the results with a bootstrapped sample of 250 for each group, the data showed a better fit to using Academic Engagement and Recreational Engagement for students who were involved in clubs/societies (CMIN/DF= 1.72; GFI=.74; CFI=.61; RMSEA=.07) than for those who had reported no club/society affiliation (CMIN/DF= 1.78; GFI=.70; CFI=.61; RMSEA=.08). Further analyses between the two groups were unsuccessful as the programme determined the data to be insufficient for further comparisons.

As before in Section 4.2.2, students' Concerns were represented by a 1st order variable consisting of responses to 16 items and showed a reasonably good fit to the data across the various indices (CMIN/DF= 2.15; GFI=.91; CFI=.93; RMSEA=.07).

Finally, students' Perceptions about their international HE experience were found to be best represented as a 2nd order variable with 50 items focused on eight interrelated factors of evaluations related to Education (3 items), Personal Development (8 items), Staff and Support Systems (6 items), Social and Cultural Experiences (7 items), Entertainment (12 items), Aesthetics (6 items), Memory (3 items), and Experience Quality (5 items) based on subscales as presented earlier in Section 4.2.4 (CMIN/DF= 1.99; GFI=.72; CFI=.88; RMSEA=.06) and displayed in Figure 26.

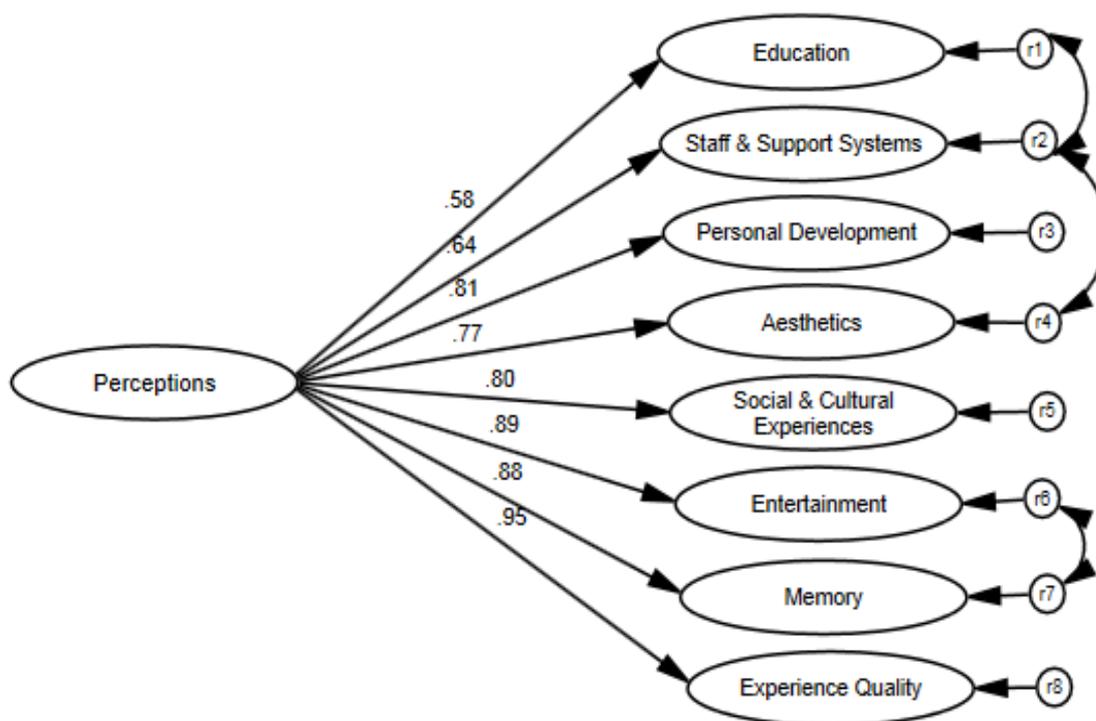


Figure 26. Student Perceptions reflected in eight factors

Experience Quality ($\beta=.95$) had the greatest impact on students' Perceptions according to the standardised estimates displayed in Figure 26. Outcomes related to Education ($\beta=.58$) and Staff and Support Systems ($\beta=.64$) indicated having the lowest effects on students' Perceptions overall. In addition, slight correlations were noted between students' responses for Education and Staff and Support Systems ($r=.04$), Staff and Support Systems and Aesthetics ($r=.04$), and Entertainment and Memory ($r=.02$). An SEM model based on earlier scale reliability analyses (refer to Section 4.2.4) which separated students' measurements of Experience Quality from the other seven factors for Satisfaction displayed poorer fit to the data and was subsequently rejected (CMIN/DF=2.14; GFI=.73; CFI=.87; RMSEA=.07).

4.5.2 Structural Equation Modeling: Overall SEM

Based on a review of previous research and relevant theories, the initial hypothetical SEM from Chapter Three (see Figure 17) proposed the following outcomes in relation to students' international HE experiences:

- Motivation affects Engagement,
- Engagement affects Concerns,
- Engagement affects Perceptions, and
- Concerns affect Perceptions.

Considering the results presented in the previous section (i.e. Section 4.5.1), Figure 27 shows the SEM identifying seven relationships of interest which have been tested between the primary variables used in this study.

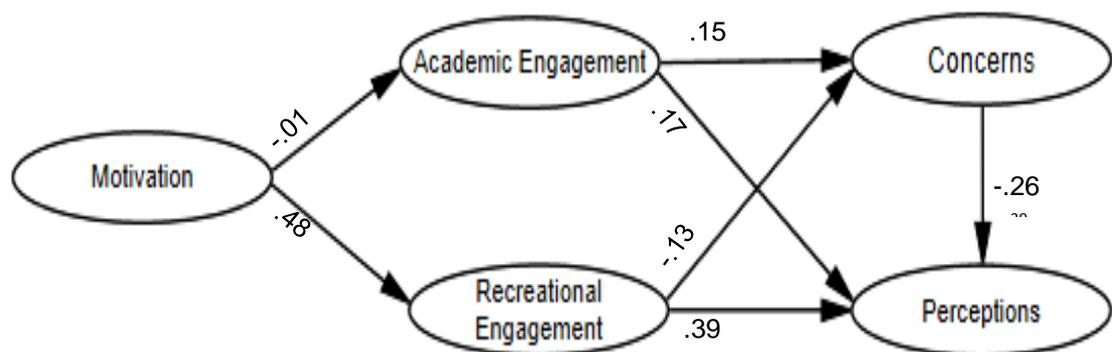


Figure 27. SEM depicting tested relationships between variables

As shown in Figure 27, the results from the analyses have indicated that students' Academic Engagement was minimally affected by their Motivations ($\beta= -.01$) although Recreational Engagement was positively affected by their Motivations ($\beta=.48$). Although Academic Engagement was shown to have increased students' Concerns ($\beta=.15$), Academic Engagement also had a positive impact on students' Perceptions ($\beta=.17$). On the other hand, Recreational Engagement was found to decrease students' Concerns ($\beta = -.13$) and also had a positive impact on their Perceptions ($\beta=.39$). Finally

as anticipated, students' Concerns had a negative effect on their Perceptions of their international HE experience ($\beta = -.26$). Correlations between all 15 of the 1st order factors are included in Table 23 in Appendix B.

The SEM analyses also provided information regarding direct and indirect effects, along with reported levels of significance, between the different variables and factors in the proposed model. The various effects within the SEM between the variables of interest to this study are displayed in Table 19; effects between each of the variables and their respective factors are presented separately in Table 23 and Table 24 in Appendix B.

Table 19. Standardised Path Coefficients between Variables

	Coefficient (β)
<i>Direct Effects</i>	
Motivation → Academic Engagement	-0.01
Motivation → Recreational Engagement	0.48*
Academic Engagement → Concerns	0.15
Academic Engagement → Perceptions	0.17
Recreational Engagement → Concerns	-0.13
Recreational Engagement → Perceptions	0.39*
Concerns → Perceptions	-0.26*
<i>Indirect Effects</i>	
Motivation → Concerns	-0.06
Motivation → Perceptions	0.20
Academic Engagement → Perceptions	-0.04
Recreational Engagement → Perceptions	0.03
<i>Total Effects</i>	
Motivation → Academic Engagement	-0.01
Motivation → Recreational Engagement	0.48
Motivation → Concerns	-0.06
Motivation → Perceptions	0.20
Academic Engagement → Concerns	0.15
Academic Engagement → Perceptions	0.13
Recreational Engagement → Concerns	-0.13
Recreational Engagement → Perceptions	0.43
Concerns → Perceptions	-0.26

*path was statistically significant ($p < .01$)

Note: The symbol → denotes a path between variables within the SEM

According to the results presented in Table 19, students' reported levels of Academic Engagement and Concerns were both minimally, albeit negatively, related to students' Motivations. However, the opposite was true for both Recreational Engagement and students' Perceptions about their international experiences which both indicated positive effects related to students' Motivations. Furthermore, significant positive relationships were shown to exist between students' Motivations and levels of Recreational Engagement, as well as between Recreational Engagement and students'

Perceptions about their experiences. In examining each of the factors within the variables (see Appendix B for Tables 23 and 24), Recreational Engagement reported positive effects on six of the eight identified factors related to students' Perceptions including: Personal Development ($\beta = 0.34$); Aesthetics ($\beta=0.33$); Social and Cultural Experiences ($\beta = 0.34$); Entertainment ($\beta = 0.39$); Memory ($\beta = 0.39$); and Experience Quality ($\beta = 0.40$). Recreational Engagement seemed to display a less noticeable effect on students' perceptions regarding Education and Staff and Support Systems, while Academic Engagement had minimal effects (i.e. less than 0.30) on the eight identified factors related to students' Perceptions. Finally, a significantly negative relationship was discovered to exist between students' reported levels of Concerns and their Perceptions about their experiences.

Collectively, the results from the SEM seem to provide some support for the use of the proposed model to examine the relationships between the variables of interest to this study (i.e. students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions about their international experiences), showing low yet acceptable fit relative to the data from the questionnaire (CMIN/DF= 1.76; GFI=.54; CFI=.70; RMSEA=.05). Although the CMIN/DF value was well below the cut-off of 5 at 1.76 and the RMSEA value indicates a good fit relative to the data at .05, the results from both the goodness-of-fit statistic (GFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI) seemed to indicate there may have been concerns in interpreting the data in relation to the proposed model (GFI =.54; CFI = .70). In contrast however, the independent model – meaning no structure of variables or subordinate variables for the individual items – showed unacceptable fit to the data overall (CMIN/DF= 3.49; GFI=.14; CFI=.00; RMSEA=.10). As stated, the model was conceived based on reviewing previous research and available theories regarding students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions about the international experience. Based on the inconclusive results from the SEM, further insights for interpreting the model involved examining the SEM results in consideration of students' comments in the interviews as described in the next chapter and discussed collectively in Chapter Six.

4.6 Summary of Analyses

The various analyses conducted on the data collected from the questionnaire have allowed for a more thorough examination of the relationships between the variables of prime interest to this study – more precisely, students' perceptions of their experiences as predicated upon specific motivations, student engagement, and concerns whilst abroad. Descriptive analyses indicated various differences between the students based on specific characteristics and previous experiences, in addition to diverse motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions regarding their international HE experiences.

Scale reliability analyses confirmed the grouping together of items from the questionnaire into summative measures for motivation, engagement, concerns, and perceptions regarding measures of satisfaction and experience quality. Although the ANOVA indicated no statistical difference between students' perceptions based on socio-demographic differences, correlation analysis indicated significant positive relationships between the primary variables while multiple regression showed individual variable scales for motivation, engagement, and concerns may be used to predict overall perceptions. Finally, the proposed SEM displayed relatively decent results based on examining goodness-of-fit measurements for reliability.

Based on these quantitative results, it seems that students' motivations can be used to predict how students engage in their experience, student engagement affects both concerns whilst abroad and overall perceptions, and students' concerns whilst abroad can have a negative impact on their overall perceptions of the international experience. These findings will be further explored through the qualitative data in Chapter Five and discussed together in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five: Results from Qualitative Analyses

As formerly mentioned in Chapter Three, this study is concerned with exploring the experiences of international students from the students' perspective. While Chapter Four has emphasised the quantitative data, this chapter focuses on exploring the results from analysing the qualitative data. Chapter Six then discusses the overall results for this study by triangulating the results from both the quantitative and qualitative data in relation to the research questions.

Qualitative information has been gathered from the students using six open-ended questions in the questionnaire and by conducting ten semi-structured interviews with individual students following their participation in the questionnaire. The qualitative data is considered valuable as it may be used to confirm and/or clarify findings from the quantitative data, as well as draw attention to new information which may enhance further understanding of the international students' experiences. When examining the questionnaire data, 142 of the 249 students (57.0%) provided at least one comment in response to the six open-ended items. Furthermore, a total of 67 students who participated in the questionnaire indicated they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview to find out more about their experiences. From this number, a total of ten students accepted invitations to be interviewed for this study. A complete coding summary based on the NVivo[®] output is provided in Table 20 which shows the amount of qualitative data generated and analysed from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. As stated in Chapter Three, analysing the qualitative data involved importing the relevant data from the questionnaire, transcribing each individual interview, and then identifying emerging themes and comparing students' answers using content analysis techniques with the assistance of NVivo[®] 10 software. While the items from the questionnaire generated a large quantity of information, the interviews provided richer data with the opportunity to ask more probing questions as to 'why' the students responded as they did in the online questionnaire. (An example of one of the transcribed interviews is provided in Appendix C.)

Table 21 further presents the coding rationale for the analysis as six general themes emerged from the data with students' comments reflecting Social and Cultural Experiences, Academic Experiences, Travel Experiences, Personal Development, Experienced Difficulties or Concerns, and Positive Reflections. In addition to the six main themes, different subthemes were also identified as shown in Table 21. It should be noted that some of the students' comments have been coded at multiple themes when appropriate.

Table 20: Summary of Coding for Qualitative Data

Source Document	Total Words in Source	Total Paragraphs in Source	Number of Themes Coded	Coded Percentage of Source	Number of Text References
Online Questionnaire					
Q35. What will you remember most?	1126	113	28	95.0%	284
Q36. What surprised you?	1170	230	26	92.5%	429
Q37. What disappointed you?	1224	170	26	88.9%	387
Q38. What enhanced your experience?	683	163	28	88.8%	324
Q39. What could be improved?	899	110	22	95.7%	307
Q41. What would you change?	751	59	24	92.9%	125
Totals	5,853	845	-	-	1,856
Semi-Structured Interviews					
1. German Erasmus Year	1281	50	25	70.2%	43
2. Danish Undergraduate	1536	65	26	85.1%	46
3. German Undergraduate	1693	86	26	66.5%	60
4. French Erasmus Year	4475	106	30	83.4%	99
5. American Masters	4094	129	29	69.7%	89
6. Mexican Masters	3410	113	26	79.1%	92
7. Italian Erasmus Semester	8927	244	31	64.6%	152
8. Chinese Masters	4446	313	27	59.0%	118
9. Austrian Erasmus Year	7747	594	30	40.8%	145
10. Canadian Semester	8197	706	28	33.6%	115
Totals	45,806	2,406	-	-	959

Table 21: Thematic Coding Summary of Qualitative Data

Themes and Subthemes	Number of Sources	Number of Coding References	Number of Words Coded	Number of Paragraphs Coded
Academic Experiences	16	361	13,185	495
Course-specific	16	63	6,641	167
Academic support	13	126	3,193	156
Differences from home	16	65	8,127	127
Social and Cultural Experiences	16	459	16,875	650
Students' union clubs or societies	13	103	4,743	169
Friendships	16	88	7,242	163
Events and activities	14	52	3,907	130
International students	16	78	5,272	127
Accommodation	14	58	2,185	85
British culture	10	51	1,893	77
Coursemates	13	29	1,730	52
British people	13	20	1,974	29
Sport or exercise	9	15	1,165	20
Travel Experiences	16	95	8,280	174
City	9	31	1,689	46
England	6	9	1,583	25
Europe	3	3	230	5
Personal Development	16	109	11,116	119
Different perspective	11	43	7,656	108
Language competency	12	27	2,596	51
Developing confidence	8	19	1,957	37
Personal maturity	8	16	2,294	36
Learning new things	8	22	2,145	29
Overcoming challenges	7	10	1,407	17
Experienced Difficulties or Concerns	15	401	13,021	517
Division of British / international	14	63	3,639	103
Physical environment	11	52	2,113	63
Missing home	9	24	3,396	61
Meeting people	11	21	2,282	49
High cost (expensive)	10	30	1,394	38
Feelings of isolation / alienation	10	27	1,752	37
Positive Reflections	15	109	14,659	274
Cultural differences	15	69	10,167	188
Enjoying the experience	11	35	4,982	98
Differences in university experience	10	27	3,130	62
Feeling grateful	2	5	1,157	8

Table 22: Overview of Semi-Structured Interview Sessions

Interview	Nationality	Gender	Academic Programme	Duration
1	German	Female	Erasmus Student (Academic Year)	9:13
2	Denmark	Female	Undergraduate Student	12:35
3	German	Female	Undergraduate Student	Email
4	France	Female	Erasmus Student (Academic Year)	24:43
5	USA	Female	Masters Student	22:41
6	Mexico	Male	Masters Student	19:51
7	Italy	Male	Erasmus Student (Single Term)	55:23
8	China	Female	Masters Student	29:55
9	Austria	Female	Erasmus Student (Academic Year)	47:42
10	Canada	Female	Exchange Student (Single Term)	37:03

The Undergraduates interviewed represent distinct programmes with two studying at the University for a single term, three participating in academic year exchanges through the Erasmus scheme, and two enrolled at the University for their Undergraduate degrees. The three Postgraduates interviewed were all completing their Masters degrees at the University. From the students interviewed, ages ranged from 20 to 27 with an average age of 22, slightly less than the average age from the questionnaire data. All of the students interviewed were single and the interviews were unintentionally biased towards female students as only two male students accepted invitations to participate in the final interview process.

Altogether, the interviews provided over four hours of recorded information, including one participant who responded via multiple emails to both main questions and subsequent enquiries for more information (Interview 3) and one participant who was interviewed in conjunction with a staff member from the School of Earth and Environment⁴ (Interview 10). While these two interviews were administered differently than the others, they have both provided relevant and useful information for this study. Furthermore, after analysis both of these interviews were found overall to be not too dissimilar from the other interviews in either scope or context which would have sufficiently justified their exclusion.

The interviews were of different lengths ranging from just under ten minutes to nearly an hour with an average time of 28 minutes. The first two interviews were conducted with acquaintances which meant that there was already a degree of rapport between the researcher and the participant that needed to be formed otherwise during subsequent interviews with the other students. These interviews were thus shorter as introductions were already established. Only two of the interviews were held with native English speakers (Interviews 5 and 10). Although all of the participants were competent with conversing in English, individual students initially exhibited variations in confidence

⁴ Staff from the School of Earth and Environment invited me to attend and help facilitate a focus group they had planned for their international students, to which only one student came.

with using the language which seemed to stabilise after establishing a rapport between the researcher and the student. However, irrelevant information related to the experiences of the researcher included in the conversation whilst establishing a rapport with the participants has not been included in the analysis. When necessary, longer quotes have been included in their entirety in order to provide valuable context and maintain the complete cohesion of the student's thoughts in relation to the relevant topic. All of the interviews covered similar questions with all the students based on a flexible interview schedule as will be discussed further.

To maintain consistency between both the quantitative and qualitative data, the interviews included questions about students' experiences as international students in both academic and non-academic contexts. The interviews were meant to encourage participants to reflect on their personal experiences as international students and provide further detailed information based on three main points:

1. Why did you choose to come to the University as an international student?
2. How would you describe your experience as an international student?
3. What would you say to students who are considering studying abroad?

These points of reference represent the three stages of experiences as previously discussed in Chapter Two – preparation, engagement, and reflection – and are used to provide a general structure for subsequently interpreting findings from the qualitative data in reference to the stated research questions for this study.

5.2 Why did you choose to come to the University?

The quantitative data results from Chapter Four show that students have many reasons for why they may choose to study abroad as part of their HE experience. In the interviews, I asked students to be more specific and talk about what made them choose to come to the University for their international HE experience. Among the responses, more than one student mentioned their initial desire to come to England in general rather than having an attraction to the University itself. As one student stated:

It has always been England, because I could have chosen anywhere in the world to do my one year. I always knew I wanted to go to the UK. (Interviewee 4)

This student acknowledged that while they were able to study anywhere in the world, their decision to come to the UK was based at least in part on some previous assumptions about what they wanted from an international HE experience. Students may initially want to come to the UK and afterwards they do research to find out which universities are suitable. Other students decided to apply based on their initial impressions of the University itself.

To be honest it was a very random choice. I kind of Googled universities and came up with [University]. I got the impression that it was a good university. They had a very nice brochure and it looked very professional and very intriguing subjects and all. (Interviewee 2)

I love English so I just want to come into an English environment but I think America is so dangerous so I chose the UK. And for [the city] because I read an article in a journal and I found that the University is quite attractive and so I choose [here]. (Interviewee 8)

These quotes indicate that students make their choices based on a variety of factors including location and opportunities that are made available which the students perceive as either 'attractive' or 'intriguing'. Furthermore, while the academic opportunities at the University attract many students, the opportunity to travel was also noted within students' comments.

I always know I wanted to go to the UK. And [here], in particular, was mainly because I wanted to travel. ... So that's why it made me choose [here]. That it was a good university. The courses were interesting to me. (Interviewee 4)

Travel is an important aspect of the international student experience as the quote above illustrates. Students today have a wide range of choices for what and where they can study. By traveling, students experience different systems of education and have a chance to encounter 'foreign' cultures. Without this noted desire to travel, most students would probably never leave their home countries in the first place.

5.2.1 Learning and/or Using English as a Foreign Language

Along with traveling and the perceived opportunity to experience foreign cultures, some international students are interested in the experience of learning and/or using a foreign language on a regular basis. Many of the students in the interviews for instance were not native English speakers (8 out of 10 interviewees). However as English is a modern lingua franca for many HEIs across the world, students are no longer primarily limited to the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand if they want to attend HEIs providing instruction in English. Nevertheless, some students still prefer to go to a country where English is the native language for their international HE experience.

Learning and/or using a foreign language can be a source of pleasure for some international students who adore being able to communicate in a different language.

I love speaking English. I'm usually not a very talkative person but if it's in English you can get me to say anything. So that's what I'm going to miss the most coming back. (Interviewee 4)

Other students are concerned with the challenges associated with learning and using a foreign language on a regular basis. Some students who are very open and communicative in the interviews describe some of the challenges that they have experienced in using a foreign language.

At first, I don't want to talk. Not I don't want, I just I'm afraid to talk with others because I'm not confident in my oral English. I'm afraid if I talk to you, you don't understand me. It's so embarrassing. (Interviewee 8)

This student's statement indicates that it is not a lack of skill which is preventing them from speaking to others but rather a lack of confidence. However with time and practice,

many international students who initially lack confidence in their personal skills with the foreign language can become more assertive as the following excerpt demonstrates:

It's really challenging because I'm only in seminars with native speakers so I sometimes feel a bit intimidated by them. But in general, I think it's very good for me and my spoken language and in order to you know just learn the language and the culture and something about my studies. (Interviewee 1)

Whereas some international students may feel that they are at a disadvantage or even may express “*occasionally feeling more stupid than in your native language*” (Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate), the nuances of language can cause problems for anyone. Even native English speakers can have difficulties with encountering language variations in another country:

It took me a while to get used to like colloquialisms and dialects and that kind of thing. And I'm still getting used to it now but I can say I've definitely picked up more on like language things this time around 'cause all I'm just hanging out with English people. (Interviewee 5)

Learning to use a language properly can be a difficult task, especially considering local dialects, accents, and colloquialisms which one does not fully comprehend without having direct experience of the host culture. However, gaining experience by encountering the foreign nature of the host culture also serves to build students' confidence over time and allows them to reflect more positively on their international experiences.

5.3 How would you describe your experience?

Similar to the quantitative results presented in Chapter Four, students are mostly positive about their experiences as international students based on their responses to the open-ended items in the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

As one student remarked,

To live alone in a foreign country with a foreign language (not to mention a different academic system) may be hard – but it is worth every minute to work for it! The experience to be in a foreign country and to make new friends there is priceless!!! (Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

Many students consider their international HE experiences to be both valuable and multifaceted from both academic and non-academic points of view. International students may be challenged by difficulties based on coping with changes inherent in experiencing ‘foreign’ aspects whether based on language, the HE system, or the general culture of the host country as illustrated by the previous quote. However, encountering and learning to overcome such difficulties is part of the overall international experience. The responses of many students seem to further support the inclusion of different aspects of engagement for international students (as presented by the quantitative data in Chapter Four), namely Academic Engagement, Social and Community Engagement, and Travel Behaviours, since many students make such distinctions in their responses. One of the students (Interviewee 7) even made a clear

distinction between many answers to questions by explicitly stating “*on the academic side of things...*” and “*on the social side...*” during the course of the interview.

While abroad, international students seem to be focused on their coursework, making friends, and traveling in a ‘foreign’ country and experiencing other cultures. Although the subsequent discussion broadly follows this order, this is not meant to imply any indication of students’ personal priorities.

5.3.1 Different Learning and Teaching Styles

Part of having an international higher education experience involves encountering different styles of teaching and learning within another HE system. Inevitably, international students will make comparisons between their experiences at the University and their home university. One example of differences displayed by findings from the quantitative data is that international students tend to have fewer contact hours while abroad (see Section 4.1.2). Students’ responses to this change in academic requirements are mixed however. Some students clearly appreciate the increased emphasis on independent learning:

It’s a lot more independent thought and organising yourself independently and you know from an educational standpoint I feel like you get a lot more out of that than having a structured semester where you have all this work due during the semester and homework and all this kind of stuff. (Interviewee 5)

I think the books I read during these nine months are more than books I read during four years in my university. Because here I think teachers focus more on autonomy but in China we just do what the teacher asks – what teachers ask us to do. So if the teacher says we don’t have homework this week then we will never read any books. But here I know I needed to keep updated or I will maybe not do a good job. (Interviewee 8)

These students’ comments show a positive understanding of the change in expectations. With this view, the students themselves are responsible for making preparations and organising their studies rather than relying on someone else to tell them what they should be doing. This is not meant to imply that the staff at the University do not support students. In fact, several students express their reliance on the availability of staff and support resources at the University such as demonstrated in the following quote:

As I said, I think it’s easy to get involved and also I like the way of studying here. And I think even if your English isn’t that good there’s so much support so there were like the Skills@Library courses and I think also that tutors are really understandable and will help you. (Interviewee 9)

As the student mentions, there are many different support services available to students at the University which are run by individual departments/schools, the University libraries, the students’ union, the Student Counselling Centre, the Language Centre, and the University’s International Office. Most of the services are available to all students at the University but some are specifically designed for providing additional

support to international students. Further auxiliary services are made available to students who have chosen to live in University accommodation and to postgraduate research students as well.

As international students spend fewer contact hours in lectures and seminars, there is also an added emphasis on developing skills in time management and self-regulation:

[For American students,] I think I would impress on them that the educational system is very different; it seems like you have a lot of free time, but you should be spending that time differently than you would at home.

(Questionnaire Response from American Undergraduate)

The availability of courses for international students can likewise be a pleasant change from what they are used to at their home university. Depending on the course and the type of exchange, some students are limited to courses within a specific department while others can choose their classes from multiple academic disciplines across the University.

Although the very good part about pairing in Erasmus is that you get to choose every course you take so you can't say you don't like your year because in France you have compulsory modules so you can't choose. And yeah, here you take everything you want so next year is going to be so hard.

(Interviewee 4)

Some international students may feel they have more of a choice in making their own decisions while they are abroad. By contrast, other students may not appreciate the change in academic expectations or the increased emphasis on personal autonomy.

As a postgraduate student, I feel academic hours are extremely few. I respect independent learning but this is too 'independent'!

(Questionnaire Response from Greek Postgraduate)

Though it is all relative, some students may struggle when they do not receive direct instructions from academic staff or they may just prefer more regular contact hours.

Some international students are similarly unsure about the perceived change in academic expectations.

Yeah, I feel like this isn't actually part of my education just 'cause it's so not what I'm used to and it's like I just don't feel like it's actually going towards my degree. I know I'm getting the credits but since it's not in my university and it's not like what I'm used to I'm kind of – it's kind of like a make-believe world right now.

(Interviewee 10)

Certain students can feel as though they do not really belong at a host university because it is such a different environment. For some students, it may take time to fully comprehend and reflect on their international experience beyond noticing the differences between their home and host universities. This supports previous models which focus on examining intercultural sensitivity as a progression from ethnocentric to ethnorelative points of view as referred to earlier in Chapter Two (Bennett, 1986; Hammer et al., 2003). Students essentially can find out how they learn best by being international students and experiencing other systems of HE. Some students realise

that they would prefer more specific guidance while others welcome the chance to become more autonomous and self-directed.

5.3.2 Meeting People From All Over the World

When asked the general question “How would you describe your experience?”, many students tend to focus on non-academic aspects.

I would sum up with the people and the activities and just traveling – that’s the best thing about being abroad. I mean the course is good but you can study anywhere... but it’s so much better to do it abroad. You get lots of different experiences and you get to see how other people study and stuff. (Interviewee 6)

Another student affirmed this view as they said,

Studies were a bit second this year. Usually it’s not so the priorities were different. You want to make the most of it. (Interviewee 4)

Ostensibly, these students’ comments seem to suggest that the main emphasis of the international student experience from the students’ perspective is not necessarily on being a student per se but rather on social and travel opportunities inherent in the international experience. When not prompted with a specific reference to their course, the students are free to discuss what they feel is relevant with the researcher producing results apropos of the intended phenomenological nature of this study.

The students’ focus on social experiences also corroborates previous results from Chapter Four, specifically the SEM model showing that students’ positive perceptions of their experience depend less on academic engagement than on engagement in other activities corresponding to social leisure, cross-cultural, and/or travel experiences (see Figure 27). For example, many students explicitly refer to “making friends” and “meeting people from all over the world” in response to the open-ended items in the online questionnaire referring to “What will you remember most?”, “What has surprised you?”, and “What has enhanced your experience?”. One student’s response to Question 35 from the questionnaire clearly illustrates this position:

The friends that I have made here, definitely. I’ve met so many wonderful people who have touched my heart and changed me as a person, and for the better.
(Questionnaire Response from American Undergraduate)

However, making friends whilst abroad can be a quicker or easier process for some international students than others. Some individuals may need more time to form personal bonds and feel connected with other students when they are abroad.

Like I’m still thinking about my real life, my real friends. My biggest connections are at home, where I come from. Ok, of course it’s still like that but like I didn’t feel very connected for the whole semester. I could feel like ok these people are my friends but they’re not really ‘the’ friends and suddenly now that everything’s coming to an end, I’m actually realising that oh gosh I’m way more connected than I expected with these kinds of people. (Interviewee 7)

Thus international students who are at the host university for only a single term may feel even less connected than other students who are studying abroad for longer

periods. When arriving in second term, students do not have the same advantage as those that arrive in autumn. At the start of term in the autumn, the University's focus is on helping new first year and international students to acclimatise to the University with Freshers' and Welcome Week events. Welcome Guides are available to answer questions and provide directions to any students who might need assistance. Second term starts in a similar fashion, on a smaller scale, with a Re-Freshers' Week in January and the World Unite Festival in February. However, by this time the majority of students who arrived in the autumn have already familiarised themselves with the University and the students' union and established individual peer groups.

According to some students, the process of meeting people is facilitated much easier through involvement in various clubs and societies through the students' union than trying to make connections in lectures.

No I think it's easier through the societies actually because they have all these things like going to bars and things, social events and stuff. So they kind of force you to be social. So that's really good. It's a bit hard to get to know people from the course I think. But I don't know, maybe it's because I'm older and like maybe I haven't been that outgoing myself. (Interviewee 7)

Another interviewee affirms the importance of getting involved as they say "*being part of societies just makes it I think easier to live here*" (Interviewee 6). This student's comment is particularly interesting because of their active involvement in twenty different clubs and societies while completing a one year Masters degree at the University. Some students can thrive by participating in multiple groups based on a variety of interests. Alternatively, other students may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number and wide variety of available opportunities.

At the beginning it's been really confusing 'cause there were so many different opportunities. I was really like I don't know who is my friend, what to do, where to go. There were so many things that were interesting to me. (Interviewee 7)

While some students may choose not to be regularly involved in specific activities, it actually sometimes seems like being actively disengaged as a student at the University takes more effort. There are so many activities, events, and opportunities to get involved at the University and through the students' union that students are provided with Give-It-A-Go programme booklets at the start of each term and free paper wall calendars which include all major dates and events for the year. Students can either plan their activities for the semester in advance or spontaneously decide to participate depending on the type of event or activity. Although some students may initially be dazed by the wide variety of opportunities available to get involved at the University, many students mention that the students' union at the University has enhanced their international experience in some way saying things like "*the student union is awesome!*" (Questionnaire Response from Swedish Undergraduate) and "*the*

University Union (it's amazing!)" (Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate).

Intriguingly, students who may initially be daunted by the idea of participating in one of the over 250 clubs or societies with the students' union often form their own informal associations with other students. Of the five students interviewed who have decided not to be affiliated with any club or society through the students' union, four have developed relationships with other students from either their accommodation and/or orientation groups which met at the start of term. Based on the comments, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter also help many students communicate almost instantaneously with others with similar interests and socialise more spontaneously.

Some students almost purposefully dissociate from other students however. This seems more common for postgraduate students than undergraduates as both of the following examples illustrate. One student commented that they socialised primarily with other students from their home country (China),

Because I think we have some similar habits and our and we can talk, talk more because when I'm um. I think... my flatmates are friendly to me and... we did quite well a good job at home but sometimes I just can't find some topic to talk with them. I don't know why just we don't have some common interests maybe. I don't know. (Interviewee 8)

This student had talked with a relative who had studied abroad at the University before and they had not expected to make friends with anyone who was not from their home country. So while language can be perceived as a barrier there are also differences in expectations and interests between different groups of students. Another student mentioned their decision to work part-time in a café as providing a means by which to 'avoid' other students and meet 'real' British people as they said,

I don't really affiliate well with people my age like I just hang out with a lot of just older friends. So yeah, it's nice not being in student areas. At least for me it is. (Interviewee 5)

The same student also said that working in close proximity in a masters student suite within the School had led to stronger collegiate affiliations than any other connection to fellow students at the University.

There's a core group of us that are in the masters suite working every day and we're all like working together and it's really really great... and it's amazing knowing you have that support system. (Interviewee 5)

As the student mentions having a 'support system' with other students in their academic department, it is interesting to note that both students (i.e. Interviewees 5 and 8) had also mentioned contacting their parents specifically for reassurance and encouragement when dealing with particularly trying situations:

I don't know, maybe I just felt homesick. It's about 7pm here and about 3am in China and I just called my friend and I cried. And in December, I really wanted to buy a ticket to go back home but my mom said, "No you should travel a lot." She said, "Maybe it's the only time you are in the UK so you need to travel a lot. Travel around. You don't need to come back to China. You stay in China for the rest fifty years. Why do you want to come back?" (Interviewee 8)

I was like beating myself up for a while. So a couple of my grades I got back were not very good and I was like "Mom, what am I doing?" like "Why am I doing this masters?" (Interviewee 5)

Many students in HE may experience feeling homesick at some point in time after the novelty of the new environment starts to fade and pressure increases with impending deadlines for essays and/or exams. Unfortunately, international students can have such feelings amplified due to the distance they are from their family and friends. Two of the students interviewed actually mentioned having a boy/girlfriend back in their home countries and all of the students referred to social media networks as being necessary for helping them stay in contact with loved ones.

Yeah, I couldn't imagine it without Skype. I'm sure that like before the time of the internet when you could just like call maybe for two minutes, I wouldn't have survived. (Interviewee 9)

As demonstrated by the preceding quote, it is difficult for some students to imagine not being able to communicate instantaneously through the auspices of the internet despite any actual physical distance which may exist between people. Even being miles away from home, international students are able to stay connected with people across the world via multiple methods including (but not limited to) texts, email, Facebook, Twitter, Facetime, Instagram, and Skype. Besides standard email, the fact that most of these now familiar and widely prevalent technologies were only made available internationally or even invented within the last decade (Skype was launched in late 2003; Facebook launched in early 2004) seems nearly inconceivable to some students. With such widespread communication established, international students do not have to worry about losing contact with others either from home when they travel to another country to study or from their time abroad once they return to their home country.

5.3.3 Traveling and Living in Another Culture

As previously mentioned, a large part of the international HE experience is inherently ascribed to the opportunity afforded students to travel. International students must initially travel to get to the host country but then they also tend to spend at least part of their time traveling during their studies. Several international students in this study express having developed a personal interest in traveling as a result of their international HE experience:

The best thing – maybe just about travel because I love traveling. (Interviewee 8)

My strongest memories are of being able to travel so easily to so many wonderful places in the UK. (Questionnaire Response from Canadian Undergraduate)

The best thing is definitely traveling, like being in a place that's so accessible to other places. (Interviewee 10)

For some students, such as those quoted above, studying abroad allows them to travel much easier than when in their home country. While the UK is relatively small compared to the landmass of other countries, it is centrally located with travel opportunities to many destinations across continental Europe as demonstrated by the full itinerary of one student's travels over the course of a single term abroad:

I went to Liverpool and Newcastle and Oxford and I went to London on two different weekends. And I went to Edinburgh for a weekend. Scarborough, yeah I went there. And then during the Easter holidays, I went over to mainland Europe and did like the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, and France 'cause I met up with my parents there. That was nice. (Interviewee 10)

While some international students do manage to travel extensively while abroad as the prior example shows, it seems that the longer students stay in a country the less they travel. This phenomenon is described better at length by one student as follows:

I understand that um well change happens and this is only for one year and stuff. Um I don't think I would stay longer because well I think one year is is good enough but I I really don't want to leave also. Like you know what I mean? It's like if you're, if you're here for one year and you enjoy it when you stay two years then it just becomes more common and everything. And I think that's also what happens with lots of, uh with lots of PhD students that I know. Because they're here for longer, they. Well you take your time and and you go like 'Oh I can do that tomorrow.' Or stuff. So I think if I had been here for longer than one year I wouldn't have joined twenty societies. I would have taken it more slowly. Well like, 'Ah I can do that later'. But it's just knowing that it's only for a short period of time you you want to go 'I want to do everything!'... 'Cause that's like another thing about living abroad is you get to travel even more than people who are here because you are like "Oh I am only here for one year. I want to travel everywhere". (Interviewee 6)

Based on this quote and other data from the interviews, most students tend to confine their travels to coincide with holidays and breaks between terms but if they believe that they only have a short time available for traveling before they return to their home country or they do not anticipate having the opportunity to return in the near future they may try to travel to more locations.

Some students continue to reflect on their temporary experiences as international students in terms which would further distinguish them from other students and those who travel to different places as tourists. The following quote from a student has been provided in its entirety as they mention the perceived differences between being an international student and being a tourist throughout:

Tourism is not exactly the same as actually living in a place. ... Because you know you're here temporarily so that's. You can either see it as staying as in living in for a year or as a whole traveling year. I tried to really have a bit of both because I know that's definitely not the way I would have behaved if I had been just staying France, because I don't travel that much. Studies were a bit second this year. Usually it's not. So the priorities were different. You want to make the most of it. So yeah I'd definitely say in-between. Because you're here, you're living, you see what things happen, you can connect with the people. You can't

just do that when you're just there for tourism. I've been, for instance, I had a cycling trip. So I just went with a friend, we took a, I rented a bike and we went for five days just cycling around and camping. Ok, that was in March so and though the snow we were just freezing half to death but that was that was amazing and I really met some English people because we asked if we could camp in their gardens. So they were kind of surprised but you could. They were surprised so you could talk to them and interact and well I... That, that's not the kind of things you just do with tourism and yet every weekend I was going either to London or discovering some other city like tourists will do. So a bit of both. That's the fact that you think you're here for just a year. You know that your days are counted. Uh, if I were to stay here for an unknown amount of time, I probably would not have rushed to do all those things. Because you also have, you always think you've got time to do it later. So that's really changing. And I know that if I don't pass my year here I still can get back to my home university. They'll just give me extra work and so you have no pressure. That's really not the same. And well I loved my courses so the aim was not to fail but you don't even have the incentive of passing your year to actually get yourself to work. You do it because you like what you do and well that's really a different way of tackling things.

(Interviewee 4)

Basically, traveling to another country to live for a period of time and experiencing everyday life in another culture shapes how international students interpret the 'foreign' aspects of their international HE experience. Conversely, students who do not like to travel do not typically choose to leave their home country and participate in an international HE experience.

International students are in the host country to study at the University and gain experience of the local host culture. If a student travels too much and consequently spends very little time at the University or with other students, they may not feel like they are part of the student community at all. However without traveling, students' experiences are alternatively limited to the confines of the University environment and immediate local surroundings.

I'm really thankful as I said for the academic part of it but rather than this definitely for the sort of multicultural experience, at least for me. And it's just something that makes you understand things like when you're home in the place where you live, you've been living for the whole of your life, you just tend to think after a while that everywhere is like this. That everywhere people have the same habits. People eat the same things or people just watch the same shows. I don't know. But it's not. ...

Everyone tends to kind of take for granted the place you live in, what you have around. While coming here, I've been trying ...to explore the UK but I'm doing it and I'm just realising I have so many beautiful amazing places that I can visit and experience back home.

(Interviewee 7)

Traveling is an important and integral part of the international HE experience. Students get to interact with different people, do different things, and realise that there are multiple perspectives to consider and appreciate one's surroundings, regardless of location whether at home or abroad.

5.4 What would you say to students who are considering studying abroad?

International students who have already spent time studying abroad in the host country or elsewhere are often thought of as a source of reliable information (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; McAllister et al., 2006; QS, 2014; UKCISA, 2008; UKCOSA, 2004, 2007) for those students who are interested in studying abroad themselves or who have only recently arrived at the University. As stated previously in Chapter Four, the majority of students in the online questionnaire (nearly 95%) said that they would recommend studying abroad in general, and a slightly lower percentage (88%) said they would recommend studying abroad at the University specifically. In the interviews, I asked students “What would you change about your experience?” and “What would you say to students interested in studying abroad?”. I asked these questions to encourage students to provide more specific reasons as they reflected on their overall experiences and considered changes based on their personal development resulting from the experience – comparing their perceptions before studying abroad and after having an international HE experience.

Many students commented on the transformative experience they have had as a result of studying abroad as part of their HE experience. Some students realise that they have changed and interpret things differently after being abroad for a period of time.

I think I've changed a lot during this nine months. Maybe I will just go back home and be a teacher and not do something really great but my view has changed. Like I've travelled to Europe and when I talk with my child I will say oh I've been to Europe, it's so great. It will show that I am maybe experienced and I think my life is more colourful than before. (Interviewee 8)

It's a great experience. And even if it's not [here], I think just everyone should travel and try to live abroad because it's just life changing. You get another perspective of everything. (Interviewee 6)

Once again, the students' emphasis is on traveling and living abroad in contrast to staying in their home countries. As the previous comments show, studying abroad is a way to gain valuable experience and expand one's personal views but another student goes even further in their response by using the term 'global citizen' and clarifying it as:

With all the people I met here and the international friends I made it feels like I had a world-wide family, people I could visit in their countries and cultures (if I had the money). So I feel like a citizen of the world instead of "just German" and the world becomes a lot smaller and more personal. (Interviewee 3)

As illustrated by the quote above, some students may even feel that their national identity is subsumed by a greater transnational affiliation after having an experience of living in another culture. Students who study abroad may feel more connected to people from other countries and cultures as they have made friends with other students from various parts of the world. Likewise, different cultures may not seem quite as 'foreign' once students meet individuals and make friends with people who can represent them beyond preconceived stereotypes.

In addition to gaining a new perspective and making friends whilst abroad, some students may also gain a greater sense of self-awareness as they accept more personal responsibility.

I feel like I've just learned so much. Like not only about my course and the content but about myself and how I work best and how to balance everything like work and relationships and friendships and school and it's just a very very big learning experience for me. Definitely. (Interviewee 5)

The process of increasing one's self-awareness and independence can similarly be conveyed by students who feel that they have become more mature as a result of being abroad and experiencing different surroundings and environments.

It's just at the beginning I was kind of struggling also maybe inside the flat. Just having to deal with so many different habits but it's ok. That's really the thing that I really liked the most I would say. Differences and in the end I really think I've grown. I think I grew up thanks to these kind of differences. (Interviewee 7)

It's good to know English I guess. It's really healthy to get a different perspective and I think you probably mature from it. You know, going out on your own. Leaving and coming to a completely different environment. (Interviewee 2)

Students' attitudes can thus change as they appreciate the differences of the host country and cultures they encounter. Likewise, after being abroad for a while some students may even adjust their feelings and attitudes about their own countries.

I like the way uni works here a lot better, but after two years in England I have developed a... when I say 'pride' that's not quite what I mean, maybe rather an affection for my own country which I did not have before, because now I see Germany to be advanced in fields that are important to me like green transport, environmental-friendly buildings with insulations, double-glazing, etc. or the health system. (Interviewee 3)

Everyone tends to kind of take for granted the place you live in, what you have around. While coming here, I've been trying to explore Yorkshire, trying to explore the UK but I'm doing it and I'm just realising I have so many beautiful amazing places that I can visit and experience back home. (Interviewee 7)

These quotes seem to support the idea that the entire experience abroad helps international students learn and develop in different ways. In fact, considered from a broader sense, international students never stop learning regardless of whether they are at the University, with friends, or traveling. Increased self-awareness, maturity, and exposure to different cultures in addition to recognising, accepting, and/or changing a variety of personal views are all part of the international HE experience. Some international students become nostalgic about their own culture when abroad and conversely miss the host culture when they are back in their home country. International students tend to have different perspectives than locals; after regular exposure to an environment, people can often take things for granted and subsequently fail to notice subtle, yet uniquely intrinsic, differences of their own home country and culture (i.e. local idioms, traditions, sights, sounds, food, people).

5.5 Difficulties Relating to Local Students

Though most students are positive about their international HE experience, this does not mean that international students do not still face some challenges as a part of their experience abroad. One student affirmed this by saying that what they would remember most from their experience was “*The many friends that I have made but also the many difficulties that I have faced*” (Questionnaire Response from Irish Postgraduate). While all students must personally cope with individual challenges which may occur at different times during their international HE experience, some difficulties are more common than others amongst the greater international student population such as coping with academic coursework, learning to manage time, and being away from family and friends (as displayed earlier in Table 21).

As stated earlier, several students remarked on the positive impact of friendly relationships they have formed with fellow international students with statements such as “*I was able to make friends from all over the world*” (Questionnaire Response from Cypriot Postgraduate). Several comments from the online questionnaire referred to many international students and/or the cultural diversity of the student population at the University, even calling it an “*international melting pot*” (Questionnaire Response from Lebanese Postgraduate). Another student explained their close affiliation with other international students as:

I'm very much in touch with the international community. I think those are the ones I relate to the most because we're all in the same kind of situation. Like just here for a short period of time, just want to do everything, have fun.

(Interviewee 6)

However for many international students in this study, the opportunity to meet and interact with other students “*from all over the world*” seems to show a direct contrast with the students’ abilities to form close relationships with local British students.

I expected it to be easier to make friends with local people, instead I am spending most of my time with other internationals.

(Questionnaire Response from Australian Undergraduate)

Some international students expected that they would get to know local students better in their lectures at the University and then have been disappointed.

It is difficult to get in contact with British students, especially in the module courses.

(Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

Making friends with coursemates can be difficult for some students. One student even attributed the little interaction with locals to the large international student population at the University.

There were too many international students on my course... I didn't have many opportunities to meet British students.

(Questionnaire Response from Japanese Postgraduate)

A related issue may be that many international students who are only at the University for a single semester or year have more flexible timetables and attend different modules than those enrolled in degree-granting programmes.

Actually I didn't get friends with anyone from my course because like you said you go to the course and then you go home. There was maybe the problem that I didn't like stick to one year. I think then I would have kept meeting the same people and that would have made it easier. So I had courses from first, second, third year but yeah it's alright. (Interviewee 9)

Interestingly however, this student intentionally got involved in various activities outside their course through the students' union which facilitated more interaction with local students.

Yeah, I wanted to integrate more with the British students. At the beginning I was like once or twice at the Global Café but I didn't join the international society or whatever they are called because you keep meeting international students anyway. And I think it's harder to meet British people in a way than internationals. And I was like my main focus was to improve my language. It was like if I'm talking to someone whose English is even worse than mine, it won't help. (Interviewee 9)

It seems that the student recognised the challenges separating international and local students quite soon after their arrival. They then purposely avoided other international students and tried to integrate more with the local students at the University, with a specific aim to improve their own foreign language competence.

The divide between international students and local students is not intentional for most students, but it exists nonetheless. Different students commented on the potential barriers which exist between themselves and local students. For example, some students feel that it is due to cultural differences.

Local people seem to have difficulties approaching internationals
(Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

British students are not interested in knowing international students
(Questionnaire Response from American Undergraduate)

Some students make even further criticisms with unfavourable generalisations, as:

British students are not friendly or welcoming
(Questionnaire Response from American Undergraduate)

British students have not been quite friendly, up to the point of questioning whether they are racist or intolerant
(Questionnaire Response from Costa Rican Undergraduate)

The University and the students' union have a zero tolerance policy towards any form of harassment but, as a matter of fact, six different students from the online questionnaire mentioned encountering racist and/or bullying behaviour or feeling discriminated against during their international HE experience. Yet, on the other hand, many other students specifically indicated that they had felt supported and encouraged by "*friendly helpful people*" (Questionnaire Response from Spanish Undergraduate), which included interactions with students, staff, and people outside the University.

One of the students particularly appreciated the patience locals had displayed with them, saying that what they would remember most was:

Being part thanks to patient British students who help tackle the language barrier
(Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

Obviously, students have mixed responses based on their personal experiences but the problem of the division within the student population is not just one-sided, especially as one student observed in stating:

Most international students don't often mingle with different races
(Questionnaire Response from Bruneian Undergraduate)

So the dilemma posed here is that many of the earlier responses tended to place the onus of responsibility for cross-cultural communication and interaction solely on the local or home students. However, based on the results from the online questionnaire data as presented in Chapter Four, most of the students who participated in this study did not spend much time socialising with international students in their home countries themselves. One of the students rationalised the situation as follows:

I could understand why like for example English students were not like, not a lot of them at least, were kind of into talking with us or trying to discover things about us but just because like we're only spending here a short period of time. And we might also have like some troubles with the language. For example with you, American persons are easy to understand but with students from Yorkshire or wherever it's a nightmare sometimes. And so like also for them I really think ok they don't wanna stay there, having to repeat and repeat or whatever but I'm really feeling that's exactly what I've been doing back home. Like okay, it's good. A smile, a sentence, a couple words with an international, an Erasmus student at home but now I'm really thinking I'll definitely try to get closer to them especially because I know how it feels. Like especially at the beginning, being so disoriented and feeling like I have no reference point. (Interviewee 7)

By reconsidering their own actions, international students realise that they may have to put in more of an effort if they want to meet local students, or at least change their approach and try to socialise more. For instance, some students recognise that there may be a fundamental difference in general attitudes between local and international students.

I find it a bit harder to get to know English people than international which like of course because international students really want to know people as well while the English might maybe a bit more settled than we are. (Interviewee 2)

Similarly, another student seemed to consider the temporary nature of the international student experience as a main cause of difficulties in relating to local students:

It's easier to relate to someone who is going to be here for a little bit but it's the other way around for locals. They go like "I don't want to invest my time making friends with someone who is going to be here only for six months or one year. I'd rather be friends with someone who is going to be here for three years". I mean it's not a conscious decision but I think it's very spot-on you know. (Interviewee 6)

In addition to these 'unconscious' decisions which may hinder interactions, some students may simply be reluctant to approach local students because they are shy or concerned about language difficulties such as the following quote demonstrates.

I felt like people I wanted to talk to, I wanted to share my ideas, my opinions, my experiences with were internationals 'cause like I was here, everything was new and everything was new also for them so I want to know your impression and offer you mine. Rather than like I mean of course it would be really interesting also doing it with an English person but it's just like maybe sometimes I just thought ok for me everything's so new and different and like for them maybe things that might be interesting or curious for me they're just like normal 'cause they're just used to this. So maybe I was kind of ashamed also sometimes just to sound childish for some reason just like to say something which is obvious for them.
(Interviewee 7)

This student felt that they had more in common with fellow international students and so it was a 'safer' environment in which to interact without any potential judgments.

Being in a completely new environment, away from family and friends, can be a simultaneously exciting yet stressful process for anyone. Based on the previous comments from students, it seems like there are multiple reasons for why international and local students do not interact as often as they could. Interestingly, the students also provided a variety of solutions to this problem.

Some students would like more support and opportunities for interactions to be facilitated by the University.

Obviously the uni can't hold our hands at every step, but if there were some additional ways to help facilitate mingling of locals with internationals it could improve things. All of my international friends I've made here have expressed that they don't really have any local friends.

(Questionnaire Response from Australian Undergraduate)

Make international students and home students meet in shared events and accommodation, rather than to segregate them.

(Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

In fact, students seem to have quite mixed views regarding how the University could best manage accommodation arrangements for international students. Some students said they would alternatively prefer if international students had separate accommodation as the following quote illustrates.

The international students should be put together in buildings, which is not done for the students that stay an entire year. That would make it easier to meet other international students as they are more willing to become friends than the English students.
(Questionnaire Response from Dutch Undergraduate)

Still, another student suggested a third possible option:

Give students a choice whether to live in an 'International' or 'British' flat

(Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

It seems that there is not a straightforward solution for making all students happy with their accommodation, whether with international or local students. Furthermore as stated previously in this chapter and Chapter Four, there are many chances for

students to socialise with different people through activities and events held by academic departments and faculties, in University and private accommodation, clubs and societies from the students' union, and still more opportunities catering to various diverse interests which are offered within the city and local communities.

5.6 Summary of Analyses

The analysis of students' comments and quotes from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews provides more in-depth information about how different students feel regarding various aspects of their international HE experience. The results from the qualitative analysis have shown that students chose to study abroad at the University based on multiple reasons including the location, attractiveness of the University, and the opportunity to improve their foreign language skills. Students were also generally positive overall referring to their experiences of a different academic system, socialising with different people, and frequently traveling. Finally, although they have been challenged by various aspects of their experience related to being in a new environment away from their homes, families, and friends, many students expounded further on the benefits of having an international HE experience by focusing on meaningful friendships and different facets of personal development such as gaining an alternative perspective and becoming more mature.

While each student's experience is unique and personal to them, the data reveals that some similarities also exist relative to the general international HE experience which are shared amongst the wider international student population at the University.

Whereas the results from analysing the individual quantitative and qualitative data sets for this study have been presented separately thus far, the next chapter focuses on answering the research questions for this study by bringing the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses together for discussion.

Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

A review of previous research (as presented in Chapter Two) offers theoretical support for exploring international students' experiences based on multiple factors related to students' motivations, engagement, concerns whilst abroad, and perceptions about different aspects of their experiences. This study has sought to bridge gaps in the research by first individually addressing different facets of the international student experience (i.e. motivations, student engagement, concerns, and perceptions) and then examining the relationships between them from the students' point of view. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study to elicit and examine the data has provided insights towards exploring the experiences of international students more holistically by considering multiple perspectives.

As Chapters Four and Five have presented results from analysing the quantitative and qualitative data separately, this chapter is focused on discussing and interpreting the comprehensive findings for this study in relation to the specified research questions. The first section begins by providing a review of the research questions and methods for data collection for this study. Subsequent sections discuss each research question starting with a review of the primary quantitative findings followed by a summary of the relevant qualitative findings, including illustrative examples taken directly from students' comments. Germane comparisons are included throughout in order to discuss the findings from this study in relation to findings from previous research described in Chapter Two. The chapter concludes with a review of the research process, referring specifically to identified limitations for this study.

6.1 Review of Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

This study has been designed in order to focus on exploring data in relation to three primary research questions. Each of these three questions seeks to build on the current understanding and further clarification of student engagement and students' experiences framed within an international student context. The research questions for this study consisted of the following:

1. What motivates international students to study abroad as part of their HE experience?
2. How do international students engage in their HE experience whilst abroad?
3. How do different motivations and engagement behaviours influence international students' perceptions of their HE experience whilst abroad?

The findings related to each of these questions are examined individually by combining the pertinent results from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the

questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. As described in Section 3.4.1, the questionnaire used a compilation of items adapted from previous research in addition to items independently created from a review of available opportunities for students at the University (i.e. drawing information from websites, leaflets, and emails regarding activities and support services at the University, the International Office, the students' union, individual academic departments and faculties, within the community, etc.). The questionnaire design encompassed a large quantity of information about students' characteristics, previous experiences, motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they were interested in being interviewed to provide more contextual information about their responses. The subsequent semi-structured interviews (as explored throughout Chapter Five) concentrated on expanding the discourse around international students' experiences featuring more detailed information related to individual students' background, motivations for studying abroad at the University, impressions of the University and city, typical routines and behaviours, and general reflections on their international experience. Final analyses for this study were conducted on aggregate data collected from international students which included 249 responses to the questionnaire and 10 semi-structured interviews.

6.2 International Students' Motivations

This section addresses the first research question: *What motivates international students to study abroad as part of their HE experience?*

Results from the questionnaire (see Section 4.1.1) indicated that students were highly motivated to study abroad based on numerous factors. Out of the 34 items from the questionnaire (see Appendix A), students collectively implied their primary motivation was "to gain experience" (M=3.73 on a 4-point scale). Previous research has similarly indicated that international students report numerous reasons for choosing to study abroad, including both general motivations for an international HE experience and more specific motivations related to studying at or living in particular locations (BIS, 2013b; Martin et al., 1995; Sánchez et al., 2006). This study brings a new perspective to the motivational discourse in international student research as most previous research has segregated students' motivations by focusing on either academic or leisure contexts separately (see Chapter Two). After examining them individually, the 34 items used to assess students' motivations in the questionnaire were then grouped into five distinct factors of motivation (i.e. subcategories using subscale measures) in order to conduct further comparative analyses. By looking at the factors' mean scores, students indicated their highest motivations were based on Academic and Professional Development (M=3.42) followed by Personal Development (M=3.28). Factors related to

the Location, Socialisation, and Travel generated lower mean scores for the students in this study (M=2.91, M=2.80, and M=2.67 respectively). Previous quantitative research has produced similar results – emphasising the primary importance of academic and professional development to students and focusing on motives towards personal development, noting social interactions to a lesser degree and fewer, if any, overt references to travel (Böhm et al., 2002, 2004; Clark et al., 2014; Doyle et al., 2010; Presley et al., 2010). These quantitative findings were then partially disputed as results from the semi-structured interviews indicated that students decided to study abroad initially based on a desirable location and opportunities to travel, with fewer explicit references to academic prospects (see Section 5.2). This was illustrated by comments from most of the students, and most concisely by the following brief excerpt in which the student stated their main priorities when choosing to study abroad (i.e. location and travel) with academic prospects as an afterthought:

I always know I wanted to go to the UK. And [here], in particular was mainly because I wanted to travel. ...So that's why it made me choose [here]. That it was a good university. The courses were interesting to me.

(Interviewee 4, French Undergraduate)

Other qualitative studies have similarly reported that students indicated a strong intention towards traveling whilst abroad (Jackson, 2006; Jianvittayakit and Dimanche, 2010; Kim et al., 2006, 2007; Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006; Zemach-Bersin, 2009) and tended to choose destinations first (i.e. regions, countries, cities) before they decided on which university to attend (Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Jones, 2006; Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). As King et al. (2010) explained,

...it seems that they [students] are more highly motivated by the general experience of studying or working abroad, than they are by its intrinsic academic merit or even, in some surveys, by its employment pay-offs. (p.24)

When examining the collective findings for international students' motivations (both quantitative and qualitative results), it seems that students' responses may change depending on the manner in which they are asked. For example, when responding to the questionnaire, the students who were interviewed indicated top motivations based on mean values as wanting to learn new things (M=3.80), take interesting classes (M=3.70), and gain experience (M=3.70); when items were grouped into five factors of motivation, these students also reported the highest values for Academic and Professional Development (M=3.47) and Personal Development (M=3.20). Students' motivations related to travel and visiting England, as discussed during the interviews, had much lower mean values in the questionnaire (M=3.30 for both). This divergence between quantitative and qualitative results could possibly be attributed to analysing total mean values within the questionnaire rather than asking students to rate their motivations in order of importance.

As previously stated, this study was deliberately positioned in an attempt to build a bridge between previously disparate areas of research into international students' motivations which had been situated exclusively within either academic or non-academic contexts. It seems that when not guided with specific references to academic reasons for studying abroad (i.e. items included in the questionnaire), students were permitted to focus on what was personally important to them (i.e. during the interviews). This concurs with Chandler (1989) who determined students often discuss motivations towards international HE experiences in personally relevant terms with "little connection to any philosophical ideology of development" (p.3). The findings from this study also mirror the wording used in promotional marketing materials used by individual universities and programmes centred on advertising "the once-in-a-lifetime experience" of being abroad (i.e. websites such as: British Council, n.d.a, n.d.b; University of Leeds, 2012a; IES Abroad, 2014; see also Oliver, 2008; Zemach-Bersin, 2009).

Another interpretation of the apparent discrepancy between students' quantitative and qualitative responses may consider that the students in this study were not as focused on the academic and personal development reasons for studying abroad during the interviews as they were conducted as relatively relaxed conversations with a fellow student (me). Borsos et al. (2014) provide similar evidence of students' proclivity to focus on non-academic reasons for choosing an international HE experience in conversations and interviews with fellow students. In contrast, interviews conducted by a member of staff may produce different results as the rapport between the researcher and participant changes based on a perceived (even if unintended) level of dissociation between students and authority figures. In cases such as these, findings from research on the "student voice" tend to generate more responses related to academic issues as staff members typically direct the flow of conversation to address academic issues, such as those which are relevant for enhancing student recruitment and provisions for student support (see Bryson and Hardy, 2014; Millard et al., 2013). Alternatively, perhaps the change in emphases for this study between quantitative results (i.e. questionnaire) towards academic motivations and qualitative results (i.e. interviews) towards non-academic motivations can be explained as the international HE experience inherently relies on an academic component with international students seeking some type of academic credit during the experience. Whereas it was directly asked in the questionnaire, perhaps students in the interviews stressed the non-academic reasons for choosing to study abroad as they considered the academic reasons to be implicitly understood by a fellow international student (i.e. myself as the researcher).

The current findings seem to provide further corroborative evidence for the multidimensionality of international students' motivations (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Ajzen, 2012; Deci and Ryan, 2012; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013), supporting previous studies which have emphasized the importance of relationships between professional, personal, and socio-cultural influences on international students' reported motivations (Choudaha, et al., 2013; Sánchez et al., 2006; West et al., 2000; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). The methods for data collection in this study did not specify or require a prioritisation of different types of motivations by student respondents. Rather, this study's results support the view that students are affected by both 'push' and 'pull' factors and will therefore have multiple motivations for choosing to study in a different location outside their home country (Jianvittayakit, 2012; Kim et al., 2006, Lang, 1996; Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). The responses from students reflect the unique nature of the international HE experience – international students are neither tourists traveling constantly to see and explore new places nor are they locals familiar with the host country and culture. Thus international students have a different outlook on what they look to achieve than students who do not travel abroad as part of their course of study, which tends to cross between academic, social, and tourism experiences.

The notion of international student mobility as an experience geared primarily to travel, adventure and enjoyment, rather than to academic achievement or career planning... suggests a productive theoretical link to studies of tourism.

(King et al., 2010, p.33).

This study has taken this prior advice of King and colleagues by focusing on the experiences of international students in academic and non-academic contexts to include perspectives from the fields of leisure, recreation, and tourism.

6.3 International Students' Engagement

This section directs attention to the second research question: *How do international students engage in their HE experience whilst abroad?*

Students' responses to the questionnaire (see Section 4.1.2) indicated that they had altered some, but not all, of their behaviours they were asked about whilst abroad. Firstly, the students reported a significant difference with fewer weekly academic contact hours whilst abroad but most students continued to devote a substantial portion of their spare time to studying or doing coursework and reading, which did not show a significant difference. Noted traits of UK academic culture, such as the less time spent taught instruction and a greater emphasis on independent study, have been previously noted in various types of UKCISA guidance for international students: "It may take some time for you to adjust to studying in the UK" as independent study is "an integral part of UK academic culture" (UKCISA, 2013). Some students in this study thrived with

more independence while others reported having experienced concerns coping with academic coursework and time management whilst studying abroad. Differences were also noted regarding students' involvement in non-academic activities. Primarily, students socialised differently whilst abroad with more frequent interactions with other international students and friends from their accommodation than with fellow students from their course. The tendency for international students to associate more frequently with each other than with other groups of students has been previously noted in other research (Iwasaki, 2008; Montgomery, 2010; Myles and Cheng, 2003; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; UKCOSA, 2004) for as the following quote from the HEA (2012) illustrates:

It's natural for international students when they first arrive to cluster with people from their own culture or language group but they also need to develop local friendships and connections to make their stay distinctive and rewarding.

The students also reported a higher inclination for travel behaviours whilst studying abroad, including more frequent experiences of sightseeing, traveling alone, and traveling with friends. Such changes in behaviour were further explored by grouping the 32 items for engagement behaviours from the questionnaire into academic and non-academic factors. In doing so, students reported the highest frequency of engagement in Travel Behaviours (M=2.69) followed by Academic Engagement (M=2.36) and Social and Community Engagement (M=2.16). Although this study brings a different perspective for measuring student engagement, some problems were noted as the three identified subscales displayed lower reliability scores than desired with Academic Engagement ($\alpha=.53$), Social and Community Engagement ($\alpha=.75$), and Travel Behaviours ($\alpha=.63$). While the reliability scores were lower than desired (i.e. below .80), they were not so low as to reject them outright as factors for measuring student engagement behaviours and moving forward with the SEM analysis. Previous work by Milem and Berger (1997) displayed similar results with low alpha reliability of scales for 'involvement' behaviours, determining that academic integration was not predictive of students' commitment to the HEI or their academic persistence whilst social integration was a significant predictor of both. These quantitative findings were also broadly supported by the qualitative data. Through many of the open-ended responses to items in the questionnaire and comments in interviews, many students indicated a preference for engagement behaviours in non-academic aspects of their international HE experience. This pattern is exemplified by the following comment taken from one interviewee:

Studies were a bit second this year; usually it's not, so the priorities were different. You want to make the most of it. (Interviewee 4, French Undergraduate)

The findings from the qualitative data analyses also provide a possible rationale for the noted change in students' socialisation patterns from the quantitative findings, as

students indicated a distinct perceived division (i.e. us versus them mentality) between their impressions and attitudes as international students and those of home students (see Section 5.5). Some students had said they were too nervous about their language proficiency to initiate conversations, while others found it easier to connect with other international students as they felt they had shared experiences.

I find it a bit harder to get to know English people than international which like of course because international students really want to know people as well while the English might maybe a bit more settled than we are.

(Interviewee 2, Danish Undergraduate)

For students in this study who did socialise with home students, this was usually a conscious decision to dissociate from other international students. Rather than attending events advertised for international students (e.g. Global Café, International Students' Society), these students chose to become more active in clubs and societies with the students' union based on shared academic and non-academic interests such as sport, dance, music, and so forth. As previously mentioned, the students' union at the University has over 250 clubs and societies representing a wide range of interests, as well as a full calendar of activities throughout the year with the Give-It-A-Go (GIAG) programme. The implication that students may have higher quality relationships with home students (i.e. friendships rather than acquaintances) as a result of becoming involved via clubs and societies corresponds with previous research (Anderson et al., 2009; Kim, 1994; Myles and Cheng, 2003; UKCOSA, 2004), regarding the key difference between international students feeling like they are a collective group of "outsiders" or have managed to become "insiders" of the wider student community as:

Students who had participated in any type of activity on campus (e.g. joining clubs or societies, doing sport, drama, music, or volunteering) were more likely to have UK friends than those who had not. It is perhaps important to emphasise to international students that UK peers often expect to make friends through such activities rather than through class contact.

(UKCOSA, 2004, p.67)

International students may also have difficulties engaging in student representation opportunities (e.g. becoming student representatives on academic committees, having leadership roles in clubs or societies, etc.) as they have limited access when not enrolled in a degree-seeking programme at the host HEI. Students who are only at the host HEI for a single semester or academic year often do not feel they have the time to fully connect with the student community and subsequently do not compete for student representative roles against other students who may have been or will be at the HEI for a longer period of time. Therefore, while the desire to mix with home students was noted across both data sets, it can be difficult for international and home students to invest themselves in activities which are considered mutually accessible and enjoyable when one group feels unwelcome or inferior. This type of intercultural interaction takes time and effort from both groups (i.e. home and international students), as evidenced

by comments from students in this study (see Section 5.5), in addition to provided opportunities and support from the HE staff and administration, as has been promoted in previous research (HEA, 2012; Siddeeqe et al., 2011; UKCOSA, 2004, 2007). As Williams (2005) notes:

...the experience of being abroad in and of itself is not enough – students must interact in the culture to receive the gain of increased intercultural communication skills. As we create study abroad programs or receive international students, we need to find ways to facilitate their interaction with the people of their host culture. Likewise, on our own campuses, we must not neglect opportunities to expose local students to other cultures even when they do not leave their own.

(pp. 369-370)

The findings from this study seem to present a different viewpoint than previous research in student engagement, which has primarily (or even exclusively) focused on the importance of students' academic engagement based on 'grades and persistence' (Astin, 1984; Clark et al., 2014; Kuh, 2001a, 2001b; Kuh et al., 2008; Lizzio and Wilson, 2013; Trowler, 2010). Recent research which has gone further to consider the positive impacts of social and recreational engagement on the student experience, in addition to measures for academic engagement, has been more limited (Martin and Dowson, 2009; Milem and Berger, 1997; Tinto, 1993). For example, Coates (2007) identified a typological model for student engagement based on questionnaire responses from Australian undergraduates, which "represents engagement as a multidimensional phenomenon underpinned by distinct social and academic dimensions" (p.137). Other qualitative research efforts in the field of student engagement such as those conducted by Bryson (2014a; see also Bryson and Hand, 2007; Bryson and Hardy, 2012) and Kahu (2013) have also advocated for more holistic research regarding the concept of student engagement and the appreciation of the inherent value of the student perspective. Such previous research has provided some additional insights into the complexity of student engagement for domestic students but none have focused on exploring the experiences of international students. This study has taken a different approach by incorporating academic, social, and travel behaviours to explore student engagement more holistically with the international student population by using mixed methods. In a general sense, the results from this study allude to what many educational administrators already know – namely, that students do not spend all of their time at university studying and there are numerous other factors to consider which affect the student experience beyond the academic context. As previously stated, this study has followed more of a holistic approach to exploring student engagement within the context of the experiences of international students by similarly considering student engagement as both a "process and an outcome" (Bryson, 2014a) and taking account of "the state of engagement, its antecedents and its consequences" (Kahu, 2013, p.758). As described before in Section 6.2, the students in this study seem generally

more motivated towards travel and recreation than academic aspects of the international HE experience. Thus, contrary to previous research which has typically been conducted by HE staff and administrators, the findings from this study indicate that the students' perceptions about their experiences were more affected by engagement in non-academic activities and recreation, rather than academic activities.

6.4 International Students' Perceptions about Their Experiences

This section concentrates on the third, and final, research question: *How do different motivations and engagement behaviours influence international students' perceptions of their HE experience whilst abroad?* In order to address this question more thoroughly, students' perceptions about their experiences are first examined as a separate variable of interest for this study followed by careful consideration of the interactions between the different variables of interest to this study (i.e. students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences) using SEM.

Findings from the questionnaire show that students in this study were mostly positive in reflecting on their experiences – 91.6% of the students said they were satisfied with their experience, 94.8% would recommend studying abroad, and 84.4% considered the quality of their experiences to be either 'Good' or 'Excellent' (see Section 4.1.3). The questionnaire included 50 items to evaluate situational satisfaction in reference to individual aspects as well as overall satisfaction for their international HE experience. When examining the mean scores for the 50 items as measured on a 4-point scale, students were most in agreement in stating that the international experience was important to them personally (M=3.63), an unforgettable experience (M=3.61), and valuable to them (M=3.56). Quantitative measures of satisfaction have been used before in different surveys, including the ISB, NSS, CEQ, and NSSE. The findings from this study coincide with results from previous research as the University has achieved various accolades for positive student experiences. For example, according to the NUS (2013), the University had the best students' union in the UK for international students in 2012/13. The University has also been ranked among the top Russell Group universities for international student satisfaction according to ISB comparisons. In examining individual factors related to students' perceptions of satisfaction with their experiences by grouping items based on the literature, students indicated that Memory was a key factor for them (i.e. an unforgettable experience, M=3.49) as well as feelings of Personal Development (i.e. self-awareness, M=3.44). Other measures for students' perceptions for satisfaction indicated a lower consensus from students' responses, including factors of Entertainment (i.e. interesting and enjoyable, M=3.24), Education (i.e. increased learning, M=3.23), Aesthetics (i.e. safe and well-maintained

environment, M=3.22) Staff and Support Systems (i.e. helpful interactions with staff, M=3.21), and Social and Cultural Experiences (i.e. making friends and getting involved, M=3.15). In examining their responses, students in this study felt there were various benefits associated with their international HE experience. The findings from this study complement previous research, going further in order to investigate factors which are important to students beyond their academic achievements:

While there is patchy empirical evidence to support claims that mobility is beneficial to students, anecdotally and mainly based on returning students' reports, they clearly value the experience. (Sweeney, 2012, p.26)

This study has used the multiple measures of satisfaction to address this noted gap in research. The quantitative findings are further reinforced by the qualitative findings of this study. Most notably, students in the interviews were unanimously positive about their experiences as international students (see Section 5.4). Students who had indicated in the questionnaire that they had not had positive experiences (i.e. 8.4% generally unsatisfied, 5.2% would not recommend studying abroad, and/or 15.6% described the quality of their experiences as 'Fair' or 'Poor') did not respond to interview invitations. Thus, reasons why these students had negative perceptions about their international HE experiences could only be interpreted by the quantitative relationships between the items that were measured in the questionnaire. In contrast, students who did participate in the interviews gave comments which were a mixture of academic, social, and travel experiences when asked how they would describe their experiences as an international student and why they were so positive. They felt that by getting involved and forming friendships they had enjoyed their experiences more:

I would sum up with the people and the activities and just traveling – that's the best thing about being abroad. I mean the course is good but you can study anywhere... but it's so much better to do it abroad.

(Interviewee 6, Mexican Postgraduate)

The aggregate findings from this study further support the use of mixed methods in examining the experiences of international students, by indicating that quantitative data regarding students' perceptions about different parts of their experiences may be better interpreted in combination with qualitative data which provides more of the personal context behind their responses. For example, it has been previously suggested that students who participate in international HE experiences may already be highly motivated and high achieving students thus making research centred around cause (i.e. level of motivation) and effects (i.e. academic achievement) even more difficult (Sweeney, 2012). This study has consequently moved the research forward by evaluating the individual variables (i.e. motivation, engagement – both in academic and recreational contexts, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences) together using SEM to explore the quantitative relationships between them in relation to international students' experiences (see Figure 27 repeated here for reference).

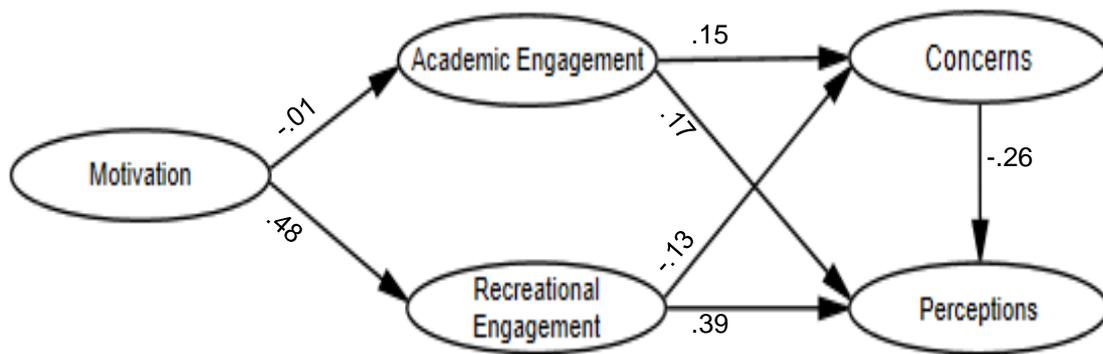


Figure 27. SEM depicting tested relationships between variables

To briefly summarise the results from Figure 27, the SEM analysis shows the following in relation to the experiences of international students in this study:

- Students' motivations had a positive effect on behaviours of recreational engagement ($\beta=.48$) but showed a negligent negative effect on academic engagement ($\beta=-.01$);
- Higher levels of academic engagement (more contact hours and independent study) increased students' reported concerns whilst abroad ($\beta=.15$), whereas higher levels of recreational engagement decreased students' reported concerns whilst abroad ($\beta=-.13$);
- Both factors of students' engagement (i.e. academic engagement and recreational engagement) had a positive influence on students' perceptions of their international experience, though recreational engagement showed a greater effect ($\beta=.39$ compared to $\beta=.17$); and
- Higher reported levels for students' concerns whilst abroad had a subsequent negative influence on their perceptions about their international experience ($\beta=-.26$).

The qualitative data further support these quantitative findings, as demonstrated in students' comments from the questionnaire and within the interviews (see Chapter Five or previous sections within this chapter).

These findings have multiple implications which have not been explored in previous research. As Kahu (2013) indicates, achieving greater understanding of student engagement in HE requires consideration of three separate stages encompassing antecedents, state of engagement, and consequences to embrace psychological, behavioural, and socio-cultural perspectives. This study has explored the constructs of student engagement and the student experience further with mixed methods to examine relationships between students' motivations, engagement behaviours, concerns whilst abroad, and perceptions about their experiences related to satisfaction and quality. Each of the four key variables of interest to this study (i.e. students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences), as depicted in Figure 27, have been measured using items which represented specific

factors in relation to exploring the construct further as a latent variable (see Section 4.5.1). Based on the data from this study: students' motivation was found to encompass five factors – Academic and Professional Development, Personal Development, Socialising, Travel, and Location; students' engagement was represented best as two factors with both Academic Engagement and Recreational Engagement; students' concerns were denoted by a single collective factor; and students' perceptions about their experiences ranged across eight factors – Aesthetics, Education, Entertainment, Memory, Personal Development, Social and Cultural Experiences, Staff and Support Systems, and overall Experience Quality.

Expanding on the findings from previous sections (Sections 6.2 and 6.3), the findings from the SEM are discussed sequentially in relation to each of the primary variables of interest in this study noting the effects of individual statistical relationships between variables as displayed in Figure 27.

1. Students reported their highest motivations related to Travel ($\beta=.95$), Personal Development ($\beta=.93$), and Socialising ($\beta=.87$), whereas the Location ($\beta=.79$) and Academic and Professional Development ($\beta=.65$) were less motivating influences for students to study abroad. These findings for students' motivations were then interpreted in relation to students' engagement behaviours.
2. Students with higher reported levels of motivation indicated a greater tendency to gravitate towards behaviours corresponding to recreational engagement ($\beta=.48$) than academic engagement ($\beta=-.01$), as shown in Figure 27. The effects of students' engagement were then examined relative to students' concerns whilst abroad and perceptions about their international experiences.
3. In turn, students' concerns were increased by higher levels of academic engagement ($\beta=.15$) and decreased by greater recreational engagement ($\beta=-.13$) as shown in Figure 27. Students' concerns were then assessed regarding their effects on students' perceptions about their international experiences.
4. Amongst the eight factors identified in relation to students' perceptions, students' perceptions about their experiences were found to be best reflected as an overall measurement for Experience Quality ($\beta=.95$). Satisfaction measures for other situational elements of the experience (i.e. Entertainment, Memory, Personal Development, etc as discussed earlier in this section and Section 4.5.1) were found to have less of an impact on students' general perceptions after taking overall quality into account (β values all below .90). Students' perceptions about their experiences were lowest regarding evaluations related to Education ($\beta=.58$) and Staff and Support Systems ($\beta=.64$).

Finally, students' perceptions about their international HE experiences were based on the perceived quality of their experience (i.e. general satisfaction, willingness to

recommend, and overall quality) and examined with respect to students' engagement and concerns whilst abroad as depicted in Figure 27. The likelihood of students' having positive perceptions about their international HE experience was decreased when students' reported having experienced concerns with more difficulties whilst abroad ($\beta = -.26$). Both academic engagement and recreational engagement were found to have positive influences on students' perceptions about their international HE experiences ($\beta = .17$ and $\beta = .39$ respectively), with recreational engagement showing more than double the effect of academic engagement.

The findings from this study recognise the effects of the interactions between students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions which combine to reflect different, yet interdependent, parts of an international student's experience. As one student declared,

To live alone in a foreign country with a foreign language (not to mention a different academic system) may be hard – but it is worth every minute to work for it! The experience to be in a foreign country and to make new friends there is priceless!!!
(Questionnaire Response from German Undergraduate)

The findings from this study also further indicate the importance of exploring student experiences and student engagement more holistically through including different types of motivation, considering multiple forms of student engagement, and encouraging students to actively reflect on their experiences through questionnaires and/or interviews.

As stated previously, this study has been designed to bring together previously disparate areas of research on students' motivation, engagement, and tourism behaviours. Therefore, the findings cannot be compared easily or directly with those from previous studies because this model and the data collection methods have not been tested before. In interpreting the findings and relative usefulness of the model, Bollen and Long (1993) suggest:

In some areas where little previous work exists, less demanding standards may be acceptable than in other areas with extensive experience. (p.8)

As such, the SEM displayed via Figure 27 may be considered relatively acceptable and useful for both practical and theoretical exploration of the variables of interest to this study as it is supported by qualitative findings from this study and through a systematic review of available literature. Mueller and Hancock (2008) further posit:

At most, a model with acceptable fit may be interpreted as one tenable explanation for the associations observed in the data... we urge authors to resist the apparently still popular belief that the main goal of SEM is to achieve satisfactory data-model fit results; rather, it is to get one step closer to the "truth"
(p.506)

The model in Figure 27 for this study is not perfect as it shows concerns for both validity and reliability in further research considering the low, although acceptable, fit

relative to the data. When assessing student engagement, for example, the subscales displayed lower reliability scores than desired (each below .80). However, ultimately, the fit indices were not so poor as to reject the model outright. Without another theoretical model or a larger dataset to compare results to, the model in this study is considered fairly acceptable and the findings may be explored further in future research. Consequently, the analyses of the data and the subsequent findings are presented acknowledging that there are limitations to this study and other researchers may consider alternative interpretations based on different approaches and understandings.

6.5 Theoretical Considerations

This study has been designed in order to recognise and contribute to prior theoretical work regarding motivation, student engagement, and experiential research as described earlier in Chapter Two and further synthesised into the previously proposed conceptual model for the experiences of international students (see Figure 14 reproduced below). In particular, this study has been guided by the theory of planned behaviour as originally put forth by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975, 1980), and subsequently further developed by Ajzen and Driver (1991, 1992; see also Ajzen, 2006, 2012).

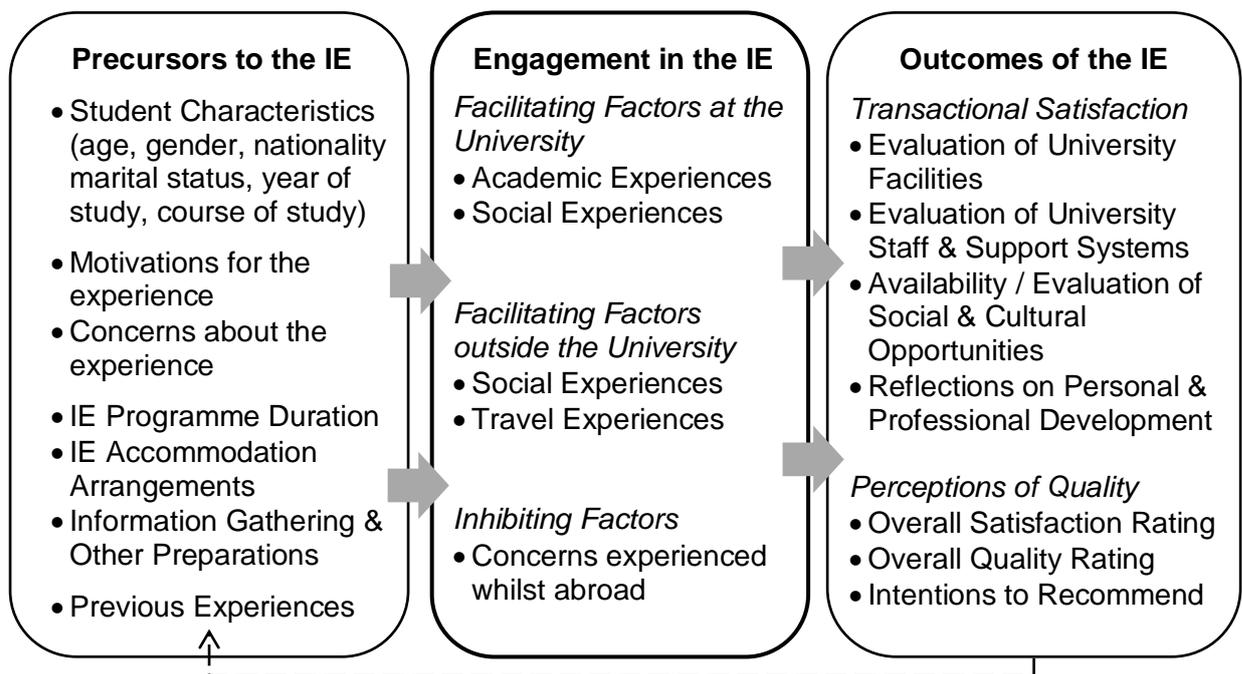


Figure 14. Conceptual model regarding the experiences of international students

While the theory of planned behaviour has been used to predict future behaviours, previous studies utilising the theory have not focused on examining the connections between individuals' motivations and their actual behaviour. This study thereby provides important practical and theoretical information as the international students who participated provided data regarding not only their motivations and expectations,

but also their engagement behaviours and subsequent perceptions about their international experiences. The findings of this study support the conceptual model for exploring the experiences of international students shown in Figure 14 which has been adapted from the theory of planned behaviour to include students' engagement in their international experience (IE), demonstrating evidence that such precursors to the international experience as international students' motivations are related to their engagement behaviours whilst abroad, which in turn affect outcomes with their perceptions about their international experiences; specifically, data showed students who reported high levels of motivation were more apt to be involved in activities of recreational engagement than academic engagement and both types of engagement (academic and recreational) had positive effects on students' perceptions about their experiences.

This study's findings further build on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2006; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and student involvement theory (Astin, 1984) with evidence regarding the experiences of international students indicating the importance of students' motivations on both academic and non-academic engagement behaviours, as well as providing further evidence regarding the importance of students making their own decisions related to personal choices for their lived experiences. As discussed earlier, this view towards empowering students has also been previously advocated in motivation research using theories related to self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2012) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), as well as flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989). These theories offer different perspectives by which one could interpret the findings of this study, whether based on examining outcome measures by referring to students' perceptions about their experiences or focusing more holistically on the entire process of learning as related to Kolb's theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). In basic terms, the students made their own decisions as to the time they devoted to their academic studies and what additional recreational activities they were involved in. These choices then affected the students' social interactions and how they formed relationships with other students, staff, and members of the community. This study was not designed to change students' behaviours but it did provide the international students who chose to participate in the research with an opportunity to reflect on different cognitive, behavioural, and emotive aspects of their experiences by asking them what they had hoped to experience (i.e. motivations and expectations), what they had actually experienced whilst abroad (i.e. engagement behaviours), and how they felt about their international experiences (i.e. concerns whilst abroad and perceptions about their experience). With this in mind, the study's design and subsequent findings from the analyses generally support the

imperative for more holistic considerations of research posited by Bryson's (2014a) earlier definition of student engagement:

what a student brings to Higher Education in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. SE is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions. (p.14)

Although this study evaluated student engagement through the self-reported measures of international students' engagement behaviours in academic and non-academic activities, the findings of this study seem to align noticeably with the earlier research of Bryson (2014a) and Kahu (2013) in recognising student engagement as a critical factor in both the process and the outcomes of students' experiences.

6.6 Significance of the Study

Although many of the findings from this study seem to support earlier research in student engagement and with international student populations, this study independently builds on the research by focusing on student engagement and the student experience from the students' perspective. The findings from this study provide evidence from the international student population at one UK HEI regarding students' motivations, engagement behaviours, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences, noting the following contributions:

- Though the items used in the questionnaire were identified from previous research in disparate areas, the data provided compelling evidence for a reconfiguration of how these factors are prioritised by students as opposed to staff. Thus, there is more support for future research focused on 'student engagement' and 'the student experience' to be conducted by students instead of staff members, including encouraging students to be involved in the development of research design, data collection and analyses, and interpretation of findings, and that such research should be conducted independently of the HEI in some cases.
- In comparison with much previous research in 'student engagement' and 'the student experience' which has focused primarily on academic provisions and evaluations, the findings from this study suggest that the 'student experience' is in fact much more complex as a process and more research in student engagement needs to focus on examining the interdependence between both academic and non-academic experiences.
- The findings from this study support revising the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2006) to include students' engagement behaviours along with reported measures for students' motivations and perceptions about their experiences within the conceptual model displayed in Figure 14. The recognition of the

student experience as a process (referring to both the conceptual model developed from reviewing the literature and the findings of the SEM analyses of data conducted in this study) also aligns with the earlier work of Astin (1984), Pace (1984), Tinto (1997), Clewes (2003), and Pine and Gilmore (1999).

- Furthermore, many of the students participating in this study commented in the questionnaire and in interviews on how they enjoyed traveling more and felt that they faced additional concerns whilst abroad in comparison with “locals” and domestic (i.e. UK) students. This provides further evidence that the experiences of international students should be considered distinctive from those of domestic students, which may require further examination in future research of student engagement and student experiences.

6.7 Study Limitations

As mentioned before in Chapter Three, all research involves issues which on reflection can be considered to serve as either limitations or delimitations (i.e. benefits) for the research effort (Creswell, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Krippendorff, 2004, 2009). This study was conducted within the framework of completing a PhD, adhering to specified ethical guidelines and university procedures for managing academic research. Thus, this section reviews various circumstances which have been thought to affect this study in terms of methodology, methods, and analyses and thus may be seen to affect wider generalisations of the findings.

This study has been constrained by both financial limitations and time requirements to complete the PhD. Financial limitations meant limited access to additional venues and/or incentives for recruiting participants. The ISB and the NSS, for example, use prize draws to entice students to participate in their research. However, incentivised research efforts do not automatically produce more responses. This study obtained 249 responses from international students at the University, representing about 4% of the University's total international student population. A similar quantity of responses (N=276) were elicited for the 2013 Student Experience Survey which was aimed at all students across the University, providing a response rate which actually represented less than 1% of the University's total student population (Grove, 2014). The PhD time requirements were also considered to limit the study in terms of finalising a suitable study design. The initial proposed design involved using three separate questionnaires – distributed before, during, and after the students' international HE experiences – and collecting data from two fairly comparative HEIs – one in the USA and one in the UK. This design was subsequently discarded as being 'too ambitious'; the scope of such a project would have been overwhelming for a single student and require working beyond the capacity of a postgraduate degree. However, in adopting the more expedient

research design, this study managed to maintain focus on exploring the primary variables of interest (i.e. students' motivations, engagement, concerns, and perceptions) within a more situated context of international students at a single HEI. This consequently allowed for a deeper reflection on the effects of motivation and student engagement on students' overall perceptions about their experiences. The questionnaire and interviews in this study were designed based on available opportunities for students at the University and encouraging them to reflect and discuss their own experiences from their perspective. Thus, although the original design would have been more thorough with the ability to make longitudinal and institutional comparisons, the primary aims of this study were still achieved.

Another limitation for widely generalising the results involves the sample for this study. As mentioned in section 3.6.1, the original targets involved obtaining data from 500 questionnaires and 20 interviews. These targets were considered appropriate in order to conduct a more comparative cross-cultural SEM analysis (Hoyle, 1995; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004) and to try to include responses from a greater percentage of the University's international student population. Unfortunately, more detailed cross-cultural comparisons were not able to be computed due to the small sample size of this study (i.e. 249 questionnaire responses and 10 semi-structured interviews). However, the characteristics of the students who participated in the questionnaire reflected similar patterns which were comparable with the wider international student population at the University. Therefore, while a larger sample may produce some changes in specific statistics, the overall findings would still be expected to remain relatively similar.

The relative brevity of the interviews conducted for this study has also been acknowledged. Compared with the questionnaire which had been previously piloted with a different student population in 2011/12, there was not a separate piloting process for the interviews beyond pretesting with feedback gained from staff members from the International Office and students who had also participated in the pilot for the questionnaire. Although the preliminary interview schedule was developed using basic questions similar to previous qualitative studies with international students, the interviewees were encouraged to discuss what they wanted about their own personal experiences as international students. Consequently, this resulted in some of the interviews being shorter than others such as when the interviewee did not choose to elaborate quite as much or had answered items on the questionnaire more consistently than others. In fact, some of the longer interviews included lengthy pauses and much information which could not be coded as it was completely off-topic (i.e. second-hand accounts, speculation about other individuals, asking about the researcher's experiences) and thus determined to have no relevance to this research. In such

cases, the interviewee had to be guided back to the topics of interest in relation to their own experiences. However, all of the interviewees spoke to a similar number of themes (as shown in Table 21). Additionally, the relative brevity of the interviews conducted for this study is compensated by the extensive amount of information gathered from student participants in the questionnaire. Although the data could be examined separately, together they are considered to provide much more valuable information regarding the students' experiences from their own perspectives.

Finally, participants in this study were self-selected and primarily contacted via a snowball sampling technique through social media outlets (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) and personal interactions with either myself or other students (i.e. Global Café, courses, clubs and/or societies, friends, flatmates, etc.) as noted in Chapter Three. Previous research has indicated the difficulties in obtaining responses from less engaged and/or unsatisfied students (Milem and Berger, 1997). As a fellow student not holding either an administrative or staff position, I had limited access to students outside of opportunities made available to all students (i.e. students' union, Global Café, etc). Reaching less engaged and/or dissatisfied students was therefore noticeably harder for this study as contact with students was not enabled or facilitated within academic course settings. Specifically, as a postgraduate research student, I was not taking any taught modules and instead had to rely on administrative staff who were willing to help by distributing the questionnaire to students within individual departments. As a result, the findings are considered to be partially skewed towards students who were more positive about their international HE experience in general. However, as previously mentioned, this positive bias in the findings coincides with similar positive results of previous large-scale research efforts conducted at the University, which have included regular NSS reports of generally high levels of student satisfaction at the University and prominent ISB results for international student satisfaction compared to other leading Russell Group institutions, as well as the NUS award for the best students' union for international students.

As an international student myself, I had experienced the positive effects of the environment at the University and the surroundings on my personal experiences as a student. I knew how to contact students through social media and academic departments because these systems were already in place. However, I have also been reticent to make assumptions or conclusions about the experiences of international students based on my subjective views. I did not participate in this study as I was already aware of my viewpoint (i.e. pro-study abroad and pro-active engagement). I was particularly hesitant to suggest methods which would constitute an intervention on students' behaviours, as this could be either ineffective, or even perhaps detrimental,

for some students. Also being an international student myself, I am personally aware of the issues facing this particular population which was a benefit in taking the phenomenological approach. So by conducting this study using a mixed methods design, the findings for this study may be considered more robust as both 'empirical' data (i.e. quantitative) and 'anecdotal' data (i.e. qualitative) (Sweeney, 2012) were gathered which when analysed generally seemed to support the same conclusions. Furthermore, the methodology and subsequent findings presented for this study seem to fulfil all four criteria for robustness in research set by Trowler and Trowler (2010):

1. *Having clear and researchable research questions*
2. *Using an appropriate methodology to answer those questions*
3. *Presenting evidence of an amount and type to give reasonable confidence in conclusions*
4. *Conclusions based on, and limited to, the evidence presented.* (p.5)

As discussed previously in Chapter Three, the phenomenological approach utilised for this study indicated the need to collect both types of data in order to provide a more consistent exploration of factors affecting student engagement and the student experience for international students.

6.8 Summary of Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that students were motivated by a range of both general and personal factors and engaged in various activities whilst studying abroad. The majority of students reflected positively on their experiences with a particular emphasis on the positive influences of being engaged in recreational as opposed to academic activities. The importance of recreational engagement was reflected in findings from both datasets, identified within quantitative results from the SEM and supported by qualitative comments gathered from students. As the instruments had not been tested before in this manner, some caution has been taken with interpreting the findings. Identified limitations for the study included time requirements and financial constraints attributed to the PhD, as well as a self-selecting sample which was considered too small to investigate further cross-cultural comparisons. The next chapter presents final conclusions for this study and reflections on the process.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study has explored the experiences of international students from one UK university by examining students' reported motivations for studying abroad, behaviours related to student engagement in academic and non-academic contexts, concerns whilst abroad, and reflections regarding specific perceptions about their international HE experiences. Mixed methods involving a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews have been utilised to collect and analyse data from student participants regarding each of the primary variables of interest as mentioned above, both separately and in relation to one another, in order to come to a deeper understanding of the holistic nature of the international students' experiences. This chapter provides a summarised review of the major findings (as discussed in Chapter Six), my personal reflections on the research as a principal investigator, a synopsis of this study's contributions to knowledge acknowledging potential implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for possible future research.

7.1 Review of Major Findings

The findings from this study support the view that research involving students' experiences is complex, and efforts which involve international students may be even further complicated. Most of the previous research in student engagement has been focused primarily on academic achievement and learning outcomes (see Clark et al., 2014; Krause and Coates, 2008; Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1993) and/or student representation issues (see HEFCE, 2008; Little et al., 2009; Lizzio and Wilson, 2009) as examined from an administrative perspective. Although some (Bryson, 2014a; Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010) have recognised a need for more holistic research to be conducted acknowledging the multiple facets of student engagement, there has been a relative scarcity of available evidence in this regard (i.e. student engagement in academic and non-academic settings, in addition to the precursors and outcomes of student engagement in relation to the students' experiences) and even less presented from the students' perspective (as opposed to research conducted by HE staff, HEIs and student unions, and/or organisations such as the QAA and NUS which are responsible for upholding educational standards and provide comparative assessments of HEIs and students' unions). Furthermore, relatively few studies have concentrated on student engagement issues for international students (see Borsos et al., 2014; Hardy et al., 2013; Jones, 2010; Montgomery, 2010; Warmington et al., 2013). Therefore, it was considered important to gain a deeper awareness of the construct from the students' perspective by recognising factors which affect international students' experiences including key variables of students' individual motivations,

engagement in academic and non-academic contexts, concerns whilst abroad, and perceptions about their experiences.

This study included data compiled from 249 questionnaire responses and 10 semi-structured interviews with international students at one UK HEI during the 2012/13 academic year. Factor analysis was used to analyse questionnaire items according to a review of the literature considering reliability statistics, reducing 132 individual items according to four separate constructs: five sub-variables for the factor of students' motivations (i.e. Academic and Professional Development, Location, Personal Development, Socialisation, and Travel); two distinct factors representing student engagement (i.e. Academic Engagement and Recreational Engagement); one factor signifying students' various concerns whilst abroad; and eight sub-variables for the final factor representing students' perceptions about their experience (i.e. Aesthetics, Education, Entertainment, Memory, Personal Development, Social and Cultural Experiences, Staff and Support Systems, and Experience Quality). As the initial analyses indicated students' characteristics and previous experiences did not point towards any significant differences, neither were included in further analyses. The final analysis using SEM examined predicted relationships between the primary variables of interest to this study, the results of which were supported by students' responses in the interviews. The major findings for the study, as discussed in Chapter Six, are briefly reviewed here.

This study has moved further to explore the role of different types of motivation and student engagement on international student experiences from the students' perspective using additional factors related to recreation and travel experiences in combination with more traditional academic experiences related to coursework. The findings from the different data collection methods used (i.e. questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) indicate a high degree of consensus in students' responses. The data shows students were highly motivated by the opportunity to gain experience during their international HE experience with an opportunity to travel as well as further their academic and professional development. The questionnaire data seem to place more emphasis for students' motivations on the importance of the academic side of the international HE experience whereas students' intentions to travel whilst abroad were featured more in the interviews. When examining students' engagement behaviours, both the questionnaire and interview data indicate students were more focused on engaging in travel and social activities than academic pursuits. The students also reported they felt there was an existing socio-cultural division based on limited interactions and relationships between themselves and British students (i.e. international students distinctly separate from home students). Finally, the data shows

that students had generally positive perceptions when reflecting on their international HE experiences. Students' responses revealed that they felt their international HE experiences were personally important, unforgettable, and valuable.

In both the questionnaire and interviews, students indicated the positive influences of non-academic experiences (i.e. recreation and travel) and meaningful social interactions on personal perceptions reflecting on their international HE experiences. Many students noted in the questionnaire and interviews that they felt there was a particular division between UK and international students both within and outside of their academic courses which also had a negative impact on their perceptions when reflecting on their international experience. The results from the SEM (depicted earlier in Figure 27) further endorse the previous distinct findings relative to students' motivations, engagement, and perceptions about their experiences especially highlighting the importance of engagement in non-academic behaviours and the development of interpersonal connections. Although the SEM used in this study displayed conflicting fit indices thus recommending caution in generalizability, results from model analysis were encouraging as they were not poor enough to warrant complete dismissal. As the model is designed based on previous theory, the model for this study may be considered somewhat promising for future research as the findings were consistent between both the quantitative and qualitative data.

7.2 Personal Reflections on the Research

While the findings from this study support taking a more holistic approach for investigating the impacts of student engagement on students' experiences, the entire research process has been incredibly valuable. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I first proposed the idea of researching international students' experiences for my undergraduate honours project back in 2007 as I had become inadvertently interested in the topic during my year abroad. Therefore, this study is the result of nearly five years of planning and persistent efforts to conduct this research, intuitively knowing it would be worthwhile both personally and professionally. Without a doubt, the research process has benefitted from being conducted as a doctoral project in complete recognition of impacts from various influences over time since its initial conception.

This doctoral research represents a culmination of personal, academic, and professional interests and experiences. Admittedly, I have been actively engaged as a student, connecting with the university community and the local environment since the beginning of my undergraduate degree. I have been involved in various clubs and societies, both as a member and in leadership roles, as well as becoming a student representative and speaking to staff in multiple contexts about fellow students'

concerns. Previous employment in recreation, management, and across multiple university departments (i.e. recreational sports, accommodation, academic departments, students' unions, and international offices) has also assisted in breaking down some personal and professional barriers through increased cross-disciplinary conversations and voluntary collaborations. Considering a critical review of the available literature has proffered a broader perspective which has facilitated numerous insightful discussions with fellow students, HE staff, and other professionals from across the globe. Furthermore, adopting a pragmatic mixed methods approach has provided opportunities to expand my knowledge and connect with different people through training, conferences, and presentations, as well as through the actual process of data collection with students and later analyses. I have received positive feedback on the timely choice of topic and constructive encouragement about selecting appropriate methodology from nearly everyone – supervisors, other students, staff from student unions, senior staff and academics at numerous HEIs, and so on – and, in turn, been able to discuss suggestions for implementing changes to policy and practice which, hopefully, may make the process and experience better for all involved. While some alternative options for methodology and methods are recognised in the final section along with recommendations for future research, I consider this study to have generally succeeded in addressing its intended aims and academically expanding the knowledge base for student engagement and international students' experiences.

7.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This study presents a significant contribution towards expanding knowledge about international HE students' experiences by building on the available literature for students' motivations and student engagement. While taking account of previous studies on motivation and student engagement, this study is distinct as it uses a holistic approach to focus on students' motivations, engagement behaviours, and reflective perceptions about experiences by including academic and non-academic factors which are particularly relevant to international students. As each has been discussed previously in Chapter Six, this section provides a summary of how the information from this study advances this area of research in international education.

The first construct examined in this study centred on students' motivations for choosing to have an international HE experience. Whereas previous studies have focused on international students' motivations in either academic or leisure/recreation contexts (see Section 2.4), this study considered both academic and non-academic motivations for the international students. The collective findings from this study indicate that international students are primarily motivated towards "the experience" of studying abroad. There were some noted discrepancies between the quantitative and qualitative

data as the questionnaire responses indicated the importance of opportunities for academic, professional, and personal development whereas students' comments in the interviews demonstrated an enthusiastic desire to travel. As similar results were mentioned in the review of previous research (see Section 2.1) depending on whether individual studies took a quantitative or qualitative approach, the findings from this study using mixed methods are considered valuable in examining students' motivations both in general and more specific contexts related to the academic and non-academic aspects of the international HE experience.

The second construct of interest in this study has focused on student engagement. Rather than providing a new definition of student engagement in a field which is already overwhelmed with multiple definitions for the concept, the findings from this study support the earlier definition from Bryson (2014a; see also Bryson et al., 2010) in acknowledgement of pre-existing factors (i.e. students motivations and expectations), the evolution of student engagement and the sum of their experiences and interactions during their HE experience, and students' evaluations and perceptions about the process which will likely change over time. Much of the previous research within the academic discourse on student engagement (see Section 2.2) has noted the importance of student's engagement in academic as opposed to recreational contexts with most research focused on domestic rather than international students. However, the collective findings from this study point towards international students being more involved and engaged in behaviours related to travel and social activities over more traditional academic behaviours identified within the questionnaire and interviews. This study further stands out from its predecessors as the research project has been designed and conducted to focus on student engagement and international experiences from the student's perspective by a student (me) with previous personal and professional experiences in HE academic and non-academic departments; in contrast, most previous studies have been designed and conducted from an administrative perspective by staff who have recruited students as co-researchers (see Borsos et al., 2014; Siddeeqe et al., 2011).

The third construct of import to this study involved students' perceptions about their international HE experience. Previous studies (see Section 2.1) point towards the value of using either quantitative outcome measures (such as in the ISB, NSS, CEQ, and NSSE) focused on students' academic persistence/achievements, evaluation of HE services, and ratings of satisfaction or alternatively providing more qualitative anecdotes (as Sweeney, 2012, suggests) alluding to the personal benefits and overall value of the experience. As the study involved mixed methods, students were able to provide reasons for their questionnaire responses during subsequent interviews. The

findings from this study show that most students consider their international experiences to be generally positive and personally valuable as students' responses were consistent between multiple measures reflecting satisfaction and experience quality identified within the questionnaire and students' positive comments provided in the interviews. Unfortunately, the minority number of students who indicated having had negative experiences in the questionnaire did not respond to invitations sent to participate in the interviews so their responses could not be explored further.

The fourth and final contribution this study makes to the knowledge and discourse in international education research considers the SEM used to examine relationships between variables representing the different constructs of interest to this study. Previous research has indicated the importance of looking at student engagement and students' experiences more holistically (Coates, 2005; Kahu, 2013) but no evidence has been found of previous studies using all of the variables identified (i.e. students' motivations, engagement behaviours, concerns, and perceptions about their experiences) and examining them in the same way as this study has done (i.e. utilising a phenomenological approach with mixed methods, framed by and building upon the theory of planned behaviour and other theories relative to student engagement). A novel finding from the SEM involved the noticeable role of identified behaviours representing recreational engagement in relation to students' motivations, reducing concerns whilst abroad, and positive perceptions about their international experiences. Students' identified engagement behaviours in academic activities did not display the same level of impact within the SEM or the interviews. Admittedly the identified SEM of this study is not considered perfect as the variables for student engagement showed lower reliability levels than desired and the overall SEM analysis produced inconclusive conclusions due to cautious interpretation of the fit indices. However, an alternative model has not been identified from previous research and the fit indices were not so poor as to completely discard or reject the model. The findings from the SEM analysis conducted on students' questionnaire responses also seem promising for future research as the interviews provided further supporting evidence for the initial conclusions.

Ultimately, this study considers the value of an international HE experience as going beyond a final degree classification with the opportunity to become more competitive among the global workforce; as Sir Patrick Stewart stated in an interview as Chancellor of the University of Huddersfield, "People put a figure on the earnings premium, but equally university education has to be about self-enrichment and personal fulfilment" (Elmes, 2014). The findings from this study support the holistic appreciation of the HE student experience advocating personal development and wider experiences

advocated by Sir Patrick Stewart and others, including the HEA (2012) in commenting of international students:

Their success depends not just on what happens at university but also in the broader university or local community; they travel to study not just for an academic qualification but also for the language and cultural experience.

This study has addressed the latter part of the quote above by recognising the impact of individual motivations and different types of student engagement on HE students' international experiences within the academic environs of the university as well as various recreational experiences of traveling and social interactions with other people. As no evidence has been identified from a previous study combining these factors into a single study using mixed methods, the design of this study and its findings are considered helpful in advancing the research and continuing academic discussions in this area.

7.3.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study provide evidence that the experiences of international students are affected by a variety of factors both within and beyond the remit of the respective HEI. Namely, while universities can provide opportunities and services aimed at improving the experiences of students, the students also have a responsibility to recognise their own motivations towards their HE experience and become actively engaged at the university and within the community as well as reflecting and considering multiple aspects relevant to their HE experience.

There are several noted implications for policy and practice when taking account of the findings for this study. The following detailed recommendations are provided to hopefully assist students, staff, and policy makers in improving the provision of and conveying the significance of increased understanding of international experiences.

1. Staff and students at HEIs should reconsider what they mean when they talk about 'student engagement' and the 'student experience'. The results from this study show that student engagement encompasses much more than involvement in academic activities (i.e. studying, attending lectures, and completing assignments) and participating in student representation initiatives. HEIs should continue to provide a supportive environment for frequent and meaningful interactions between students, staff, and the greater community by utilising both curricular and extracurricular opportunities as these activities were found to have a significant impact on students' perceptions about their experiences in this study. Staff should also encourage students to get actively involved in various activities which promote interdisciplinary and cross-cultural interactions, personal development, and connecting with the community to increase knowledge and understanding on a deeper level. Likewise, students should also actively engage

in such frequent and meaningful interactions with other students, staff, and the greater community to have more positive experiences and give back to others at the same time.

2. Universities should make communication between past international students and prospective or new incoming international students easier. Multiple students indicated in the questionnaire that they had relied on the advice and recommendations of previous students when applying, choosing, and preparing for their international HE experience. Many students further commented that they were interested in the results from this study, both in personal face-to-face conversations and emails sent after participating in the questionnaire; they made specific reference to a delay in results from larger university research such as the ISB or NSS surveys which produce results after they leave and/or return to their home country. Therefore, for a more direct involvement between past and current international students, HEIs could consider instituting mentor programmes, volunteer or part-time positions within the international office, facilitation of activities through a club or society, or online networks. Such networking opportunities could be created through social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) or administered through university systems; the network could be structured as a general forum for a specific institution, such as the Global Community Member Zone for students at the University of Leeds (2012a), or in order to connect students more broadly based on specific locations or regions. This process would provide continued links between individual students so they can talk about their experiences (i.e. expectations versus actual experiences, surprises and/or disappointments, advice and recommendations, etc.), as well as an opportunity for universities to continuously evaluate services and improve students' experiences (Chaban et al., 2011; Siddeeqe et al., 2011). The positive aspects of the international student experience are often highlighted in marketing, whereas negative aspects are overlooked or avoided altogether outside of administrative surveys. Instead, all students' comments should be recognised as being useful and valid and ought to be utilised to adjust services and manage expectations.
3. National governments and HEIs should reconsider policies which restrict or otherwise discourage students from participating in international education opportunities. The results from this study show that some students may feel as though they are sometimes singled out or feel isolated from domestic or other international students because of individual concerns felt before and during their international HE experience. International students should be recognised for who they are and what they stand for – cultural ambassadors and future leaders for

younger generations (Breuning, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; HEA, 2013; Stewart, 2005). Strict immigration policies, complicated application procedures, and high fees all act as deterrents for incoming students (Kandiko Howson, 2014; Matthews, 2014; Richardson, 2013; Sellgren, 2013). Funding cuts to programmes and staff reductions place more of a burden on remaining staff to provide similar (if not better) services relying on fewer resources with detrimental add-on effects to students. In such cases, departments should share resources and expand to more collaborative events and activities which may be more appealing or relevant to a greater number of students. Furthermore, students with limited experience in the target language should enrol in intensive language programmes (before arriving or before term starts) and take advantage of available workshops to help them cope with different academic standards. The findings from this study show that the students who took advantage of these opportunities were more positive in general when considering both academic and non-academic experiences.

These recommendations are provided with the idea that such actions could further promote positive personal experiences for individual students, increase diversity and opportunities for cross-cultural interactions at HEIs, and encourage greater numbers of students to participate in international education experiences.

7.4 Recognising Alternative Methods

The findings from this study have been considered useful in contributing to available research and addressing gaps in previously disparate areas focused on academic and non-academic contexts. However, generalisations about the results from the data collected should be considered within the context in which this study was conducted considering the limitations outlined previously in section 6.6. Although there are general similarities and characteristics based on the decision to study outside their home country, international students are not a homogenous group which can always be judged collectively. The students are also individuals with uniquely different backgrounds, motivations, expectations, concerns, preferences, personalities, and life experiences. While this study has focused on exploring the experiences of international students from the students' perspective, the results cannot and should not be applied in a *carte blanche* manner towards all students at every institution worldwide.

Experiences are individual and subjective, and as such may be interpreted in a variety of ways determined valid for the situation. Therefore, it is important to recognise that data collected from other students, at another institution, and/or in a separate country may result in different conclusions. Such alternate methods may be explored further in future research as outlined in the next, and final, section.

7.4.1 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has used mixed methods to focus on data collected and analysed from international students at a single university regarding their motivations towards an international HE experience, student engagement in academic and non-academic activities, concerns before and during their experience abroad, and their perceptions when reflecting on their experiences abroad. The findings and conclusions are considered particularly useful in trying to close the gaps between previously distinct academic and non-academic spheres of research which have focused on the primary variables of interest included in this study. In consideration of noted restrictions related to time and resources for conducting this study, future research in this area could potentially be conducted in a variety of ways to address these issues.

- The questionnaire used in this study to explore international students' motivations, engagement in academic and non-academic activities, concerns before and during their international experience, and perceptions about their international experiences has not been used before in previous studies. Future research could consider replicating this study using the same methodology which would then allow a valuable comparison of results.
- This study focused on the international student population at a single university in the UK using a sample size of 249 students who completed the questionnaire and 10 students who participated in semi-structured interviews. Future studies may be conducted at other universities or in other countries using the same methodology, which would subsequently provide important comparative data.
- Furthermore, when considering the sample size of this study, future research may focus on a larger sample which would allow further comparative analysis of data between segments of the international student population based on cultural differences, the duration of the international education experience, across multiple academic disciplines, at different academic levels, or reported involvement in particular activities.
- Considering that students who had reported having negative experiences did not choose to participate in the interviews, another researcher may address this discrepancy by targeting unsatisfied students or otherwise identifying and then assisting students who may have additional barriers or negative experiences with being actively engaged in their HE experience. Opportunities for additional research to explore the concept of student engagement may also consider including both domestic and international students and comparing their experiences. This could provide useful information as to how to encourage students to integrate further and learn more about one another; thus potentially

improving the experiences of international students and inspiring more domestic students to study abroad themselves.

- Finally, this study was conducted using a single questionnaire which encompassed a large quantity of information related to students' experiences before, during, and after participating in their international HE experience in the 2012/13 academic year. Future research efforts may consider longitudinal data with multiple stages for data collection (i.e. before arrival, before or after exams, after students return to their home country) or in order to compare student data from one year to the next.

When considering recommendations for future research, it is also necessary to consider the research agenda – who is conducting it, why, and for what purpose. In the field of international education (as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two), research is typically aimed at increasing the number of outgoing domestic students who study abroad or incoming international students, or exploring innovative efforts to improve the experiences of international students. In reviewing the literature, this study further considered the impacts of different types of student motivations and student engagement on international students' perceptions about their international HE experiences using both quantitative and qualitative data. Furthermore, the phenomenological approach means that the intent behind conducting this research was focused more on exploring international students' experiences by paying attention to the perspective of the students rather than the HEI. This study has been conducted in an effort to hopefully join theory and practice, providing evidence that student engagement matters in both academic and non-academic contexts. International education experiences can provide valuable opportunities for students to have direct experience with living and learning outside of their 'normal' environment. Ultimately, however, the students have a responsibility to make the most of the opportunities they are given, at home and whilst abroad.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Answers to the Questionnaire

Welcome / 欢迎 / Willkommen / Bienvenue / ようこそ / Welkom / أهلاً / Bienvenidos

Welcome to this survey of International Student Experiences, and many thanks for taking the time to share your experience of being an international student at the University of Leeds.

It should only take you around 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

This survey has been designed as part of a PhD study intended to capture the views and experiences of international students at the University of Leeds. The overall aim of this survey is to identify how international students are engaged during their time at Leeds and whether different types of engagement affect the quality of experiences.

The survey has sixteen pages of questions and it is *not possible to return* to a page once it has been completed. Therefore, please think carefully before responding so that your views are accurately represented.

Your input as an international student is very important and highly valued, and we appreciate the time you are taking out of your busy schedule to tell us about your experiences.

Research Ethics

All research with human participants conducted at the University of Leeds requires approval from the Ethical Approval Committee.

Authorization for this study has been granted from the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University of Leeds (Ethics reference: LTEDUC-022).

Data Protection

All data collected in this research will be held securely.

Individual results are confidential.

Individual results will be anonymised.

Participants will not be identified when reporting the results.

The researcher agrees to use their best efforts to ensure that no individuals can be identified by implication.

All results will be reported in an aggregated and anonymised form.

Aggregated results will be used for the purposes of PhD research and may be published.

Informed Consent

I have read and understood the above statements.

I understand that participation in this research is voluntary.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

I agree that I am a student attending the University of Leeds during the 2012/13 academic period.

I agree to participate in this research.

Yes No

1. Do you agree to participate in this research?

No – 0 ; Yes – 249

2. What is your date of birth?

Range: 18-42 years; M = 24.49, SD = 4.37

3. What is your gender?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	163	65.5	65.5
Male	86	34.5	100.0

4. What is your current marital status?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Married	17	6.8	6.8
Single	232	93.2	100.0

5. Which region of the world are you from?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Africa	12	4.8	4.8
Central America	2	0.8	5.6
North America	33	13.3	18.9
South America	10	4.0	22.9
East Asia	59	23.7	46.6
West Asia	18	7.2	53.8
Australia	3	1.2	55.0
Eastern Europe	33	13.3	68.3
Western Europe	79	31.7	100.0

5a. What is your nationality?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Germany	23	9.2	9.2
China	20	8.0	17.3
France	15	6.0	23.3
Canada	14	5.6	28.9
USA	13	5.2	34.1
Italy	12	4.8	39.0
Greece	8	3.2	42.2
Taiwan	8	3.2	45.4
India	7	2.8	48.2
Netherlands	7	2.8	51.0
Mexico	6	2.4	53.4
Japan	5	2.0	55.4
Saudi Arabia	5	2.0	57.4
Spain	5	2.0	59.4
Sweden	5	2.0	61.4
Others (<5)	96	38.6	100.0

6. Please indicate your current year of study in your home country.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1st Year Undergraduate	12	4.8	4.8
2nd Year Undergraduate	19	7.6	12.4
3rd Year Undergraduate	62	24.9	37.3
4th Year Undergraduate	17	6.8	44.2
Foundation Year (pre-University)	7	2.8	47.0
I have completed my masters course (PGCE, PGT, PGR).	13	5.2	52.2
I have completed my postgraduate course (PhD, EdD, or equivalent).	4	1.6	53.8
I have completed my undergraduate course.	31	12.4	66.3
Masters (PGCE, PGT, PGR)	48	19.3	85.5
Post-Graduate (PhD, EdD, or equivalent)	36	14.5	100.0

7. Have you studied abroad before?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	176	70.7	70.7
Yes	73	29.3	100.0

7a. If yes, where did you study abroad previously? (*open response*)

7b. How long was your previous programme?

	Frequency	Percent of Responses	Percent of Study Sample
<i>No previous study abroad</i>	177	---	71.1
Less than 1 month	7	9.6	2.8
1 - 3 months	11	15.1	4.4
4 - 6 months	9	12.3	3.6
6 - 9 months	4	5.5	1.6
More than 9 months	41	56.2	16.5

8. How long is your period of study at the University?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Academic Year (September - June)	100	40.2	40.2
Entire Degree	107	43.0	83.1
Semester 1 (September - January)	3	1.2	84.3
Semester 2 (January - June)	39	15.7	100.0

9. Please indicate what school or department you are in at the University?

Academic Faculty at the University	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Arts	81	32.5	32.5
Biological Sciences	19	7.6	40.2
Business	48	19.3	59.4
ESSL	41	16.5	75.9
Engineering	16	6.4	82.3
Environment	18	7.2	89.6
MAPS	10	4.0	93.6
Medicine and Health	8	3.2	96.8
PVAC	8	3.2	100.0

10. While [here], my living arrangements are:

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Living in University accommodation	118	47.4	47.4
Living with friends or family members	10	4.0	51.4
Renting a private flat or house	121	48.6	100.0

10a. Which University accommodation?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
A Residence	5	2.0	2.0
B Residence	9	3.6	5.6
C Residence	3	1.2	6.8
D Residence	1	0.4	7.2
E Residence	7	2.8	10.0
F Residence	5	2.0	12.0
G Residence	4	1.6	13.7
H Residence	15	6.0	19.7
I Residence	7	2.8	22.5
J Residence	10	4.0	26.5
K Residence	2	0.8	27.3
L Residence	17	6.8	34.1
M Residence	3	1.2	35.3
N Residence	9	3.6	39.0
O Residence	7	2.8	41.8
P Residence	10	4.0	45.8
Q Residence	4	1.6	47.4
(<i>in private accommodation</i>)	131	52.6	100.0

10b. Who do you live with in your accommodation?

	Frequency	Percent of Responses	Percent of Study Sample
<i>In University Accommodation</i>	118	-	47.4
Mainly British students	34	26.6	0.3
Mainly international students	49	38.3	19.7
Mix of international and British students	35	27.3	14.1
<i>In Rented Accommodation</i>	131	-	52.6
By myself	21	16.0	8.4
With family members	16	12.2	6.4
With friends from home	22	8.8	8.8
With non-students [here]	11	8.4	4.4
With other students [here]	61	46.6	24.5

11. Had you been to Europe before?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	74	29.7	29.7
Yes	71	28.5	58.2
I am from Europe	104	41.8	100.0

11a. If yes, how many times had you visited Europe in the past?

	Frequency	Percent of Responses	Percent of Study Sample
1 time	21	29.6	8.4
2 times	14	19.7	5.6
3 times	9	12.7	3.6
4 or more times	27	38.0	10.8

12. Had you visited England before?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	123	49.4	49.4
Yes	126	50.6	100.0

12a. If yes, how many times had you been to England in the past?

	Frequency	Percent of Responses	Percent of Study Sample
1 time	21	29.6	8.4
2 times	14	19.7	5.6
3 times	9	12.7	3.6
4 or more times	27	38.0	10.8

13. Which sources provided you with information to prepare for coming [here]?

	Frequency	Percent
Embassy or Tourism Office	15	6.0
Friends and Relatives	121	48.6
Internet Sources	188	75.5
2012 London Olympics	2	0.8
Magazines	8	3.2
Previous Trips	66	26.5
Television or Movies	23	9.2
Travel Agent	2	0.8
Travel Books or Brochures	20	8.0
University's International Office	123	49.4
University website/print materials	198	79.5

14. When I first came [here] at the start of term, I arrived:

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Alone	170	68.3	68.3
With family or friends	56	22.5	90.8
With other students from home university	23	9.2	100.0

15. This factor affected my decision to study abroad in 2012/13.

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much
a. I wanted to improve my language skills.	58	27	48	116
b. I wanted to learn new things.	3	17	49	180
c. I wanted to take interesting classes.	17	21	75	136
d. I wanted to study subjects not available at my university.	61	33	56	99
e. I wanted to develop new skills.	6	27	68	148
f. I wanted to meet new people.	9	18	72	150
g. I wanted to be with friends.	121	50	43	35
h. I wanted to be with other students who share similar interests.	40	62	95	52
i. I wanted to be able to pursue extracurricular interests at the University.	74	75	69	31
j. I wanted to be able to tell my friends and relatives about my experience.	40	75	77	57
k. I wanted to be challenged.	10	32	72	135
l. I wanted to gain experience.	5	7	38	199
m. I wanted to be able to list a semester/year at an overseas university on my CV.	28	39	76	106
n. I wanted to enhance future career opportunities.	11	25	52	161
o. I wanted to do something by myself.	17	36	73	123
p. I wanted the opportunity to grow and develop as a person.	10	13	66	160
q. I wanted to learn more about myself.	22	39	76	112

16. This factor affected my decision to study abroad in 2012/13.

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much
a. I wanted to get away.	58	53	68	70
b. I wanted a change from my daily routine.	45	43	80	81
c. I wanted to relax.	116	58	50	25
d. I wanted to enjoy a friendly atmosphere.	45	66	89	49
e. I wanted to have fun.	32	50	89	78
f. I wanted to have a good time.	26	27	93	103
g. I wanted to have a thrilling and exciting experience.	18	43	75	113
h. I wanted to try new foods.	90	66	53	40
i. I wanted to travel.	17	42	59	131
j. I wanted to see famous cultural places.	42	52	70	85
k. I wanted to buy goods and souvenirs.	124	69	34	22
l. I wanted a new experience.	8	19	51	171
m. I wanted to learn more about English culture.	28	56	81	84
n. I wanted to learn more about English history.	48	68	78	55
o. I wanted to experience everyday life in England.	25	38	80	106
p. I wanted to experience the English education system.	27	46	75	101
q. I wanted to meet English people.	28	32	94	95

17. I expected to experience some difficulty with the following factors:

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much
a. Learning and/or using English as a foreign language	95	69	61	24
b. Coping with academic coursework	32	66	101	50
c. Managing my time	44	74	93	38
d. Meeting people	54	95	76	24
e. Making friends	45	89	79	36
f. Issues related to accommodation	59	91	66	33
g. Maintaining my health	100	76	52	21
h. Being away from home	80	74	54	41
i. Being away from family and friends	60	70	66	53
j. Adapting to the local climate	77	74	62	36
k. Using the local currency	123	68	39	19
l. Having enough money	45	64	72	68
m. Adjusting to English customs	74	95	56	24
n. Adapting to local foods	93	73	47	36
o. Using local transportation	109	74	46	20
p. Traveling on weekends and/or during holidays	121	75	33	20

18. How many contact hours per week do you spend in lectures, seminars, or tutorials at your home university?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 – 5 hours	26	10.4	10.4
5 – 10 hours	84	33.7	44.2
11 – 16 hours	72	28.9	73.1
17+ hours	67	26.9	100.0

19. Were you typically involved in clubs or societies at your home university?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	122	49.0	49.0
Yes	127	51.0	100.0

19a. Which kinds of clubs or societies were you involved with at your home university?
(multiple response)

20. Have you been involved with the international student community at your home university?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	221	88.8	88.8
Yes	28	11.2	100.0

20a. Please describe how you were involved with the international student community at your home university. (open response)

21. In my home country, I am typically engaged in the following activities:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often
a. Studying or doing coursework	12	19	89	129
b. Watching television or listening to music	5	40	104	100
c. Playing video or computer games	94	79	43	33
d. Playing on the internet	60	51	68	70
e. Reading	3	32	121	93
f. Sightseeing	42	91	96	20
g. Traveling by myself	57	99	67	26
h. Talking with friends and family	1	10	61	177
i. Working for pay	56	54	70	69
j. Playing competitive sports	123	60	43	23
k. Playing non-competitive sports	67	75	76	31
l. Exercising	20	76	106	47
m. Volunteering	88	74	60	27
n. Shopping for fun	50	77	80	42
o. Attending a fine arts performance/exhibit	31	83	105	30
p. Doing arts and crafts	107	73	46	23
q. Cooking for fun	66	55	80	48
r. Participating in activities to enhance spirituality/worship	128	56	32	33
s. Socialising with friends from my course	19	47	92	91
t. Socialising with friends from my accommodation	77	45	70	57
u. Socialising with international students	89	76	67	17
v. Partying or going to clubs	63	78	79	29
w. Traveling with friends	27	79	101	42

22. I have experienced difficulty with the following factors:

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much
a. Learning and/or using English as a foreign language	114	57	56	22
b. Coping with academic coursework	37	86	74	52
c. Managing my time	54	57	83	55
d. Meeting people	80	85	56	28
e. Making friends	73	69	69	38
f. Issues related to accommodation	89	86	50	24
g. Maintaining my health	110	73	44	22
h. Being away from home	85	83	48	33
i. Being away from family and friends	63	79	62	45
j. Adapting to the local climate	97	70	49	33
k. Using the local currency	142	62	30	15
l. Having enough money	60	78	58	53
m. Adjusting to English customs	103	87	40	19
n. Adapting to local foods	122	59	44	24
o. Using local transportation	124	81	30	14
p. Traveling on weekends and/or during holidays	132	73	28	16

23. How many contact hours do you spend in lectures, seminars, or tutorials at the University?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 – 5 hours	52	20.9	20.9
5 – 10 hours	56	22.5	43.4
11 – 16 hours	43	17.3	60.6
17+ hours	98	39.4	100.0

24. Are you involved in any clubs or societies on campus or through the local community?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	112	45.0	45.0
Yes	137	55.0	100.0

24a. Which types of clubs or societies are you involved in? (*multiple response*)

25. Do you attend activities through the University or the Students' Union?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often
a. Give-It-A-Go Sessions	87	57	86	19
b. Club nights at the Students' Union	117	81	40	11
c. Live performances or gigs	136	63	43	7
d. Careers Fairs	125	53	56	15
e. Advice and Skills Sessions	119	61	53	16

26. How often do you attend the Global Café?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	105	42.2	42.2
Rarely	72	28.9	71.1
Sometimes	47	18.9	90.0
Very Often	25	10.0	100.0

27. Did you participate in any of the Global Saturdays trips?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	189	75.9	75.9
Yes	60	24.1	100.0

27a. Which trips have you been on? (*open response*)

28. At the University, I am typically engaged in the following activities:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often
a. Studying or doing coursework	3	30	87	129
b. Watching television or listening to music	27	54	99	69
c. Playing video or computer games	133	64	36	16
d. Playing on the internet	74	42	66	67
e. Reading	6	40	110	93
f. Sightseeing	13	59	127	50
g. Traveling by myself	47	78	96	28
h. Talking with friends and family back home	5	42	116	86
i. Working for pay	169	31	36	13
j. Playing competitive sports	176	26	34	13
k. Playing non-competitive sports	124	47	58	20
l. Exercising	38	76	81	54
m. Volunteering	180	33	31	5
n. Shopping for fun	62	92	71	24
o. Attending a fine arts performance/exhibit	60	85	88	16
p. Doing arts and crafts	148	46	42	13
q. Cooking for fun	51	55	84	59
r. Participating in activities to enhance spirituality/worship	150	45	34	20
s. Socialising with friends from my course	31	69	97	52
t. Socialising with friends from my accommodation	27	59	90	73
u. Socialising with international students	17	33	99	100
v. Partying or going to clubs	55	68	85	41
w. Traveling with friends	25	61	107	56

29. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your time as an international student.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. My university coursework is challenging.	8	30	142	69
b. I am enjoying my classes.	7	23	161	58
c. The module leaders are very knowledgeable about the course.	3	15	130	101
d. University staff are helpful.	2	17	131	99
e. University staff are understanding.	3	21	136	89
f. University staff are available when I need assistance.	2	23	138	86
g. University staff are considerate of my needs.	5	21	158	65
h. I have received the support I need to succeed academically.	6	29	143	71
i. There is a supportive campus environment at the University.	4	17	145	83
j. Coming to the University has let me experience a different style of education.	4	10	97	138
k. This experience has made me more knowledgeable.	6	19	102	122
l. This experience will help me in my future career.	4	16	111	118
m. I have learned a lot during this experience.	2	16	101	130
n. I have felt safe at the University.	7	14	117	111
o. University facilities are well maintained.	5	16	142	86
p. The setting of the University is attractive.	8	22	128	91
q. Transportation here is efficient.	23	47	132	47

30. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your experiences as an international student.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Events at the University are scheduled well	4	23	185	37
b. It is easy to get involved as a student here.	8	26	151	64
c. Activities at the University are entertaining.	2	28	160	59
d. Activities at the University are fun.	3	24	171	51
e. Activities at the University are enjoyable.	3	20	171	55
f. I feel like I have been able to experience British culture.	9	45	136	59
g. I have been exposed to many different cultural experiences here.	6	36	125	82
h. People here have been friendly and accommodating.	4	34	141	70
i. I have made many new friends.	7	44	103	95
j. Other students are supportive.	7	39	138	65
k. Other students are friendly.	4	25	150	70
l. I feel like I belong to the University student community.	12	51	134	52
m. I feel safe here.	10	27	140	72
n. I have enjoyed the weather here.	67	90	70	22
o. I feel like I have had a unique experience.	4	24	121	100
p. Coming to the University has let me experience a different way of life.	2	17	111	119
q. Having a study abroad experience was important to me.	2	6	73	168

31. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your experiences as an international student.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. This experience has been stimulating.	4	10	121	114
b. This experience has been exciting.	3	15	121	110
c. This experience has been enjoyable.	3	14	121	111
d. This experience has been interesting.	2	8	103	136
e. The study abroad experience has been valuable to me.	4	6	86	153
f. My study abroad experience has been delightful.	6	33	116	94
g. My study abroad experience has been excellent.	11	31	118	89
h. I have learned a lot about myself because of this experience.	5	22	111	111
i. I will have wonderful memories about this experience.	4	18	102	125
j. I won't forget my experience at the University.	3	4	79	163
k. I will remember many positive things about this experience.	5	12	98	134

32. I am satisfied with my study abroad experience at the University.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	2.0	2.0
Disagree	12	4.8	6.8
Agree	98	39.4	46.2
Strongly Agree	134	53.8	100.0

33. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your experience as an international student.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I would recommend studying abroad to other students.	4	9	85	151
b. I would recommend studying at the University to other international students.	9	16	107	117
c. I would recommend studying at the University to students from my home university.	11	19	104	115

34. In consideration of all possible factors, please rate your overall experience.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Terrible	0	0.0	0.0
Poor	9	3.6	3.6
Fair	30	12.0	15.7
Good	104	41.8	57.4
Excellent	106	42.6	100.0

35. What will you remember most about your experiences as an international student at the University? (*open response*)

36. Please list up to three things that surprised you while at the University. (*open response*)

37. Please list up to three things that disappointed you as an international student at the University. (*open response*)
38. Please list up to three things which enhanced your personal experience at the University in order of their importance. (*open response*)
39. Please list three things which you feel would improve students' experiences at the University in order of their importance. (*open response*)
40. Would you be willing to participate in a brief interview to find out more about your personal experience as an international student at the University?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	182	73.1	73.1
Yes	67	26.9	100.0

41. Is there anything about this years' experience that you would change? If so, what? (*open response*)

Appendix B: Results from SEM Analysis

Table 23: Correlations between Variables and Individual Factors in SEM

	Personal Development	Academic & Professional Development	Socialisation	Travel	Location	Academic Engagement	Recreational Engagement	Concerns	Education	Personal Development	Staff & Support Systems	Social & Cultural Experiences	Entertainment	Aesthetics	Memory
<u>Motivation</u>															
Personal Development	x														
Academic & Professional Development	.73	x													
Socialisation	.53	.60	x												
Travel	.69	.56	.83	x											
Location	.51	.52	.67	.73	x										
<u>Engagement</u>															
Academic	-.04	.25	.06	-.17	.02	x									
Recreational	.22	.19	.49	.37	.36	.24	x								
Concerns	.03	.11	.20	.09	.05	.14	-.12	x							
<u>Perceptions</u>															
Education	.15	.33	.11	.05	.26	.27	.20	-.09	x						
Personal Development	.37	.44	.21	.27	.35	.23	.25	-.14	.66	x					
Staff & Support Systems	.24	.29	.24	.21	.33	.24	.15	-.19	.62	.61	x				
Social & Cultural Experiences	.31	.32	.35	.34	.33	.27	.52	-.26	.47	.63	.55	x			
Entertainment	.43	.42	.37	.43	.47	.14	.36	-.23	.45	.70	.51	.74	x		
Aesthetics	.22	.21	.26	.27	.32	.18	.24	-.20	.44	.73	.64	.66	.66	x	
Memory	.41	.37	.37	.43	.39	.15	.36	-.24	.46	.67	.52	.73	.88	.62	x
Experience Quality	.36	.32	.26	.31	.35	.12	.32	-.33	.55	.72	.61	.73	.86	.73	.87

Table 24. Standardised Path Coefficients – Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

	Motivation	Academic Engagement	Recreational Engagement	Concerns	Perceptions
Direct Effects					
<u>Motivation</u>		-0.01	0.48		
Personal Development	0.77				
Academic & Professional Development	0.71				
Socialisation	0.88				
Travel	0.94				
Location	0.77				
<u>Engagement</u>					
Academic Engagement				0.15	0.17
Recreational Engagement				-0.13	0.39
<u>Concerns</u>					
					-0.26
<u>Perceptions</u>					
Education					0.57
Staff & Support Systems					0.64
Personal Development					0.80
Aesthetics					0.76
Social & Cultural Experiences					0.81
Entertainment					0.91
Memory					0.91
Experience Quality					0.94
Indirect Effects					
<u>Concerns</u>	-0.06				
<u>Perceptions</u>					
	0.20	-0.04	0.03		
Education	0.12	0.07	0.24	-0.15	
Staff & Support Systems	0.13	0.08	0.27	-0.17	
Personal Development	0.16	0.10	0.34	-0.21	
Aesthetics	0.16	0.10	0.33	-0.20	
Social & Cultural Experiences	0.16	0.10	0.34	-0.21	
Entertainment	0.19	0.12	0.39	-0.24	
Memory	0.18	0.12	0.39	-0.23	
Experience Quality	0.19	0.12	0.40	-0.24	

(Table 24 continued)

	Motivation	Academic Engagement	Recreational Engagement	Concerns	Perceptions
Total Effects					
<u>Motivation</u>		-0.01	0.48		
Personal Development	0.77				
Academic & Professional Development	0.71				
Socialisation	0.88				
Travel	0.94				
Location	0.77				
<u>Concerns</u>	-0.06	0.15	-0.13		
<u>Perceptions</u>	0.20	0.13	0.43	-0.26	
Education	0.12	0.07	0.24	-0.15	0.57
Staff & Support Systems	0.13	0.08	0.27	-0.17	0.64
Personal Development	0.16	0.10	0.34	-0.21	0.80
Aesthetics	0.16	0.10	0.33	-0.20	0.76
Social & Cultural Experiences	0.16	0.10	0.34	-0.21	0.81
Entertainment	0.19	0.12	0.39	-0.24	0.91
Memory	0.18	0.12	0.39	-0.23	0.91
Experience Quality	0.19	0.12	0.40	-0.24	0.94

Appendix C: Example of Transcribed Interview

Interview #4

Date – 27.05.2013

Duration – 24:43

Interviewer – I; Interview Subject – S4

I: So where are you from?

S4: France

I: Ok, whereabouts in France?

S4: [City]

I: [City]? Ok, so like south east right?

S4: Uh, northeast but yeah that's on the border with Germany so

I: Ok, very cool. How many languages do you speak?

S4: Uh well, I speak a little German (not that good), English. I'm studying Japanese also and well French.

I: Very cool. How old are you? If you don't mind my asking.

S4: 20

I: Ok, very cool. So third year or?

S4: Yeah

I: Ok and are you going back?

S4: I'm going back in France for semester.

I: So are you here on an Erasmus year or a semester?

S4: Uh, a year. The whole year.

I: Oh very cool. How have you liked it so far?

S4: Oh yeah. I've wanted to be in England for so long now.

I: Ok, very very cool. Um, what made you choose England? Or [here]?

S4: I always know I wanted to go to the UK. And [here], in particular, was mainly because I wanted to be able to travel. And not being stuck in south because I knew that if I headed towards London or something I'd be there the whole time. So that was the opportunity to be able to go north and well that's really in between Edinburgh and London. So that was really useful. You've got the airport. You've got train stations and coach that's really well deserved. So that's why it made me choose [here]. That was a good university. The courses were interesting me. So that was either [city/university A], [city/university B], or [here]. And so, I'm really happy with what I've got.

I: Ok, what did you think when you first got here?

S4: Um, I was really happy with everything so that was really discovering. I had not ever been north so far. Already quite a few times in London, uh Colchester. Really south it is so really the industrial side was eh really really stressed.

I: Yeah, I remember when I got here. I arrived at the train station and I was just like 'Whoah, this is an industrial city'.

S4: Yeah

I: And then I got to where I actually live and it's totally different. So it was kind of funny. Um, what course are you doing? Either here or in France.

S4: Politics. Politics in both case.

I: How do you like that? Is it good?

S4: Yeah yeah. Although the very good part about pairing in Erasmus is that you get to choose every course you take so you can't say you don't like your year because in France you have compulsory modules so you can't choose. And yeah, here you take everything you want so next year is going to be so hard.

I: Yeah, getting back to what you've been used to for two years.

S4: And that's really flexible because I could take modules in law, politics, uh [indistinguishable] department for Japanese diplomacy and even I took a course in marketing and arts so that's really flexible.

I: Definitely. Sounds awesome.

S4: Yeah.

I: I think I did something similar with my year abroad but I did a degree in international studies.

S4: Ok

I: So it was kind of like mixing everything with one so when people asked me what I was studying I was like 'German. And as long as it's taught in German, it's fine.'

S4: Yeah, well I say politics but I had a bit of everything actually. So, even in France we call that 'politics' but we have economics, history, law... Nothing that's really political intrinsically. That's really here that I discovered 'politics' as such.

I: Right

S4: So that's... You have courses that we don't even have in France. I mean, modules on terrorism. You wouldn't have even have a masters on that. Here you can take that as second or third year level and that's really different so...

I: Yeah. So do you like the fact that there's more courses and everything?

S4: Oh yeah. I even tried to uh you know apply for semester for next year or something. Just watching how it could turn out. But uh with my school that's impossible. They don't follow gap years. Because in France masters is two years instead of one. So I thought, you know, just a gap year would have been possible. They consider that as failing a year in France. And so if you go back afterwards and well, for whatever reason, don't pass the exams on the first try, they can just throw you out. So and you can't attend the fifth and you get out without any degree. So I'd like to stay in the UK and work here. So I do intend to go back but I'm French. So I want to get a degree in France as well just, you know, for security in a way.

I: Right

S4: So I'll be back in France for semester and then I'll try to you know with a job or internship or something to go back.

I: Ok. Sounds good.

S4: Yeah

I: Have you talked to the Careers Centre here?

S4: The what?

I: The Careers Centre.

S4: No, no no.

I: About like doing internship searches and things?

S4: Um, I don't really know how all these things work.

I: Um, the Careers Centre is well. The easiest thing is to check online.

S4: Ok

I: Um but it's it's on campus and you could just ask them how to apply for internships in the future.

S4: Ok

I: Because they should have that info.

S4: I kind of forgot all these opportunities and well just centres and people to ask too. Because in France it doesn't work this way at all. You don't have the people for that and so I kind of forget.

I: Right. So how... If somebody said, 'how would you describe your study abroad experience? Your Erasmus year.' How would you choose to describe it?

S4: Uh... Unforgettable. I always wanted to make this one year. Always a year I could look up to for, you know, just make it as perfect as possible so I'm happy with every aspect of it so far. Whether it be the course, the year, the people I met. Uh, everything I have. I really really really enjoyed it. So, I don't know if you wanted a particular aspect or...

I: Um, well we can talk about various things. Um, have you ever heard the term 'student engagement'?

S4: No

I: Ok, um. Basically, do like do you feel connected to [city/University] since coming here?

S4: Not [here] in particular.

I: Or to the university or the international student community or anything like that?

S4: Eh none of that actually. Uh, that may be have been the disappointment with [University]. I was not feeling really connected to it. I completely love [home city]. I didn't know anything and I'm really happy to go back if only for that because I love the city. I don't think I'll be missing [here] in particular. I mean, it's it's a huge city but there's not much actually. There's just shops and that's great to go out or anything but there's nothing to visit for instance or... When I had friends over, I was like 'yeah we can spend a day [here] but then maybe we could head to [another city] instead.' Because you can't be here for a while and just. I thought there was. When I was checking online, [Similar name place] that's in fact in the south. And well that was just. I love the university and the people I met but aside from that. I love England as a whole so I could have been anywhere in England and probably have the same feeling of enjoying myself as much but not in particular because I'm [here]. With the university, a bit more than in my home university actually because the way it works with all the societies and association that's really wonderful to be able to just come in. Come out for the Give-It-A-Go's and meet people that are not in your course. Or not just international students. Because in France you don't have that. You just hang out with the people in your own course usually, because you have no such opportunities to do that. Well, not on such a big scale. So that was really the the thing I liked the most maybe. Um that's so easy you just. All the Give-It-A-Go's are really wonderful because I don't really like to show up in someplace I don't know with people I don't know. So at the very beginning I did not attend Freshers' Week or stuff like that. That was kind of difficult to meet people and that really made things easier. So if you don't meet friends or meet people, it's really because you don't want to. Because all the opportunities are here so yeah I really appreciated that. And oh yeah, even with the teachers and people in your modules talking is so easy. And the people are here for that and they are asking you your opinion and everything. That's completely different from what I'm used to as well. So yeah, you can totally connect with what you do, the people who are around. And that was great.

I: Cool. What kind of Give-It-A-Go's and clubs and societies have you done?

S4: Uh mostly sport. I've committed to archery and fencing. And that's probably the only Give-It-A-Go's I've done because that were the only things that were interesting me. Uh but I've been attending Global Café a few times but that's really not my thing because that's a bit impersonal. You don't know anyone. You just come in and try to talk and move on so I went to Newcastle with the university and I really liked the opportunities of discovering the cities as they were doing. And I think maybe my home university for international students when I'll be getting back, that's the kind of thing you want to you know share and yeah. That was not the way I was doing things but all the opportunities were there and that's eventually how I met all the friends I've got here. So that's really yeah good.

I: Ok, so most of your friends are from archery or fencing or from the Newcastle trip?

S4: Well yeah. Actually that's from one of my flatmate. I'm in one of the small residences and well she introduced me to some people who were from the International Student Society and we... We did not meet actually at one of those meetings but that's where I used to see them around and... Well actually that's two Give-It-A-Go's I have seen them. They were attending all of them. All of them. And so I went to the Palestinian Give-It-A-Go society, stuff I have a slight interest in because I'm in politics but not as a whole in. That's how I got to meet the most people actually. And then we were doing things on the side but they were always going to Global Café so that's when I attended and then some were going back to Newcastle and so that's when you spread around so...

I: Do you do nights out or travel a lot?

S4: Uh, I travel a lot. I don't do partying or nights out at all. Not really my interest. But I, I'm really used to traveling alone so I don't really miss it when there's no one around and well particularly when I go back to London. I've done most of the touristic stuff so I just want to do all the things that are not necessarily the first thing that would come to mind. And I don't like to do the same things. Usually I am used to traveling alone but that's really nicer when you have people around so...

I: Right, definitely.

S4: We've done quite a lot, a lot of things together as well so. I can balance the two and I was really glad for that.

I: Right. You said that you love England and you feel connected more with the university than the city and everything like that. What do you think of British culture? Like has it been a bit of a shock coming from France? Or were you already used to it?

S4: Well from France, it's really not that different. Uh, most of the things I were already expecting them. Uh, I really was looking forward to actually leave everything. I was expecting more because I was always reading British news, watching TV shows, and well even for literature everything... Everything I could do I was already doing it in English but that has been going on for years. So that was just really being inside. Instead of having the old thoughts that I was really looking forward to. Uh, no even for the food I was expecting that. That was the yeah the biggest challenge because well you know, French and food. And but having real bread. Everything. Vegetables and everything are so expensive. Having to walk into a little old market every week, no way. So that was the most difficult part but I mean, you can live so...

I: So definitely food has been a sticking point. But have there been any other, I don't know, concerns or anything that you've had?

S4: Um no.

I: Or has it basically been smooth?

S4: Um, well I'm studying in Strasbourg but I actually live four hours of train from there because that's the kind of school you have to take a test to get in and so you can't really choose where you end up. So I was already living away from my family for two

years before coming here so. And we have Skype and everything so. And I'm just in the UK. From France, it's not that huge a leap. So I had no problem with that. No. I was just so excited to come here that I had no downside. And that infuriates my friends and family but for years I've always been you know thinking that British is best so I don't really miss anything from France. Even for getting books in English or newspapers and magazines and everything that we can't have. Or have to import everything. Having everything on hand that, wow that's a good change. And just talking the language. I love speaking English. I'm usually not a very talkative person but if it's in English you can get me to say anything so that's what I'm going to miss the most coming back. Yeah, going back to just French and I can't read in French anymore. I just love reading in English so much. And yeah, here it was very different. Just the way doing the courses and everything. You read all the time. And uh, yeah, I... I don't have any downsides really that would stick out. I know I have some friends who did not enjoy their year abroad but I have no idea how they could manage that. You get to choose everything! You pick the city, the country, the courses, what you do when you're down there. How can you? Yeah, I don't know.

I: Yeah, so if you don't mind my asking when are you going back home?

S4: Uh, on the 9th of June.

I: Ok, so you have about two weeks left.

S4: Mmmmm, I have almost no money left. Traveling is kind of expensive so I've got a summer job waiting on the 10th so I have really an edge to get the very last minutes in then I'm going back.

I: Are you looking forward to going home? To finish your degree and everything?

S4: I have... Well the thing is in France, you um. In my school you don't really get to choose your degree. It's kind of wide areas so you have either, as far as I'm concerned, public administration. But that's French law. I want to get rid of France so that's out of question. Finance, no way. Or that's European politics. And I like politics but not European politics as such. So I'm not exactly looking forward to my degree because I can switch in my fifth year but it's a network of schools and so switching you don't exactly know what you're going to get. So yeah, it concerns me a bit because well I don't really know what I'll be doing in two years, if I'm really going to enjoy it or not so that's the bit downside part. After having had such an amazing year, that's gonna be difficult to go back. ... I'm happy to go back because I've got friends I haven't seen for a year. I have friends in Strasbourg, in my hometown. So that's really going back to connect a bit with all that. And I've had a whole year already so yeah, I can be grateful for that but (sigh) I'm not happy to go back at all! If I could stay, I'd do it. But I'm going to, well go back to a job to get some money so everything fits in where it should be so that's the reasonable part. But if I could just stay and be here, I wouldn't go back. That depresses my friends and family but even being here when they're not I don't mind it so much. So...

I: So, did you already have that feeling before you even came? That you knew that you didn't really want to go back. Or has that just kind of like strengthened over the year?

S4: I didn't know because I've always had this kind of faraway dreams that sometimes in my life I could just stay in England and live there. But I didn't know if that would live up to the expectations I had. So being here for one year was kind of a test. Uh, is it going to be as great as I imagine or was that just ideas of the ideal image that I had just because I don't feel that good in France? So I didn't know but yeah during the year when I was trying to get into masters and see if it could fit or not. Well it turned out not to be the best option for me right now but I was think... It really happened during the year. And I think yeah, that kind of fixed my point on this thing. I'd like to, I'd like to come back.

I: Ok, so you definitely like... You're going back to France to finish reading for your degree through your fifth year and then you said you want to get an internship or a job

over here. Is there anywhere else in the world you've considered other than England? Or has it always been England?

S4: It has always been England, because I could have chosen anywhere in the world to do my one year. So that... I always knew I wanted to go to the UK. But I was also wondering if I have one year and know I'm already trying to get back to the UK at some point, wouldn't it be more beneficial to try to improve my German for instance or to go to some faraway place like Wellington or the US. I've already been twice in the United States for holidays and I already had the feeling that that was not a place I'd like to live for a year. Tourism is not exactly the same as actually living in a place and yeah, well. I was also thinking of Japan because I'm taking up on the language as well and that was not the same attraction. I can't really explain why England. I'm really interested in the politics, the literature, the music, and uh somehow I just feel like I've been born in the wrong country. That's kind of... that all started... It's really stupid but you know, when I was a kid with all those Harry Potter books and being French you had to wait for the translation. And that was no way. So that's when at 11 I just started studying English all the time and I was doing on the computer just reading stuff 40 hours a week. And then I got interested in so much things at the time because that was in English so you get in to the culture. And with either movies, TV shows, or the books and that that everything was British and so that really kind of fashioned the way I was thinking about things. Maybe I would have started with something American I would have been that way with American culture but I always felt more connected to England in a way. So, I don't know even just the weather I don't mind. I don't like when it's too sunny. Honestly, I thought it'd be raining much more than. You always expect something worse than that and that did not put me off at all. Or I don't know even the humour of everything.

I: Ok, you said being a tourist is different than living somewhere. And with your Erasmus year, have you felt more 'tourist' or more like you've actually 'lived' here?

S4: Uh, that's really a bit in-between. Because you know you're here temporarily so that's. You can either see it as staying as in living in for a year or as a whole traveling year. I tried to really have a bit of both because I know that's definitely not the way I would have behaved if I had been just staying France, because I don't travel that much. Studies were a bit second this year. Usually it's not. So the priorities were different. You want to make the most of it. So yeah I'd definitely say in-between. Because you're here, you're living, you see what things happen, you can connect with the people. You can't just do that when you're just there for tourism. I've been, for instance, I had a cycling trip. So I just went with a friend, we took a, I rented a bike and we went for five days just cycling around and camping. Ok, that was in March so and though the snow we were just freezing half to death but that was that was amazing and I really met some English people because we asked if we could camp in their gardens. So they were kind of surprised but you could. They were surprised so you could talk to them and interact and well I... That, that's not the kind of things you just do with tourism and yet every weekend I was going either to London or discovering some other city like tourists will do. So a bit of both. That's the fact that you think you're here for just a year. You know that your days are counted. Uh, if I were to stay here for an unknown amount of time, I probably would not have rushed to do all those things. Because you also have, you always think you've got time to do it later. So that's really changing. And I know that if I don't pass my year here I still can get back to my home university. They'll just give me extra work and so you have no pressure. That's really not the same. And well I loved my courses so the aim was not to fail but you don't even have the incentive of passing your year to actually get yourself to work. You do it because you like what you do and well that's really a different way of tackling things.

I: It sounds really good. With your friend that you went cycling with, was that a friend from where you live or where you're living right now or from archery? Where are most of your friends from?

S4: We were just two. Actually that was a French guy as well but I didn't know him before coming here and that was because he is really used to doing that. He'd been cycling across Europe with just a bike and doing that the whole summer he wants to do a world trip like that so I, he knew what he was doing and so that's why I went with him. I met him through my friends because my Italian flatmate had all these bunch of friends they invited me to come over to Liverpool instead of going on my own. They said, 'just come'. Then I saw them. They were ok. Then I saw them again at all the Give-It-A-Go's and then they started doing this chicken rice on Friday so they went to the mosque and when they were getting back they were taking food for everyone and we started from five people to around thirty in the common room every Friday. We even have a card that's not a registered society and that's where I met all these other people and the French guy that I went cycling with. I do things with different people. Usually I stick to the five friends that I've got from there and we do lot of stuff together but.

I: So you're an informal chicken and rice Friday society?

S4: Yeah

I: Sounds good

S4: They wanted to set up a karaoke society but they had to have members before they had the whatever so it turned out to be that instead. Whee! We had quite a lot of people coming.

I: Sounds great to me! So I think I might already know the answer to this but would you recommend studying abroad to other people?

S4: Yeah, of course.

I: Ok, um I think that's all I can really ask. Can you verify for me your date of birth? Just so I can connect it to the survey.

S4: [DOB]

Additional notes:

After microphone was shut off, discussion continued.

Subject mentioned the one disappointment she had with her experience was not meeting or interacting with loads of British people. She knew mainly other international students but from all over the world.

Subject also mentioned the period of adjustment. During 1st semester/term, she focused on her studies whereas in 2nd semester/term she "got out, did more, and met more people." Said it might just be her personality.