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The Transition of International Sub-Saharan African Students into the UK University system with reference to a University in the North of England

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Abstract

The study seeks to examine the transition of international Sub-Saharan African students joining a UK University situated in the North of England.

This research study examines the existing literature on the transition of international students into higher education; the factors that influence universities in recruiting international students; the motives of students to study in the UK; the issues prospective international Sub-Saharan African students experience in the process; and the support mechanisms universities have in place.

Using interviews as the primary research method, an empirical inquiry has enabled the researcher to explore areas of transition where no substantive theory existed. The interviews were conducted with international Sub-Saharan African students who were new to the country and had been in the University for only six weeks. The interviews covered the international Sub-Saharan African students' background, their decision to study in the UK and their transitional experiences. The research enquiry found that the majority of respondents in the study were first generations pursuing higher education outside their country of origin.

Generally, the international Sub-Saharan African students in this study agreed that their previous upbringing and educational experiences had impacted on their studies. In retrospect, the decision to come to study in the UK was influenced by their parents, the prestige of obtaining a UK degree, enhancing future prospects and assisting the families in their own countries. The international Sub-Saharan African students encountered a catalogue of problems which had a great impact on their transitions to a UK university. In the name of "education" and a UK qualification, the international African students were prepared to endure difficulties. Such findings regarding these included: limited support during the transition process, in particular prior to the student arriving in the UK, and also upon arriving at a UK airport, but prior to arriving at the University. Induction programmes are conducted generally in academic institutions, but this research shows they are not targeted at meeting the

needs of international African students. Prior learning of international students is not considered. There was also inadequate support for students arriving at the University after the induction process. This research explains perceptions the international Sub-Saharan African students held about their transitional experiences, and personal strategies they deployed in order to cope with their new environment.

Whilst the results of the inquiry are in agreement with much of the current literature about international students, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on transition and provides a number of recommendations to the University in order to help improve its transitional processes for international Sub-Saharan African students.

Acknowledgements

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ACRONYMS

ASIS	Applicant Student Information System
AST	Assured Shorthold Tenancies
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CoP	Communities of Practice
DFSE	Department for Education and Skills
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
GNP	Gross National Product
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistic Agency
IELTS	International English Language Testing Systems
ISSAS	International Sub-Saharan African Students
IT	Information Technology
NSS	National Student Survey
OECD	Organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMI	Prime Minister's Initiative
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UK	United Kingdom
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Control
UKCISA	United Kingdom Council for Student Affairs
UKHEIs	United Kingdom Higher Education Institutions
USA	Unites States of America
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

Chapter One

1.1   Introduction

The fundamental purpose of this research is to investigate the transition of international Sub-Saharan African students into the United Kingdom Higher Education system with reference to a University located in the North of England. The study highlights the transitional processes experienced by selected African students when they come to the United Kingdom (UK) to obtain "prestigious" Higher Education qualifications. This study intends to research the experiences of international Sub-Saharan African students with consideration of their entire transitional journey, rather than assuming transition begins on their first day on campus. To achieve this, differing theoretical frameworks will be referenced to explain the underlying issues international African students from Sub-Sahara encounter in their transition. In this research, the term "International Sub-Saharan African students" will be referred to as ISSAS in order to differentiate them from other international students. References often denote international students as a homogenous group (Hyland et al., 2008), but such categorisation encourages generalisation, creating an inaccurate, inappropriate and insensitive summation of individual international students' needs and experiences (Andrade, 2006). The hypothesis that underpins this research is that the transitional experiences of ISSAS are complex, individual and influenced by a range of personal, national and UK University factors. Investigating the experiences of a sample group of ISSAS in a University in the North of England will reveal whether, and to what extent, they are in fact a homogenous group in terms of their transition.

This chapter provides an introduction to the contents of this study and therefore commences by explaining the reasons for undertaking this project, justified with the parameters within which the research was carried out. Following a brief overview of the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) context, the research questions establish the purpose of this investigation into the transition process of ISSAS.

1.2   Rationale

Embarking on this project to study ISSAS transition into the United Kingdom Higher Education (UKHE) system is partially motivated by personal reasons, as the researcher was born and raised in one of the SSA countries. In view of previously undertaking studies in a SSA country, he has a wide knowledge of the various SSA educational systems. Due to poor institutional infrastructure and facilities, it was necessary for him to leave Africa and to progress to higher educational study in a UK university. This has left long lasting memories. Despite his educational advancement both as an international student and now as a British citizen, from a personal view it became apparent that ISSAS experience different transitional challenges due to their educational backgrounds, cultures and personal circumstances. Motivated by his own long and painful educational journey as an ISSAS, the researcher had an initial understanding of the difficulties of being "different"; of being both black and foreign in a wider society. But these are personal experiences, whereas this study will investigate transition issues more objectively, ensuring that personal standpoints remain unobtrusive to the findings of this research. Having gone through the transition process as a student, the researcher set out to identify and understand the presenting issues ISSAS encounter in transition. What factors influence the adjustment of ISSAS to studying and living in the UK? What coping mechanisms do

they develop? Do University systems meet the needs of ISSAS during their transition period? Published statistics indicate the number of ISSAS has increased (HESA, 2006, Andalo, 2008), thus necessitating the need to investigate the impact of social, cultural and academic factors on their transition process. It is hypothesised in this research that ISSAS are a unique case because their diverse cultural traditions, including collectivism are still imbedded in them and are relevant during their transition. Such context may have distinctive implications for ISSAS transition. By choosing the ISSAS pursuing Higher Education (HE) in one particular UK University, the findings of the research will shed light on answers to the above questions.

1.3   Sub-Saharan Africa in context

This study seeks to refine the sample and examines specifically the transition process of ISSAS studying at a UK University which will be called Greenside University for the purpose of protecting confidentiality. Although the focus of the study highlights the ISSAS, Africa is a large continent with 53 countries and a total population of over 700 million, 50 percent of whom are under 20 (Maringe & Carter, 2007).

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has a colonial legacy of historical events which continue to have a large impact on political, economic, social and cultural developments in the region (Boahen, 1987 & Khapoya, 1998). SSA is considered to comprise of six distinct regions: Sudanese-Sehal, Island of Indian Oceans, East, West, Central and Southern Africa (Lelo & Makenzi, 2000). The current boundaries of SSA countries are a legacy of western colonial rule (Britannica, 2007) which still wields significant power and influence in the region. Khapoya (1998) adds that boundaries were drawn by the colonial powers with no regard for, or recognition of ethnicity and tribal ties.

The intervention of the colonial masters brought about social, political and economic reengineering that distorted the heritage and momentum of indigenous peoples. The untimely changes imposed cultural dichotomies which were detrimental to the native inhabitants of Africa (Jarret, 1996). Césaire (2004, p.43) argues that: "societies were drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extra ordinary possibilities wiped out".

The demarcation of Africa by the Western countries led also to the abandonment of the native's traditional languages in pursuit of the enforced colonial languages. In this context, the findings of Maringe & Carter (2007) suggest that ISSAS tend to follow the roots of their colonisers because of their derived cultural capital, including shared language. On the basis of this, one would assume that the Western culture which was imposed on Africa could make the transition process less problematic but findings show this to be contrary (Boaduo, 2008). The imposed culture and language appear to be less helpful for ISSAS when they make the transition to the UKHEIs, in fact it can be irrelevant or an obstacle (Furnham, 1997; Held et al., 1999).

1.4   International Students Perspectives

Existing evidence suggests that the ISSAS generally experience more difficulty than other international students in American universities (Adelegan & Parks, 1985) and in the UKHEIs (Li & Kaye, 1998; Bartoli et al., 2008), but these issues particularly in the UK, have remained under-researched (Naidoo, 2007). There are great challenges for ISSAS emanating from their past and present which this study seeks to explore in great depth. It presents issues and evidence that relate specifically to the

experiences of the ISSAS transition, with regard to how their past and present may affect their transition and expected academic/life trajectory. In light of these issues, this research reflects on an hypothesis that the transition of ISSAS is long and deep and under-estimated by UK Universities.

1.5 Research questions

The following questions will form the focus of the study and aid analysis of whether or not the above hypothesis is supported by evidence drawn from this study.

1-   To what extent does the background of the International Sub-Saharan African students' impact on their transition to studying in a UK University?

   a. Are there common academic and living experiences of ISSAS that are distinctly different to those in the UK and which affect their transition?
   b. Are ISSAS a unique or distinct group within the international student category?
   c. How do the current concepts and theories of transition relate to ISSAS?

2-   What are the main factors that influence the decisions for the International Sub-Saharan African students to study in the UK?

   a. What are the academic, social, and economic factors influencing ISSAS to come and study in the UK?
   b. Why do ISSAS have a desire to study in a UK University?
   c. What are the short term goals for ISSAS?

3-   What problems may International Sub-Saharan African students encounter during the transition of studying/living in the UK?

   a. What transitional challenges do ISSAS face?

b. Are the university support systems adequate for supporting ISSAS to transition successfully to UK study/living?

c. What 'coping strategies' do ISSAS develop to deal with the transitional issues?

1.6   Summary

This chapter has focused on the hypothesis and questions the research is addressing. The need to recruit international students to boost university revenues is very much emphasised, and UKHEIs, like any other universities worldwide, are competing to recruit such students. A critical issue in this competitive market is a University's understanding of the international educational market and the major challenges faced by international students. This chapter has opened up areas which will inform the next chapters with regard to transition. As the research inquiry seeks to become aware of the current state of knowledge in this area, the next chapter will undertake a review of relevant literature.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

Much research has been conducted in recent years on the issues of international students and in particular their first year students in higher education. Such research is valuable and gives a general account of the international students' experiences in a foreign country. This review aims to provide an academic literary overview of relevant texts whilst examining and analysing the extent to which they provide evidence of factors that have influenced the international students' transitional process. Definitions of different terminologies that seem to be subtle and complex will be identified and discussed in order to provide an agreed position and scope for the investigation. In addition, this chapter will incorporate theoretical perspectives that will underpin this study.

2.2   The landscape of change and transition

Writing about the experience of the international students in the UK is not a new phenomenon as discussion of the salient issues has been going on for decades. As early as 1956, Carey (1956) wrote a book entitled *Colonial Students* which focused on how different groups got used to living and study in Britain. He believed that colonial students, specifically Asians and Africans, had unrealistic expectations about how quickly they could adjust to UK norms (Carey, 1956). Tajfel & Dawson (1965) organised an essay competition in order to gain an understanding of the concerns of the African, Asian and West Indies students about their reaction to Britain which were published in their book, *Disappointed Guests.* The students'

experiences indicated how the British were unfriendly, patronising, superior and ignorant about their countries of origin. Thus, exploring the international student experience is not new, but expanded recruitment to UKHEIs in the 21st century has led to a keener focus on the transition experience of such students.

There is broad agreement that students' transition into university life is not straightforward. Recent literature focuses exclusively on the students' transition within the context of the "first years' experience" (Ramsay et al., 1999; McInnis, 2001; Yorke & Longden, 2006; Sovic, 2008; Ninnes & Hellstén, 2005 and Bamford, 2006). There is a consensus that transition into higher education is very difficult for some students. Tobbell (2006) argues that transition is a process of change which human beings experience in their lifetime. For some students, the initial change from their previous educational institutions into the UK university are more substantive than others, and some transitions require considerable adjustments.

Within the literature, the terms "change" and "transition" are often used interchangeably. For the general purpose of this research, it is important to make a distinction between both terms which are different, but dynamically-linked concepts. Change can occur voluntarily or involuntarily; self-imposed or imposed on us (Densmore, 2009). Nortier (1995, p.33) describes "change as: a process which, in all cases, is first of all external to the individuals who are going to undergo it. It involves specific alterations structural, economic, technological and political".

Lewin's (1952) model for change provides examples to support approaches to change and transition. The model comprises three phases: firstly, "Unfreezing", which involves challenging the existing culture and behaviour that creates a need for

change and doing things differently; secondly, "Changing", which is a period of confusion culminating in new ways of doing things; and finally, "Refreezing", which involves making changes sustainable as well as implementing new concepts and ideas. In terms of international students, this model plays a significant role in exploring the changes and considers the salient issues associated with studying in a foreign country. For example, upon arrival the international students are faced with a culture totally different from their own, hence they could experience both "unfreezing" and "changing" phases as part of their attempt to adjust to the new culture and environment. The last phase, "Refreezing", may explain the process international students go through in their attempt to survive the transitional challenges.

Nortier (1995) argues that transition is about the experience individuals have in the here and now, and not what they are seeking for tomorrow. It echoes the question: where am I? It takes into consideration what is going on in the person's "guts" (Nortier, 1995, p.35). Nortier, 1995, p.38) further asserts that: "our experience has taught us that transition, whatever it may be, is a process internal to the individual, slow and progressive, not demarcated in time and directly related to what the individual is living through".

Bridges (1991) postulates that transition as an internal and less visible process in contrast to change which is external and visible. He further claims that transition can be periods of growth, a process one goes through mentally when faced with a big psychological change. It is not a passive phase but an active and interactive process

in which the transitional individuals play a greater role in the process by accepting responsibility.

The notion of change as being external while transition is internal is also echoed by Bridges (2003). He contends that "there can be a number of changes, but unless there are transitions, nothing will be different when the dust is clear" (ibid, p.5). This is echoed by Heathcote & Taylor (2007) who point out that change occurs only when individuals are drawn in the internal psychological adjustments i.e. the transition. Similarly, for the transition to exist, the individual has to psychologically experience it or else it is not a transition but instead a change (Schlossberg et al. 1995). According to Bridges (2003), transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation; a process by which people "unplug" from an old world and "plug" into a new world (ibid). In this respect, transition starts with the ending and finishes with the beginning. That is, the failure to identify and get ready for endings and losses is the largest difficulty people encounter in any transition. Using the analogy to emphasise the process of transition, Bridges (2003, p.5) states that "when change happens without people going through transition, it is just a re-arrangement of the chairs". In this respect, life is still basically the same, just re-ordered rather than changed. Therefore, transition is inevitable for meaningful change to take place, however its impact on international students may vary according to the presenting circumstances they find themselves in.

Bridges (2003), whose arguments on managing transition have been widely adopted, tries to characterise transition in three dynamic phases. He argues that transition starts with endings which require the individual to let go of the old situation and identity. That is made more difficult because of accepting the risk of losing the

personal and professional identity which went with it. He argues that individuals need help to deal with the changes caused by the loss of all those old familiar life events in order to embrace the new ones. It can be argued that one cannot live and study abroad without being challenged to reconsider the social system and values one has known up with until then. Based on the idea from Bridges (2003), for example, that of letting go of at least some of the past such as their identities and roles, it can result in living in a neutral zone. This phase can be classified as a "no man's land" because it plunges the individual into a reality that is not empty of meaning, but that the meaning of is not in terms of a familiar framework, so it can cause confusion and crisis and cause some things to seem unreal. It is a period of psychological re-alignment and re-patterning of self and requires time (ibid). The term 'crisis' can be applied in this context, which reflects better the way in which the individual may experience a blurring of the distinction between past and present life events. Thirdly, is the stage where the individual makes a decision to embrace their new circumstances in the sense of acquiring new forms of behaviours, new skills, a new way of thinking and establishing contact with new individuals.

Transition is a natural part of an individual's change process and lies between the past and anticipated future. Schlossberg et al. (1995, p.27) describe transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles". They emphasise the need to comprehend the significance of the individual's attitudes to transition through consideration of the type, context and impact of transition. Furthermore, they conceptualise transition as a process which consists of the individual's experience of "moving out" which involves the experience of emotional feelings of grief; "moving in" a new situation and familiarising

themselves with the new rules, regulations, norms and systems; and "moving through", a process of survival (ibid). Some commentators, such as Evans et al. (1998), agree with Schlossberg's view on emotional feelings and conclude that the positive and negative experiences during the stages of transition can result in stress for the individual.

Schlossberg (1984) attempts to provide an insight into the fundamental factors related to transition for example, the individual and their environment. She points out three types of transitions that the individual might experience: anticipated transitions which occur predictably; unanticipated transitions, which are not predictable and non-event transitions which are expected but for various reasons do not occur. It is noted that a process of transition does not occur as a single moment but extends over a longer period of time (Rice & Dolgin, 2002). In this case, time is needed to achieve a successful transition. Burke et al. (1992, p.157) argue that the "concept of transition implies that individuals are in a process of movement from one situation to another". But, in retrospect, it may not guarantee successful transition unless the changes and adjustments are made and individuals unplug and adjust to the new environment.

In her empirical study with mature students returning to education, Schlossberg (1984) found that people in transition often feel marginalised and less important. She contended unequivocally that:

> *every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition the potential for feeling marginal arises. The larger the difference between the former role and the new role, the more marginal the person may feel especially if there are no norms for the new roles* (p.7).

2.3   Traditional rites of passage

The concept that underlines the dynamic nature of a transition is the traditional rites of passage. In an African context, tribes offer rituals and rites of passage to mark the end of puberty and rely heavily upon customs and examples as the main educational agents (Rasing, 1996). In some African extremist tribes, rites of passage include: some alterations to the body, for example, circumcision, removal of teeth, tattooing and sacrifice and dressing of hair (ibid). Delaney (1995) confirms that the lifetime pinnacle in the African context is the ceremonial event that marks the passage of an individual from childhood to adulthood; from one social or religious status to another.

In the African context, Mensah (1993, p.62) defines rites of passage as:

> *those structures, rituals, and ceremonies by which age-class members or individuals in a group successfully come to know who they are and what they are about, the purpose and meaning for their existence, as they proceed from one clearly defined state of existence to the next state of passage in their lives.*

Determining what are perceived as traditional rites of passage for Africans is complex, but it marks the beginning of a new life and a process that is not meant to be taken lightly. Africans consider this passage as an event that has to be celebrated as part of a ritual. Van Gennep (1960) explains how rituals and rites in a diverse culture are connected with the biological stages of life: birth, maturity, reproduction and death. He believes that individuals have to go through this process of initiation into special societies or groups.

Some theorists have identified the model of "rite of passage" to explain the process of transition. Hopson & Adams (1976) describe the common characteristics of transitions as passing through particular stages which seem intense and lengthy depending on the circumstances of the person. Examining the concept of the "neutral zone", Bridges (1983) alludes to the rites of passage practiced by certain cultures in which individuals must isolate and commune with themselves in order to reach adulthood, find meaning for their life or live through bereavement. In her review of the rites of passage in adolescence, Delaney (1995) identifies four significant elements that imply a rite of passage, namely a separation from society, preparation or instruction from an elder, a transition from childhood to adulthood and a welcome back into society after the rite of passage ceremony.

Research investigating student transitions has turned to the work of Van Gennep (1960), and his study of the rites of passage in tribal societies. This Dutch anthropologist was very much concerned with movements of people and societies as well as the "life crises" people and groups experienced during the course of their lifetime. In his view, life comprised of a series of passages; from birth to death or from membership in one group to another. He noted that the movement of individuals was necessary and as individuals moved from one phase to the other, either temporarily or permanently, certain rites of passage were celebrated or marked with significant events (Metz, 2002). Seeking to optimise the mode of rite of passage, Van Gennep (1960) identified three categories: separation, transition and incorporation as having a similar structure to the process of transition. Likewise, Warfield-Coppock (1992) points out three major phases parallel to rites of passage:

separation, indoctrination and reincorporation as the common trends for successful African-centred rites of passage.

In trying to draw parallels between the rites of passages stages and transition when studying abroad, the notion of separation, transition and incorporation as identified by Van Gennep (1960) are considered. The exploration of these three phases opens the door to the understanding of the issues experienced by ISSAS.

2.3.1 Separation

In an attempt to understand the experience of separation, it is important to first understand the basics of separation. According to Van Gennep (1960) separation requires individuals to dissociate themselves in varying degrees from community membership of the past, such as the family, previous college friends and the village. He refers to the old self and community status being erased in preparation for the new one. Such description of this stage marks a process where students dissociate themselves from communities of their past (the family, the village, colleagues, jobs) to become a part of the new university community (Fisher 1990). Separation in this context can imply a temporal rejection of families and local values in order to adopt new values which seem dissimilar to the past; a fundamental shift in the way individuals construct their daily lives (Tinto, 1987).

With regard to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially African international students, it must be noted many will be separating from their families, friends and country for the first time. Tinto (1987, p.97) argues that: "foreign students, students from very small rural communities, and students from distinct

social, ethnic, or religious communities may also find separation particularly difficult".

2.3.2 Transition

Transition represents a major part in the individual's life and has become increasingly important as people move from one stage of life to another. One of the reasons why it is so important is that the individual has to let go of the old ways and behaviours one has clung to, and learn new ways which are appropriate to the new environment (Van Gennep, 1960; Bridges, 2003). This can be a time of discomfort for individuals where the gap between what they know and what they need to acquire is sometimes perceived as almost too great to adapt to. Tinto (1997) unravels this by arguing that the process of transition from the past can be applied to new students from a different social context who have yet to acquire the norms, values and patterns of behaviour appropriate to incorporate themselves into the new community. Human beings are creatures of routines and their social life is embedded in an environment that is intimately familiar and local. To new students, including ISSAS, their integration into a new community such as a UK university can be a difficult time and their past experience may not equip them with the necessary means of being incorporated into their new academic community. Tinto (1987, p.9) states that:

> *individuals who come from families, communities, and schools whose norms and behaviours are very different from those of the communities of the college (university) into which entry is made, face especially difficult problems in seeking to achieve competent membership in the new communities.*

With regard to ISSAS, the majority will come from countries that are dissimilar in values, norms and attitudes to living and studying in the UK so their previous learning experiences will be challenged. Such students may, therefore, experience transition to the new way of life as requiring them to unlearn past practices and learn new ones, rather than building upon and utilising their past experiences. Being able to make use of past experiences and to develop existing knowledge would have made the ISSAS transition more easily negotiated and adaptable to the challenges of living and learning in a foreign country.

2.3.3   Incorporation

According to Tinto (1987), the individual has to negotiate and re-negotiate the stages of separation and transition before the final phase of incorporation. The first two stages occur very early in the international student's life after they arrive in the UK. What the student is faced with is the challenge of incorporation into the university (ibid) and the additional task of becoming integrated in a wider community (Van Gennep, 1960). He further argues that those in universities are rarely provided with relevant rituals and ceremonies that deal with integration and form part of their rite of passage to the next stage of their life. Tinto (1987) comments that although some institutions have a fresher's orientation programme at the beginning of the year, most new students are subsequently left to make their way through the maze of institutional life. In his view, not all new students end up being incorporated into the life of the new institution. Therefore, the different phases in the rites of passage i.e. separation, transition and incorporation are also important for international students. This provides challenges for universities and requires them to set in place structures

and procedures which seem currently lacking in order to assist ISSAS in their transition process.

2.4   Transition to a new academic life and expectations

Although the literature here has focused on transition as a stage in the rites of passage, other academic writers limit their use of the term and refer instead to the transition stage as an adjustment to university life which consists of academic, personal and social factors. Sidoryn & Slade (2008) view transition as a critical phase which students experience in higher education, right from the initial entry into university to their final exit from the university. They argue that the manner in which the transition period is experienced is very individual, especially where the student attending university is from a different country. Hartman (1993), on the other hand, examines the pre-university period as being dynamic for any prospective student whilst providing an array of opportunities for post-secondary institutions to develop transition programmes for undergraduate students, whilst Lucas (1990) examines the extent to which higher education programmes provide adequate preparation for adjustment to university life. Yorke (1999) argues that transition from school to higher education requires preparation before it takes place. Rhodes et al. (2002) question whether the support available in HEIs enables a student's smooth transition from further to higher education. In accordance with the views of Yorke (1999) and Rhodes et al. (2002) regarding preparation for adjustment and support, ISSAS would also benefit from such a process which would ease their transition into their new environment.

Reay (2008) explores particular sociological and psychological processes that make mature students' transitions to HE problematic. She argues that within a cohort of mature students, there are bound to be individuals with differing priorities in terms of risk and meeting the challenges of fitting into HE. In the same vein, Childs & Spencer (2002) identify the significant factors that either assist or hinder transitions to HE and in developing a learner's autonomy. They argue that change in both academic and social areas is one of the factors that many students perceive as causing them anxiety and concern. Similarly, Mclnnis et al. (1995) point out that first-year students in HE face significant life changes such as living away from home, dealing with differing learning environments and learning to be independent.

In relation to ISSAS, they are mature, affected by social and academic change, living away from home and probably not familiar with autonomous learning. These unfamiliar practices and experiences are compounded and may disorient the respective students and impair their intellectual and behavioural functions. Therefore, services and support need to be provided to assist their transition towards incorporation into their new academic and domestic communities.

As noted, ISSAS face challenges in HEIs, it is necessary to examine the motives behind this drive to study abroad in order to understand why they are willing to persevere and face personal, social and academic challenges.

2.5   Motives for studying abroad

A further theoretical area which is noted in the literature is that of motives to study abroad and these can be linked to changes experienced. Motives to study abroad are external and in most cases the change is voluntary. If this is the case one might expect the students to be more prepared for transition as it is something they are choosing. They are making a decision to "unfreeze", "change" and "refreeze" their world in response to pull and push factors. On this basis, it may be assumed that a student's preparedness for the transition might be better as students are willingly undertaking the change. Such motivation to study abroad is sometimes coupled with enticement, persuasion or assurances from external bodies.

In its campaign to entice international students, the Prime Minister's Initiatives (PMI2) highlight to students around the world the benefits of a UK education. The education UK website and publications enable students to find out about their study options (McGovern, 2004). Universities work with overseas agencies to ensure that the benefits of Western education are promoted to potential students. Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) argue that the role of student recruitment agencies is to provide face to face communication about the potential benefits of Western academic courses and institutions. In this respect, the UK universities use agencies in students' home countries to provide more information about courses offered by individual universities and also to assist in the recruitment process. This has contributed to UK universities becoming commercial education entities which are meant to be profitable and value yielding. Such marketing of UKHEIs may overpower the agent's responsibility to provide information that could subsequently assist the students during their transition period.

Political or local instability in the international students' home countries are noted as some of the impediments to study in their own country (Boaduo, 2008). It is not uncommon for parents to send their children to study abroad with a notion of getting a better education or skills that are not easily obtained in the home country (Tiereny & Auerbach, 2005). Maringe & Carter (2007) present the decision to go abroad to study abroad as the result of missing opportunities back home and family disruptions in the home country, whilst Pritchard & Roberts (2006) argue that the reasons are: personal challenge; the need to acquire new skills with a view to promotion; to improve their qualifications; reaching a turning point in life and gaining a "passport" to a new and rewarding experience. McNamara & Harris (1997) list the driving factors to pursue courses in UK universities rather than anywhere else as: English Language, recognition of UK qualifications by governments and local companies, the standard and quality of education and the international reputation of a UK education.

The prestige to the individual and the family of gaining a qualification from a Western university is a motivating factor. Livingstone (1960) and Barker (1997) agree that among international students UK qualifications are valued by employers and affirm that in some countries of Asia and Africa the goal of attaining an overseas degree is something in the nature of an obsession. Livingstone (1960) argues that overseas training provides international students with the prestige and opportunity for more rapid promotion in their home countries. Sen (1970) comments that when the international students embark on academic studies in the UK they are under immense pressure, both inwardly and outwardly, to succeed because of the family's sacrifice and ambitions, personal needs, and to prove their academic ability and earn

national pride. This may have implications on the transition process of ISSAS as they are under pressure to be incorporated successfully into their new academic and social community.

Whatever the international student's motivational factors for studying in the UK, it is clear that they will be undoubtedly affected by financial factors. Rhodes (2006) argues that more ISSAS yearn to study abroad to the detriment of their financial situations and that this could be due to the expected benefits of a UK qualification. Nworah (2006) points out that some ISSAS may well be compelled to sell family property and borrow large sums of money from friends and relatives to fund their studies. With regard to the general overview of international students in the UKHEIs, Harris (1997, p.40) concurs that "most students are supported by their families by payment or loan, and on graduation are expected to provide similar help for younger brothers and sisters". This pressure may have adverse implications for ISSAS transition.

Numerous studies have used a combination of push and pull factors to indicate the fundamental decision to undertake international study (McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Maringe & Carter, 2007). Li & Bray (2007, p. 793) perceive the push and pull factors as:

> *external forces which impact on actors' behaviours and choices, but much depends on the personal characteristics of the actors. These characteristics include socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age motivation and aspiration. While some individuals choose to respond to push and pull forces, others do not.*

Altbach et al. (1985) use the pull and push factors to identify the key variables that affect foreign students' decisions to study abroad.

Table 1 Push and Pull Factors of International students

Key variables pertaining to the home country (Push Factor)	Key variables pertaining to the host country (Pull Factor)
1- Availability of funding and bursaries scholarship for study abroad 2- Lack of quality educational and research facilities 3- Competition for local university places and failure to get admission to local institutions 4- Reluctance of parents to provide financial assistance 5- Enhanced value of foreign degree 6- Discrimination against minorities 7- Political instability	1- Availability of funding and bursaries for international students 2- Good quality education and advanced research facilities 3- Alternative universities likely to offer admissions 4- Presence of relative willing to provide financial assistance 5- Opportunity for general international life experience 6- Educational opportunities for all 7- Stable political and economical situation

Adapted from (Altbach et al. 1985, p.11)

Altbach et al. (1985) confirm that the foreign students' motivation is difficult to comprehend. An application of pull and push factors will differ greatly among the international students. Thus, the key variables are condensed into three motivating forces for foreign students: politics, economics and a desire for knowledge. This indicates the possibility of a more challenging transition as the choice to study abroad for international students is not straightforward (ibid).

Beaver & Tuck (1998) identified four major motivational factors for international students leaving their home country to study at New Zealand universities, namely: strong ambition to obtain a specific professional credential; desire to gain citizenship; competence in English language and social integration with business and local people. Allen & Higgins's (1994) study of 84 UKHEIs deduced that motives to study in UK universities involved three main reasons: academic reputation, course content and entry requirements. Pimpa (2003, p.179) points out that:

> *of the many factors influencing students' desire to study abroad the most commonly cited are the ability of international education to raise economic and social status of graduates, limited access to education in home countries, and the perception of quality of education in home or host countries.*

While the quality of teaching and other academic activities pursued in the UK universities are thought to be superior, other factors motivating international students are numerous. Studying abroad can be one of the most exhilarating and rewarding experiences of an individual's life. It provides a structured, focused approach to identifying and acquiring new ideas, offers opportunities to meet new people, enables the exploration of new cultures and landscapes and can lead to life-long friendships and relationships. However, studying in a foreign country can be a two-edged sword penetrating the international students' transitional experiences which require separation, incorporation (Van Gennep, 1960) refreezing, unfreezing (Lewin, 1952) and psychological re-alignment (Bridges, 2003). Such experiences in a foreign country can leave powerful negative impressions on students that could last all their life time. Furthermore, Arthur (2003, p.18) says: *"*unrealistic academic expectations combined with difficulties coping with academic loads and differences in instructional practices can be the basis of severe stressors for international students*"*.

Making the transition is more challenging when it is coupled with unrealistic expectations that have been raised in academic, cultural and social aspects. The implications of such unrealistic expectations, which can impede the international students' transition, can also be perpetrated in the challenges faced prior and after arrival at the University.

2.6   Challenges faced by international students prior to arrival

2.6.1   Recruitment and selection of international students

UK universities have invested highly in the recruitment of foreign students. Barron (2005) argues that most Western universities now have a designated international department responsible for marketing and recruitment of foreign students. Methods used to entice foreign students to UK universities include brochures, word of mouth, road shows and related events (Nworah, 2006). Universities are becoming more sophisticated and are now using flash websites as a marketing tool and local agencies and representatives (ibid). Harris (1997, p.41) believes that some universities are using "patronising platitudes in glossy brochures and flyer papers in their attempts to woo overseas students in particular".

This may have implications for ISSAS as they may establish positive perceptions about UK universities without considering their own economic, financial and social anchors; thus possibly overlooking profound problems of transition and challenges from living and learning in a new country.

The urge to increase the number of foreign students in UKHE has resulted in both positive and negative constructions of international students' recruitment processes. In her conference proceedings on *'the Stranger' the 'Sojourner' and the international student'* Coates (2004, p.1) extracts a discourse of 'internationalisation

of HE' and cites the following evidence to justify her argument of why international students are so desirable to British universities because they:

- provide a means of revenue for HE strongly related to commercialism (Devos, 2003, Habu, 2000; Greenaway and Tuck, 1997);

- are cultural mediators who have the potential to enrich their fellow students' experiences (University of Salford, 2003; Habu, 2000);

- are considered as potential employees in a global economy (University of Salford, 2003; Habu, 2000).

Globally, the number of international students in the HE has grown steadily. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the organisation responsible for UK international student data collection, there were 340,500 international students in 2001/02 (including EU and Non-EU students) in UKHE. In 2003/4, UK HE admitted 213,000 international students and 114,000 students from other EU countries. In terms of the more recent intake of international students, there has been a general upward trend reflecting increased enrolment of ISSAS in the UK universities. For example, UKHEIs have seen a steady increase of ISSAS from Nigeria.

Table 2. Growth of International students

Year	Total Number of International students	Place of Origin (Africa-Nigeria)	Percent of Total
2007-08	389,330	12,680	3.3.%
2008-09	415,585	15,105	3.6%
2009-10	455,600	17,750	3.9%

Adapted from (International Students in UK, 2010)

Such more recent increased influxes of international students could have further implications on the transition process of ISSAS in that the focus of the universities may be on increasing the number of students and the acquisition of revenue rather than ensuring that there are effective structures and procedures in place to cater for their smooth transition. In this regard, therefore, universities who see international students as "cash cows" could be doing so at their own peril (Peterson et al., 1999).

The desire of international students to study in the UK often comes from former students. Sen (1970) argues that some international students rely on information given by returned students. What is remarked upon by several researchers is that international student returnees do not give an accurate image about their overall experiences in the UK universities. Russell (2005, p.68) states that "there is always the possibility that dissatisfied customers will praise an institution following completion of their studies in order not to lose face among colleagues". They may perceive it as a weakness. As a contribution to their UK experiences, international students claim that life in the UK is a mixture of excitement, strangeness, apprehensiveness and challenging freedom (UKCISA, 2008). Academic and social difficulties encountered whilst studying in the UK do not normally form part of the students' feedback. Instead, positive images raise high hopes and expectations for all those international applicants who aspire to obtain qualifications in a UK University. This can raise further implications for transition if the ISSAS find that the positive information they received about UKHEIs prior to coming is plainly contrary to their experience.

International students also rely on information displayed on the internet and whatever is posted to them by universities. Harris (1997, p.37-38) comments that: "UK universities' experience tension between promoting themselves attractively and giving honest information to prospective students". Some universities fail to state clearly in their brochures the hidden costs such as language tuition, vacation accommodation and types of accommodation, climate, clothing, cost of living and methods of payment (ibid). Without enough information given to students prior to arrival, international students find the transition very difficult.

Consequently, international students can experience a deficit in recruitment knowledge. They are less informed about the courses and the difficulties of courses at British universities and colleges (Sen, 1970). Some underestimate the demands of the British degree. UK universities too find themselves in a dire situation for not being able to interview international students before being admitted. The qualifications provided on the application forms seem to be the only evidence universities use to admit international students. It appears that UK universities take for it for granted that the prior learning of international students, together with their International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, indicates a readiness for Western education.

The general consensus for universities is that international students whose first language is not English are expected to undertake one of these two popular international tests of English, namely: IELTS or TOEFL. The minimum English language requirements are usually: IELTS test score of 6.0 or Paper TOEFL score of 550 or internet TOEFL score of 220. In their investigation of the

internationalisation experiences of academic staff, home and international students in UKHE, Hyland et al. (2008), indicate participants' concerns about the entry requirements for non first language English speakers. Hyland et al. (2008, p.12), criticise "the entry requirements on non-English language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL are too low, resulting in students being admitted with inadequate language skills". This may be detrimental to the whole process of learning as ISSAS may not be fully prepared or well conversant with the English language which further impacts on their academic transition processes.

Despite such doubts, passing language tests and securing a full time place in a Western university are not panaceas for visa challenges. Applicants seeking to undertake studies in western universities are expected to apply for a student visa from major British Embassies and High Commission based in the applicant's country.

2.6.2 Visa challenge

To be granted a student visa, applicants must prove to the embassy that they have enough funds to pay the university fees as well as their upkeep (food, accommodation and transport). In addition, the visa-issuing officer has to be convinced that the applicant is the "real person" through one-to-one interview and checking of passport photos. The embassies want to be reassured that the applicant has a genuine reason to enter the country and will return to their country after completion of their course. The decision to grant or reject a student's visa application may be based on the personal judgement of the individual visa officer. Such individual decisions can easily lead to discrimination of genuine applicants.

International student applicants are often confronted with pre-transitional issues such as completing and financing a visa application form, visa interview(s) or counselling, facing the anxiety of being turned down and not obtaining a student visa (Butcher, 2002). Visa processing is not only arduous but also requires a non-refundable fee. Principle reasons given for turning down students' visa applications include: supplying photocopied supporting documents rather than originals; insufficient funds; poor academic records; inadequate evidence to show stable family/financial background; counterfeit visa documents; and a generally unfavourable impression given to the consular officials (Lipset, 2009). Sidy (2007) confirms that visa-denials for African applicants seeking to study in Western universities are a common occurrence. She offers two common reasons why African students are denied visas more than students from other developing nations; a lack of finances and intent to migrate. She points out that African applicants from countries such as Nigeria and Ghana can rarely get student visas. However, Sidy (2007) offers no solid evidence to support her argument.

International students who are granted visas then experience a shock as they read the visa certificate stamped in their passports:

> *Leave to enter the United Kingdom on condition that the holder maintains and accommodates himself and any dependants without recourse to public funds and does not enter or change employment paid or unpaid without the consent of the Secretary of State for Employment, and does not engage in any business or profession without the consent of the Secretary of State for the Home Department is hereby given until...................... on behalf of the Secretary of State of Home Office.* (Extract from Zimbabwean's passport, 2009).

Although there could be a general assumption by universities and the government that the international students are financially equipped (Butcher & McGrath, 2004), the reality may be different for ISSAS as there may be a variety of full fee payers. ISSAS would normally want to work to support themselves, but the visa is prohibitive as it constrains them from engaging in activities that may ease financial pressures and assist the transition process.

2.7   Challenges faced by international students after arrival

The international students' journey from home to host country is full of twists and turns. Students are no exception when it comes to scrutiny in their home country's migration office. Students are expected to show a valid passport, student visa, evidence of admission letter from the University, accommodation and sponsorship. Failure to show such documents can lead to refusal or delay to board their flight.

It is now requirement for international travellers to complete an immigration entry form shortly before landing in the host country. Negative experiences of international students on arrival are a major concern. It is noted that international students have to undergo an immigration interview after they arrive at the airport which consists of students' eligibility to self- funding, accommodation, duration of the course and at times a medical check-up for tuberculosis. Although the attendance at such interviews may benefit the UK border control in terms of limiting the number of immigrants entering the UK, this may not be the case for international students as it might not benefit them in their transition. The immigration interview can be daunting, especially for those new international students who lack confidence in

technical language communication as the IELTS or TOEFL do not prepare them for such excessive lengths of interrogation.

The experience of arriving in a new country is significant, especially if there is someone waiting for the individual's arrival. Most UK universities have coordinated arrangements to meet the international students either at the airport or train station (UKCISA, 2010). Furthermore, most universities claim to offer clear instructions on how to proceed when the international students arrive at the port of entry or train station, but such arrangements seem to work well only when the students arrive at the scheduled time and day. However, for those international students who arrive late because of the difficulties encountered in their own countries such as visa delays, flight delays, cancellations and/or delays at the border control, it may be a daunting experience which affects their transition.

2.7.1 Adjustment

The idea of adjustment is not a new phenomenon that affects students' transition to higher education. It happens wherever a person experiences a change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). All students, to varying degrees are human beings in transition (Thomas & Althen, 1989) and their experiences of adjustments from a familiar to an unfamiliar life setting make it a large life transition. In contrast to domestic students, international students experience more complicated adjustments: cultural differences from previous educational settings and such prevailing demands as the need to quickly adapt to changes in roles in the host culture (Arthur, 2003). International students are doubly disadvantaged in the sense that they have to adjust to two societies namely the society in general (UK) and the society of the HEI (Sen, 1970). The differences in lifestyles make it hard for one to adjust and where there is

a complete dissimilarity in most things, for example dietary habits, social habits, academic practices, study styles, and many other adjustments, they can then become major issues to ISSAS in particular. Borrett and Zysk (2007, p.45) assert that: "international students encounter a range of challenges in their first study period in a new country; they are expected to make transitions to new educational, cultural and social environments". In practice, such expectation makes the whole process of adjustment to HEIs bewildering and challenging.

Further researchers have noted major adjustment problems facing international students as a whole which include: educational challenges; communication problems; financial difficulties; accommodation; social isolation; serious nostalgia problems; worries about immediate and extended family; discrimination; and the adjustment to social customs and cultural differences (Church, 1982; Crano & Crano, 1993; Furnham, 1997). Although these adjustment experiences are generic, there are bound to be differences in the nature of individual experiences across international students in the host country. Arthur (2003, p.280) cautions that: "whereas the tendency has been to emphasize group differences between domestic and international students, one should not lose sight of the tremendous within-group differences in the experiences of international students".

The significant difficulties ISSAS experience can affect their transition. Those who had a wholly satisfying life back home may have a different set of life experiences whilst undertaking HE in Western developed countries (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Personal issues such as homesickness, loneliness, problems of cross-cultural differences and adjusting to the unfamiliar environment add to further challenges for

ISSAS. In view of these recurring problems Sawir et al. (2007, p.2) state that: "international students must establish themselves as foreigners staying for a time, as neither inside nor outside. They must deal with unpredictable encounters, idiosyncratic communications and problems of racial discrimination, largely on their own".

Bochner (1972) affirms that international students have to take on triple roles when they embark on their education in a Western HEI; that is, the roles of being university students, foreigners and ambassador of their own countries. He further argues that while the first role may be acceptable and part of their transition, the roles of being a foreigner and ambassador are never anticipated. The effects of these unanticipated roles may create additional pressure, a test of identity, low self-confidence and false self-image (ibid).

2.7.2 Religion

Religion may play an important role in aiding the ISSAS through the process of transition. The efforts of missionaries during the last two hundred years to convert Africans into the Christian faith have not been in vain. A high proportion of Africans are nominally Christians and most of them undertook their preliminary education in local Christian Mission Schools (Wright, 2003). The Church in Africa is radiant and lively, as is reflected in services which are usually fully attended. Most of the ISSAS who practise Christianity are accustomed to regular church attendance in their home countries. Some African students choose to study in the UK because they perceive Britain to be a Christian country – a land from which missionaries went to preach Christianity. However, the ISSAS find the pattern of church life in the UK different

from what they are accustomed to. Negative impressions of the UK churches are sometimes formed due to the paucity of attendance, an ageing congregation, dullness of worship, and a lack of friendliness of worshippers towards strangers. Thus, students feel discouraged and lose enthusiasm about Christian fellowship (Wright, 2003). It seems the present generation of worshippers in church in the UK barely resembles the congregation in the churches in Africa. This may have significant implications for ISSAS who embrace Christianity, and it could exert detrimental effects during the process of transition because the link between religion and the Church in the UK normally forms part of the ISSAS new "family" and community to provide a sense of belonging and thus enable them to "plug" into the local culture.

2.7.3 Race Consciousness

The provocations of living in a foreign culture at times lead to racial discrimination (Furnham, 1997; Lin & Yi, 1997). Tajfel & Turner (1986) suggest that discrimination can result in low self-esteem and low self-confidence while Williams & Berry (1991) suggest that discrimination is one of the potentially injurious experiences which affects the individual's well-being.

Individuals who may be categorised as "visible minorities" are prone to racism and discrimination at institutional level according to Macpherson (1999) and Williams, (1985). Evidence suggests that International students are aware of the fact that they are in the minority and are often labelled racially inferior (Lee, 2006). Drawing on her study of neo-racism and discrimination, Lee (2006) provides a broad range of negative responses of what it means to be an international student from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. She argues that the consequences of neo-racism

experienced by international students range from feelings of discomfort to verbal insults and direct confrontation and this is likely to affect their transition.

The difference in skin colour, the classification of people as "white" and "black" triggers race consciousness (Lee, 2006). While racial identity and association with others of the same race cannot be extirpated or ignored, an individual cannot lose their independent identity. Akin to this theory, Sawir et al. (2008) raise the notion of 'same culture networks' which provide some support in the process of adaptation (see incorporation as discussed in Section 2.3.3), but they point out that, although the networks are good, pastoral care by the universities is crucial. The "same culture networks" reflect on Maslow's (1954) theory of the hierarchy of needs, such as social needs, friends and colleagues, and being part of the group or team. When these social needs are satisfied, they facilitate movement onto the next need in the hierarchy, which is the esteem need (Eggert, 1999). Human beings like people to talk and share their joys, concerns, hopes, fears and aspirations with, be it with colleagues or friends of the same group or team. Without this cultural network insecurities and deprivations can arise. This is particularly common in collective societies which includes the majority if not all African societies. According to Hofstede (1991), in collective societies the interest of the group prevails over that of an individual. But like Sawir et al. (2008) point out, a group of 'cultural friends' is not sufficient to solve the problems, and therefore other provisions by universities are needed.

Generally, it is argued that international students' experience of race is negative and therefore, there is need to be conscious and to pay particular attention to safety measures whilst living in a foreign country. It is also argued that the cultural values

acquired by international students as they grow up tend to be at risk of loss in a foreign country. Preserving them could result in conflict with those of the host country and may not be appreciated. In order to cope one would need the support of friends/colleagues, group or team with which one associates. The association could provide a sense of belonging and coping strategies on how to deal with cultural shocks which could produce, as noted by Forbes-Mewett & Nyland (2008, p.186), "confusion, anxiety, disorientation, suspicion, bewilderment and perplexity".

2.7.4 Culture

The free flow of people from one country to another has led to high diversity of population and cultural sensitivity in modern society (Mead & Andrews, 2009). Understanding culture and cultural issues has become increasingly important to both home and host countries (ibid). To some extent, a major theme running through the literature that positions transition as a problem, is that of 'culture' and 'cultural shock' for international students (UKCISA, 2004). Culture is a complex term, easily recognised but not consensually understood.

Hofstede (1991, p.5) defines culture as "the mental programming that differentiates the members of one organisation from another", while Rollinson (2005) argues that culture cannot be defined as each individual looks at the issue from a different point of view. Mullins (2005) introduces the idea of culture as a simple model consisting of three layers; the core layer is formed by basic or deep assumptions relating to people and the nature of a specific society; the middle layer is the most relevant and comprises values, attitudes and behaviours, whilst the last layer is formed by

products and artefacts. It can be argued that ISSAS are most likely to be influenced by core and middle layers as they are accrued during past experiences.

Spradley (1979) asserts that culture includes patterns of behaviours that are learnt from a particular social group namely; language, logic, religion, philosophy, morality and law. Examining the 'culture' view of Spradley, it is argued that there are different ways of defining the world that people live in. This implies that any study into the values of international students has to take into account their individual situation within their culture. Pedersen (1991) argues that where there is failure to understand the differences between the student's home culture and the host culture, then the greater are both the complexity of adjustment issues and the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings. Brookfield (2005) writes about the experience of committing "cultural suicide". That is, these international students fear they will have to abandon their culture in order to be accepted in the university culture; such students exist in a sort of cultural "no man's land"- feeling that they do not quite belong either at home or at university. The issue of culture is, therefore, very diverse and needs special attention to ensure that an individual's culture is incorporated within the operating system to facilitate transition to studying in UKHEIs.

Researchers who have examined issues of international students have extended and improved Oberg's (1960) notion of culture shock to include terms such as "language shock" (Smalley, 1963) and "role shock" (Byrnes, 1966), to put more emphasis on the different challenges such students encounter in a new environment. Adler (1975, p.345), for example, defines culture shock as:

a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences. It encompasses feelings of helplessness, irritability, and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured or disregarded.

Culture shock is generally regarded as a normal but unpleasant and negative experience (Sen, 1970; Milstein, 2005), a form of 'alienation' (Adler, 1975), a process-based punishment (David, 1976) and/or an emotional reaction furthered by the inability to understand, control or predict patterns of behaviour (Bock, 1970). Culture shock entails the loss of familiar cues, the breakdown of interpersonal communications, and an identity crisis (Weaver, 1994).

Culture shock is perceived as an inevitable process in a new situation (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; McKinlay et al., 1996) International students usually go through different stages of culture shock before assimilation to the host culture, namely: the "honeymoon" phase, the culture shock phase, the recovery phase (Oberg, 1960). Lysgaard (1955) argues that individuals follow a common pattern called the "U-curve" of adjustment cycle. During the first phase, individuals experience an initial excitement and optimism of being in a new culture - a positive perception. The second phase is characterised by confusion and disorientation causing a culture shock "crisis" – a negative perception. In the third phase, the individual is immersed in social life and gets used to the host culture (ibid). Ward & Kennedy (1996) have a different view that low satisfaction is experienced both in the beginning and at the end of cultural change while higher satisfaction is more pronounced in the middle. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) further suggested that culture shock could be best understood in terms of a W-curve model. Nonetherless, it is argued that a W-curve

accounts for similar readjustment processes for international students after returning to their home countries.

According to Furnham (1997), culture shock is viewed as a transitional experience which results in acquisition of new attitudes, values and behaviour patterns. Adler (1975) concurs with this view and introduces a five-phase model based on transitional experience. First is the *contact stage,* in which the newcomer is still closely in touch with the home culture and at the same time fascinated with the experience of a new culture. Second is the *disintegration stage,* during which the newcomer exhibits signs of confusion and disorientation caused by cultural differences. At this stage, feelings of loneliness and home sickness can start to creep in. Third is the *reintegration stage* - the newcomer vehemently rejects the new culture and encounters emotional feelings of hostility and withdrawal. Fourth is the *autonomy stage* where the newcomer begins to experience some flexibility and starts to explore new areas and to get acquainted with a new culture. Fifth is the *independence stage,* at this stage, the newcomer shows overwhelming changes in attitudes, emotions and behaviours culminating in the comprehension of cultural differences. As a consequence, evidence suggests that the newcomer then may have the ability to reinterpret and put meaning to their experience of transition. This model provides an overall view of a transition experience newcomers encounter as they try to adjust to a new and unfamiliar learning environment, as is the case of international students.

2.7.5 Homesickness

Homesickness affects many international students (Stroebe et al., 2002). Most people in one way or the other have experienced some kind of homesickness while in an unfamiliar environment. Fisher (1989) suggests that 50-75% of the overall population have been hit by homesickness at least once in a life time. In the same vein, students who join a foreign educational institution often exhibit signs of homesickness. Research shows that 50-70% of new UK students suffer from homesickness to some extent within their first two or three weeks (Stroebe et al., 2002). In a similar context, research on homesickness amongst British university students shows that 35% of new students experience some homesickness, and that between 5% and 15% describe the experience as frightening with a few going on to develop depression (Manchester University, *2008*). These percentages are based on UK students but in terms of ISSAS, the levels of homesickness could be higher and this may impact negatively on their transition.

Fisher et al. (1985) and Fisher & Hood, (1987) examined the links between homesickness and first year students. Their research findings illustrate that homesickness affects all first year students irrespective of their age or sex. In addition, the results show those who are susceptible to homesickness have strong attachments and positive experiences about their home environment that they find hard to let go. This could be linked to the increased potential transition dilemmas and related issues affecting international students.

Although homesickness has a negative connation, it is argued that homesickness can be a positive emotion in that it constantly reminds individuals that there is a memorable and cosy place where there are close friends, family, security and

comfort at home (Chow & Healey, 2008). Home is considered to be a place where there is peace and tranquillity. Kazantzis & Flett (1998) suggest that family cohesion is a determinant of homesickness amongst first year students, while Brewin et al. (1989) report that leaving home for the first time is a major determinant for the international students' homesickness. Their findings show that homesickness is a common factor in a new situation, but it is usually a short-lived phenomenon. Fisher & Hood (1988) suggest that those students who are inclined to experience homesickness in the six weeks of their first term are those who show signs of insecurity and social issues prior to starting university life. For some students and in particular the ISSAS, homesickness will not fade away and therefore there is need for universities to take action and aid these students during their transition.

In addition, it may be argued that many international students seem not to have enough time to prepare themselves, psychologically and socially before embarking on their journey to Western universities. As noted earlier, it may take a long time to get a student visa and by the time the visa is issued there is limited time for the international applicants to say good bye to their immediate families. Such feelings can add to a student's exhibition of homesickness, poor concentration, loneliness and mental fatigue. Stroebe et al. (2002) point out that the effects of homesickness are serious and can result in poor academic performance, that is, poor concentration, poor quality and late submission of course work; whilst Lockhart (2004, p.36) asserts that homesickness can: "make it hard for an individual to socially integrate as negative moods and states can lead to a lack of interest in other people and a failure to capitalize on the opportunity to form relationship with others in social situations".

In their study of homesickness, Constantine et al., (2004) found that ISSAS concealed adverse information about themselves and were prone to depression more than other international students, a concern which the universities need to particularly be aware of. This might have been due to the fact that in Sub-Saharan African students' upbringing, more emphasis is placed on close-knit relationships and community (Constantine et al., 2005).

2.7.6   Educational issues

Transition includes every type of change that occurs during university life. International students come from diverse academic and social environments. For some international students, university life is not all that new. It is noted that a large proportion of international students enter UK universities after having experienced university life in their home countries (Sen, 1970). Some enter directly into the second or final year of an undergraduate course and others progress to postgraduate courses without experiencing orientation programmes. Whatever entry points at which international students first encounter a UK university, it still poses challenges, including academic shock. As Harris (1997) argues teaching methods and innovations emphasised in the UK universities cause academic shock and uneasiness to foreign students.

Samuelowicz (1987) points out that the transition to UKHE learning which embraces group work, seminars and taking the individual as an autonomous learner all create internal learning transition difficulties for international students. They are expected to "unlearn" their past learning experiences and adapt to the western ways of teaching and learning. International students whose learning experiences are

significantly shaped by diverse ontology and epistemologies are coerced to minimise their previous educational practices (ibid) and to negotiate unfamiliar educational and learning methods (Holmes 2004).

Church (1982) describes academic problems such as adjusting to second languages and new educational systems, as the key concern of international students. The language barrier is often identified as a major impediment which makes adjustment in the transition process slower for international students. Chen (1999) argues that a lack of language proficiency has a strong impact on the international student's social and academic life in the university. The difference in language is not based solely on the differences between domestic and international students but also between international students from the same continent and/or country.

It is suggested that in terms of the ISSAS, the transition into the "Western" style of teaching and learning is difficult. Students from Africa have inherited an academic culture that is significantly different to that which they encounter in foreign universities. Keteku (2002) the Regional Advising Educational Coordinator for Africa, working for the Department of State in Accra-Ghana, confirms that African education systems are geared towards oral communication and pay less attention to reading, reflective writing, critical analysis and research. Furthermore, African students come from systems that embrace national examinations as a sole determinant of their university place (ibid). Abramovitch et al. (2000) view non-Western educational systems as pushing students towards memorisation and regurgitation rather than the ability to analyse, evaluate, question and develop individual opinions, as emphasised in the west. The differences in academic cultures

and expectations pose unique challenges to the international students in the transition.

International students are known to play a "passive" role and are not prepared to adopt an "active" classroom culture (Sawir et al., 2008) and this may be due to the effects of prior learning experience (ibid). In the documentation on transition of international students, Hellstén (2005, p.10) states that:

> *the transition between 'passive' (non-western) and 'active' (western) classroom cultures coupled with the insecurity imposed by adverse cultural know-how and less than adequate competence in language skills carried a particular kind of vulnerability .*

Dawson & Hacket (2006) argue that generally international students lack positive affirmation (positive strokes) which may cause them to develop negative feelings or lack of confidence towards their studies. In their silence and lack of retaliation, international students sometimes hear negative remarks made by both students and academic staff as criticising them for lacking initiative, being linguistically impoverished, passive intellectually, uncritical and 'spoon fed' (ibid p.2). In her study of international students from 15 countries, Lee (2006) talks about the reasons why international students do not file complaints or report negative remarks. She notes that the international students perceive the faculty and university administrators to be above reproach. They tend to perceive 'power distance' (Hofstede, 1991) and hierarchical power relationships, unequal treatment and discrimination as an accepted norm which becomes an issue during the transition.

2.8   Upon arrival at university

Generally, all new students face social transition issues in their first year of university but international students face unique and more challenges in their social transition compared with domestic students. A study of social transition in universities suggests that during this period, students develop friendships across cultures, maintain connections with family and peers at home, partake in social gatherings that are different to what they are accustomed to and also interact with a diverse group of people that they have not met before (Borrett & Zysk, 2007). It may be argued that international students who come to the UK universities for a short time and for a specific purpose find the social transition problematic. Edmund (1996) concurs that international students experience social problems culminating from not knowing the rules and nuances of communication and behaviour in the new culture.

Most international students appear to live only for their books and nothing else interests them. This therefore, may limit their participation in the university's leisure activities, societies or clubs. For international students paying high fees to undertake studies in a Western university, the simple pressure of needing to succeed, may negatively affect their social life. In addition, international students often need to pursue part-time work to support their stay, further eroding their opportunities to engage in a social life.

It is generally argued that transition is about life changes, adjustments and cumulative effects of experiences (Wehman, 1992) that occur sporadically in the transition of international students. Chen & Chen (1998) suggest that there are four categories that are a hindrance to international students: social, cultural, academic

and adjustment, whilst Lewthwaite (1996) suggests that there are three key factors in transition: instructional, social and environmental. Mewett and Nyland, (2008) further identify other factors, such as tutoring and teaching methods, which fall in the academic category as detrimental to the transition process.

A review of further literature indicates the most disconcerting issues international students experience as: problems of living in a foreign culture which may comprise racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, separation reactions, dietary restrictions, financial stress (rising fees and living expenses) loneliness and homesickness, and social and academic problems (Furnham & Tresize, 1973; Furnham, 2004). Universities should seek to ameliorate such problems for the students. Sidoryn & Slade (2008, p.1) confirm that: "the place students are coming from affects their experiences at university in relation to the social and academic environment, as they come from the familiar to the unfamiliar"

Morrison et al. (2005, p. 329) caution that "international students do not form a homogeneous group, in terms of country of origin, attitude, level of prior qualifications, and so forth". They argue that too often the problems of international students are grouped together uncritically as a group without taking into account their individual countries, region or continent of origin. Said (1978) argues that international students are thought of as "others" and assumptions are made of them collectively, whilst Halliday (1999) & Devos (2003) consider them as "the others" responsible for the precipitous decline in the academic standards and quality of HEIs. Such miscalculation and misperception can inconspicuously hide the actual needs of international students. What seems to be a common denominator is that international students are defined by their status in a foreign country such as the

temporary leave to remain (Furnham, 1987; Lee, 2006), people in transition (Adler, 1975), as strangers (McLemore, 1970) and sojourners (Church, 1982 & Coates, 2004). Such labeling is likely to affect their individual perceptions and the likelihood of being incorporated into the social and academic communities.

The transition to a foreign country can either be an eventful or a non-eventful experience (Schlossberg, 1989). Some international students experience the move to be a positive event whilst others see it negatively. It has to be noted that international students are at their most vulnerable during transition. Generally, international students are confronted with the daunting and sometimes mental torture of leaving their familiar and lived experiences to face the unfamiliar and disconcerting experience of being a foreigner. The effects of geographical transition contribute intensely to other transitory issues that are particularly challenging for international students namely: adjustment, cultural shock, social shock and academic shock.

2.9   Community of practice

The concept of community is crucial for the purpose of understanding student transition. A community exists in a sense that individuals have shared beliefs, culture, problems and socio-economic positions. It can be argued that community groups can act as a driving force in bringing change in a community. The notion of Community of Practice (CoP) was coined by Wenger (1998) in work on participation as learning. According to Wenger (1998) the essential factors are to examine the individual's past, present and future to be able to assess and predict the educational transition.

Wenger & Snyder's (2000) view of CoP provide a new dimension which focuses on people and their social setting which allows them to interact and learn with and from each other. In this context, it can be argued that Africans regard their communities as one big family, where everyone looks out for each other. Such communities are based on tribes, rituals, beliefs, customs, language and totems. Communalism is embedded in the oral traditions and customs of the African people. This is shown in the way African people support one another in illness or bereavement. The whole community visits the ill/bereaved person offering support where needed and taking turns to do that. Furthermore, people living next door to each other are not merely neighbours but often are considered to be members of the same family in a sense that they converse freely, eat together and share each others' joys and sorrows. This notion community is relevant for the understanding of the transition of ISSAS and their culture.

2.10 Summary

From the foregoing discussion, a theoretical overview of the concept of transition and change, and a critique of their subtle complexity has been examined. Although the two words are used interchangeably, there is a general consensus that change is external and visible while transition is internal and invisible. Some of external causes encountered in the process of transition include visa, flights, and accommodation whilst the internal causes are culture, social, academic and physical environment. Such cases and their consequences can lead to transitional problems.

This research of ISSAS attempts to address the dearth of studies into international African students' transitions into a UKHEI. Having considered the diversity of

relevant literature in respect to the transition of international students in foreign universities a conceptual framework that underpins the dynamics of the process has been identified. Van Gennep (1960) & Schlossberg (1987) in particular have provided a conceptual framework that will be applied in this study in order to understand the process of transition for SSA students. The framework will be applied to identify the forces for ISSAS to pursue HE studies in the UK.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

3.1   Introduction

As outlined, the purpose of this research is to explore the process of transition experienced by ISSAS when they come to the UK to study within the HE system at Greenside University. The transition experience of students and, in particular, the international students, is complex as demonstrated and elucidated in the literature review (Harris, 1995; McNamara & Harris, 1997; Furnham, 1997; Böhm et al., 2003; Furnham, 2004; Morris et al., 2005; Naidoo, 2007; Beckhradnia, 2007). Issues pertaining to international students such as discrimination; separation reactions; dietary restrictions; loneliness and homesickness; social isolation; communication problems; cross-cultural differences; teaching methods; assessment methods; and independent learning have been noted as being detrimental to the smooth transition of international students in Western universities. As international students are not a homogeneous group, the research is seeking to explore such issues in more depth among the ISSAS. In light of the findings, this study will add to the scope of knowledge regarding international students in general, but ISSAS in particular. It will inform universities ultimately of the new strategies that should be taken to try to ensure a smooth transition of ISSAS coming to study in the new landscape.

The research study examines the issues inherent in the transition process experienced by the sample of ISSAS coming to Greenside University. In this context it:

- investigates features of the background of the ISSAS prior to them joining a UK University and to analyse the extent to which they impact on their transition experience;

- analyses the main factors that influence the decisions of the ISSAS to study in the UK;

- explores the transitional experience and the issues these students encounter in making the transition from studying/living in Africa to the UK;

- identifies factors which may enhance the effective transition of ISSAS studying in UK universities.

At the outset, this chapter includes a discussion of an interpretive research paradigm and its application in this research. Its uses and limitations are noted by the researcher. This is followed by an examination of specific methods used, paying particular attention to research design, data collection sampling strategy, ethics, interviews and other prevailing issues in this study. Finally, questions relating to validity and reliability in this qualitative research context will be considered.

3.2 Research design

According to Eriksson & Kovalainen, (2010, p.25) the research design is very important in determining "how to do things and in what order". The research design makes it easier to think logically and to plan the structure of the inquiry (De Vaus, 2001; Yin, 2002) Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) argue that research design is about organising research activities, including the collection of data, in ways that are most likely to enable the researcher to achieve the research objectives. Wilson (2010)

confirms that the choice of research study has a direct influence on the choice of research design.

The study uses a qualitative exploratory research design to identify the transition of African students. Robson (2002) identified three major aspects a researcher should consider in determining the purpose of the research one of which is exploratory. This involves identifying the situation with a view to finding out "what is happening, to seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (ibid, p. 59). Brink (1998) suggests two major goals for exploratory design namely identifying and describing an issue previously not researched and exploring the meaning and describing the concept when no extensive literature exists. Brink's (1998) suggestion could be applied to the current topic on the transition of ISSAS in the UK universities. Although the subject of transition has been studied by a number of researchers, there seems to be limited research focused on the ISSAS.

The aim of this research is to examine the transition of ISSAS joining Greenside University in the North of England. One of the objectives explores the transitional experience and the issues that ISSAS encounter in making the transition from Africa to studying in the UK. Qualitative researchers believe that the individual experiences are so important and need to be explored and interpreted with their context. Gray (2004, p.214) comments that "if the objective of the research, for example, is largely exploratory, involving, say, the examination of feelings or attitudes, then interviews may be the best approach". His view, to some degree, is supported by Lee & Lings (2008), who make it clear that qualitative approaches such as interviews are naturally

the most appropriate methods for offering useful insights into the lived experiences of the respondents (Schwandt, 1994).

Robson (2002) classifies descriptive as another research purpose. According to Robson (2002), descriptive research implies portraying an accurate profile of persons, events or situations which requires an extensive previous knowledge of the situation by the researcher from which to collect the information. This definition of descriptive research has relevance to the researcher in terms of providing accurate information about the ISSAS past and existing situations in order to expand his broader understanding of the phenomena in relation to the research objectives. In terms of collecting the ISSAS descriptions of their situation, a semi-structured interview was employed.

3.3   Interpretive research paradigm

Interpretive research seeks to describe, translate and assign meanings to the individual's social definition of a situation. Holloway & Wheeler (1996) argue that this approach is based entirely on interpretation and creation of meaning by human beings and their subjectivity. Lee & Lings (2008, p.67) state that: "interpretive research is concerned with individual interpretation, meanings and experiences of the subjective world". Lee & Lings (2008) argue that interpretive approaches are most concerned with gaining an understanding of the social construction of the individual respondent. They go on to argue that the term "understanding", or *verstehen* in German i.e. "to understand", is emphasised fundamentally in the interpretive approaches to encapsulate the concept of interpretive understanding of the individual's experience (Schwandt, 1994). Similarly, Cohen et al. (2009) argue that

the interpretive approach focuses on action. They state that: "actions are meaningful to us only in so far as we are able to ascertain the intentions of actors to share their experiences" (ibid, p.21).

Cohen et al. (2009) further use the term interpretive paradigm and point out that it is characterised by the concern for the individual and the understanding of the subjective world of individual experiences. Van Maanen (1997) confers the understanding of human beings to be merely captured through the experiential reality of their lived world.

According to Newell (1990), human behaviour can be understood when the context in which it takes place and cognitive processes which give rise to it are studied. McNeil & Chapman (2005, p.19-20) assert that: "interpretivists strongly

believe that unique and trusting relationships should be established with those being studied so that a true picture of their lives is constructed".

Given that this study aims to explore lived experiences of first-year ISSAS studying in a UKHEI, the interpretive research paradigm is the most appropriate and congruent as a focus for data analysis. As such, this research approach formed the basis for uncovering, describing and analysing the meanings of the experiences of those who were studied; i.e. the ISSAS. It enabled the researcher to study the respondents' interpretations and to find meaning in their "lived world". Gummesson (2003, p.484) concludes that: "an interpretive approach is inherent in all human effort to understand the world, specific aspects of interpretation appear in all types of research, although it is most often perceived to be typical of qualitative approaches".

3.4   Qualitative research method

Authors such as Lincoln & Guba (1985); Patton, (1990); Strauss & Corbin, (1990); Silverman, (2004) and Lee & Lings (2008) consider that meaning and interpretation can only be understood by qualitative research methods which are relatively open, thus allowing the researcher the texture and the feel of the social situation. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative research includes an interpretive approach to understand the reality of the research respondents. In the same vein, McNeill & Chapman (2005) point out that interpretive research is rooted in qualitative research methods from which it is possible to understand the data collected and to analyse and evaluate it during the research process. Maxwell (1996) acknowledges that, fundamentally, the objectives of using qualitative research are to understand the phenomenon from the situation of the people who have agreed to be studied.

Therefore, a qualitative approach lends itself well to this research. The aim was not to impose ideas forcibly on respondents, but to have them talk about their situations as they perceived it. According to Kvale (1996) qualitative approach enables the researcher to collect information which retains the meaning and interpretations of the event in relation to the respondent. Bloor (2001, p.307) states that "qualitative research techniques, with their capacity for rich description, are favoured techniques for research focused on everyday experiences". Although observation method was used as a minor method of collecting data, the researcher decided that such technique could provide insight into the participants' responses through observing general behaviour during the semi-structured interviews. Wilson (2010, p.138) states that "no-verbal communication can provide you with extra information that is not

available in written form". The observation served as a supplementary data collection but the main method for collecting the data was recording the words spoken in the interview.

Lee & Lings (2008) point out that interpretive approaches use qualitative data as the main source of insight whilst Gilbert (2001, p.35) adds that: "qualitative data often make it easier to follow cause and effect, since one can track people through their lives or ask them to tell their experiences". This was important in terms of letting the participants narrate their experiences of transition because the researcher wanted to discover the root to current problems of ISSAS. McNeill & Chapman (2005) conclude that data gathered through a qualitative tool is described and presented in the form of words rather than numbers. They further argue that most of the research findings in such studies are composed of word for word quotations from the respondents, an approach used in this study to explain the transition experiences of ISSAS.

3.5   Data Collection

3.5.1   The interview

While qualitative methods include interviews, observation, and analysis of documents (Pope et al. 2002), specific methods are usually more appropriate to diverse situations and research questions. Pope et al. (2002) argue that in certain situations a single method may be employed, while in other cases a combination of methods may be more appropriate. In this study, the focus was on interviews as the appropriate method to be employed in order to delve more deeply into findings relevant to the research questions. The use of the qualitative interviews was central to this study by providing information relating specifically to the expectations and

lived experiences of a sample of the first-year ISSAS in Greenside University. Interviewing is classified as the most popular qualitative method and is cited by many as the most widely-used research method for data collection (Sarantakos, 1998; Fielding & Thomas, 2001; Gilbert, 2001; Lee & Lings, 2008). Some authors consider it to be the "gold standard" of qualitative research methods (Silverman, 2000). Sarantakos (1998, p.246) acknowledges that "interviews are employed as methods of data collection in most research designs, regardless of the underlying methodology". Kvale (1996) describes the interview as a special conversation that has both a structure and a purpose, whilst Mason (2002) considers the interview to be a conversation that is flexible and fluid with a purpose. Lee & Lings (2008, p.217) highlight this importance of interviewing in a sense that: "it is very flexible, both in terms of content and time and can be tailored to suit your research questions, respondents, and your lifestyle much more effectively than many other qualitative methods".

This study adopts a qualitative research interview with a purpose of gathering vital information about the lived experiences of the people studied. Kvale (1983, p.174) views the qualitative research interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena".

This method is also a favoured approach in the sense that it is suitable for the respondents. Gray (2004, p.215) confirms that interviews are often used especially where "the respondents are not fluent in the native language of the country or where they have difficulties with written language". In the case of ISSAS, the issue of language both oral and written can be a major factor in explaining their concerns.

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The researcher used interview as a means of getting first-hand information about ISSAS experiences, and to give them the opportunity to share and interpret their lived world. This view is supported by Cohen et al. (2009, p.349) who acknowledge that: "interviews enable the interviewees or interviewers to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view".

There are a number of well-documented advantages and disadvantages in the literature to the use of interviews (Sarantakos, 1998; Bryman, 2001; Gray, 2004; Silverman, 2004). The relevant advantages noted within the context of this study are:

- The interviewer did not require interviewees to read or handle complex documents or long questionnaires. Therefore, this enabled the researcher to get to the truth and enhance validity of the findings.

- The interviewer had the opportunity to observe the non-verbal responses and also have control over checking the identity of interviewees and reinforce validity of the findings.

- The interviewer had freedom to ask, change, order and adjust questions so as to meet the interviewees' needs and meet the research objectives.

- The respondents had the time and space to seek clarification and to answer questions which led to more reliable data.

- Interviews enabled the researcher to draw out respondents' views, attitudes and meanings that underpinned their lived experiences.

Saunders et al. (2004, p.245) conclude that, "the use of interviews can help you to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to your research question(s) and objectives".

Although the interviews are limited in some aspects, such limitations were not important in the context of this study:

- The respondents were offered the opportunity to provide written answers to interview questions, but the respondents chose to be interviewed face-to-face.

- The interview offered less anonymity as the interviewer knew the respondents identity, but it did not lead to any interviewees withdrawing from the research process.

- The interview required the co-operation of the interviewees but this allowed far greater depth of responses and thus enhanced the validity of the study.

Cohen et al. (2009, p.349) state that:

> *the researcher using interviews has to be aware that they are expensive in time, they are open to interviewer bias, they may be inconvenient for respondents, issues on interviewee fatigue may hamper the interview and anonymity may be difficult.*

In terms of time and cost, the researcher allocated specific time for interviews that did not interfere with the participants' timetables. The researcher recognised the expense in terms of time when the research started, but decided to adhere to it as it was the most appropriate method to meet the needs of the research objectives. The need to avoid bias was considered, so the researcher strived to ensure all interviews were conducted in a consistent manner and there was no imposition of his own beliefs through the questions asked and in the interpretation of responses. To ensure that the researcher did not experience fatigue which could result in missing out some important points during the interviews, only two interviews were carried out per day.

3.5.2 Semi-structured Interview

In this research, the semi-structured interview technique was chosen as best method to elicit information on transition experiences and the major factors that influenced the student's decision to study in a UK University. It was vital to use the interview to enable the ISSAS to voice their lived experiences both prior to and after leaving their countries. Robson (2002) argues that, by using the semi-structured interview, it is anticipated that the researcher will get honest answers on the issues.

This type of interview facilitates the collection of rich primary data from respondents and allows the researcher freedom for probing questions that require respondents to expand on their answers (Robson, 2002 and Gray, 2004). According to Burton et al. (2008), semi-structured interviews are more flexible and provide opportunities to pursue fruitful lines of inquiry in more detail. Semi-structured interviewing offers the researcher an opportunity to ask fundamental questions, to alter the sequence of questions posed, and probe for more information with a view to meeting the research objectives (Gilbert, 2008). Despite the probes, Bryman (2001) contends that respondents have the liberty to reply to the questions in the way they want and to expand on the areas they feel are important. Probing and delving deeper for meaning from initial answers was paramount in this research. Fielding & Thomas (2001) emphasise the importance of probing and prompting in a semi-structured interview. They view probing and prompting as processes used to encourage the respondents to produce answers and to keep the interview on track. In order to elicit a full response, Fielding & Thomas (2001, p.251) identify probes which can be utilised whilst conducting semi-structured interviews: "an expectant glance; um hm, mm, or yes, followed by an expectant silence; what else? what other reasons?; please tell me more about that; I'm interested in all your reasons".

To maintain the interviewee's interests and to obtain more useful information, the researcher used these probes because he considered the strategy would satisfy the purposes of this study.

Semi-structured interviews utilise open questions. Saunders et al. (2004) argues that open-ended questions are appropriate and commonly used in qualitative interviews as they allow the respondents to give continuous free responses to the questions. Bryman (2001) points out that the use of open questions offers the respondents the opportunity to answer the questions in their own way, whilst Cohen et al. (2009, p.357) identify a number of advantages of using open-ended questions, which this researcher was particularly cognisant of for this study.

> *they allow the interviewer to probe so that she (he) may go into more depth if she (he) chooses, or to clear up any misunderstandings; they enable the interviewer to test the limits of the respondent's knowledge; they encourage co-operation and help establish rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondents really believe. Open-ended situations can also result in unexpected or unanticipated answers which may suggest hitherto unthought-of relationships or hypotheses.*

3.5.3   Gatekeeper: permission

As outlined, this research study is specifically for ISSAS in the first year of academic study in Greenside University. In order to gain access to their personal data, approval was required from the gatekeepers. King and Horrocks (2010, p.31) define a gatekeeper as "someone who has the authority to grant or deny permission to access potential participants and/or the ability to facilitate such access".

Permission was sought from the University's Admissions and Records Office to allow access to the Applicant and Student Information System (ASIS). This meant

completing an application form, giving details about research objectives and waiting for permission. Burton et al. (2008, p.51) state that: *"in seeking to gain access to the respondents, it is important to provide the gatekeeper with detailed information about the purpose of the research, the participants and the relevant procedures"*.

After obtaining permission the researcher initially contacted the Business School Administrator in Greenside University to provide him with names of all first year ISSAS. The Business School was chosen because University statistics showed that there were more international students undertaking business courses. In addition, as a lecturer in the School, the researcher had a general knowledge of the system and believed that his first contact with new ISSAS in that school could lead to other similar students in other schools being included in the research. Burton et al. (2008, p.51) caution that "insider research can be problematic and raises issues of the balance of power, ownership, voice, anonymity and confidentiality and informed consent". To counteract this problem an email was sent to all the participants before the interview explaining the nature of the research and their voluntary participation in the research. They were also made aware that their responses were to be kept confidential and under no circumstances were their names to be identified or associated with specific transitional experiences in the final report. The researcher made sure his contact details were given and participants were encouraged to contact him if they had any concerns before or after the interviews.

The list obtained included the registration numbers and names of first-year international students in the University. As a broad rule, the students' registration numbers begin with their year of entry; for example, if a student's number begins 08, they started in 08/09. During the period of this research (2009) relevant respondents

would have numbers beginning 09. The international student population list was in alphabetical order by surname. The researcher had to scan through all names and identified some common African names. The significance of African surnames is that they represent totems, culture characteristics and/or an instance that occurred at birth. Therefore, they are quite readily identifiable as African surnames. Secondly, the researcher obtained photos of the expected ISSAS from the Applicant and Student Information System (ASIS), which aided their identification. Where the researcher suspected that they were not originally from Africa, the University's International Office was contacted for more details. This was in line with the University's prior agreement which allowed him to have access to the records of all first year ISSAS within the university. Hence, a combination of photos and surnames helped to identify the new ISSAS. The researcher chose the ISSAS who were new to Greenside University and the UK, as he wanted to know about their lived experiences during their transition into the UK HE system from the African education system.

3.5.4   Sampling Strategy

Sampling is a technique widely used by researchers to select from the population needed for a particular study (Bryman, 2001). Population in this research denotes first year students from African countries studying at Greenside University. Bryman (2001) argues that the method of selection is based on two approaches namely probability and non-probability sampling. Probability approach is associated with random selection where the researcher assumes that a representative sample is more likely to be the outcome from participants randomly chosen from the research

population. Non-probability approach is a sampling technique where some of the population are more likely to be selected than others (ibid).

This research employed the probability approach as an essential method for selecting the representative sample and snowball sampling was considered to be an ideal technique for this study. Bryman (2001) argues that snowball sampling enables the researcher to make an initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses them to establish contact with others. Burton et al. (2008, p.78) state that:

> *snowball sampling method starts with a small number of individuals who have been selected by the researcher on the basis of specific characteristics relevant to the study and who can identify other individuals potentially eligible for inclusion in the research.*

A snowball sampling method was employed in this study because a participant who satisfied the requirements of the research objectives could introduce a relevant friend who also met the research population criteria outlined above, but they must be willing to take part in the study. This was not a kind of research where the researcher could force people to participate – their participation must have been voluntary due to the sensitivity of the research and the need to produce more reliable data. Therefore, not all students came from the Business School. The sampling method chosen resulted in the researcher getting new ISSAS from other schools within Greenside University. Students recommended their new friends who were fellow Africans in their first year of study and, therefore, relevant to the purposes of the research. This resulted in getting students from other schools and countries who might not have otherwise taken part in the interview if the researcher had chosen non-probability sampling.

Table 1 summarises the demographics of interviewees. Of the 25 African countries represented in Greenside University in 2009, 12 Sub-Saharan African countries were included in the sample. Notably, all these countries, with the exception of Angola, Cameroon and DRC, were former British colonies. Such choice to undertake a course in a UK University may lead to high student expectations of the colonial masters and have an impact on the ISSAS transition process.

Table 1: Demographics of Interviewees

Country of Origin	Total	Gender		Age					Degree		Home Location	
		Male	Female	< 21	21-25	26-30	31-35	36+	U/G	P/G	Urban	Rural
Angola	1		1	1					1			1
Cameroon	1	1			1				1			1
Congo (DRC)	2	1	1		1	1			2			2
Gambia	4	3	1		2	2			4			4
Ghana	6	3	3		3	2	1		6		1	5
Kenya	2	0	2		1		1		1	1	1	1
Nigeria	13	6	7	1	5	6		1	12	1	2	11
South Africa	2	1	1		1	1			2			2
Sudan	4	1	3	1	1	2			4			4
Uganda	1		1	1					1			1
Zambia	6	1	5		4	2			6		1	5
Zimbabwe	8	5	3	3	2	2	1		8		2	6
TOTAL	**50**	**22**	**28**	**7**	**21**	**18**	**3**	**1**	**48**	**2**	**7**	**43**

50 individuals participated in this research, 22 males (44%) and 28 females (56 %). The random geographical representation of the respondents is due to the snowball sampling method used to select students. In comparison to the West where University education is accessed primarily by under 21's, it is interesting to find that of the ISSAS in this sample, "mature students" (i.e. over 21 years) accounted for 86%. A remarkable result is also that 96% of the respondents were undergraduates, while 4% were postgraduates. Thus the undergraduate ISSAS were distinct from their academic peers both in terms of culture, nationality and age. This may have

affected their abilities to adjust and to feel more comfortable during their transition. Universities also tend to market induction week and 'freshers fairs' towards the younger population (under 21) with involvement from local businesses such as nightclub promotions. While social events can help home-based students transition more easily, students from SSA countries may find this to be an overwhelming social experience, taking into account that mature students are often disregarded in such environments anyway. Therefore such events may create transitional challenges rather than provide vehicles for ISSAS to move into their new living and studying environment.

An overwhelming number of the respondents (86%) came from rural areas, while 14% came from cities. This may have an adverse effect on their transition because they may not be familiar with the aspects of life in the UK University system. Adapting to a new environment within a short space of time may not have been easy for such a group of people. Some may also have found it hard to let go of their communal experiences and/or the experience of collectivism. People in the West can provide a safe, caring and empathetic environment for those moving into their communities, but it takes time and effort to build this relationship which may not be formed so easily with ISSAS who are sojourners in the UK environment.

Table 2: Schools Representation

Country of Origin	University School 2009						
	SBUS	SCEN	SHUHS	SAS	SEDU	SMUS	SDES
Angola	1						
Cameroon	1						
Congo (DRC)	1	1					
Gambia	2	1	1				
Ghana	3	2	1				
Kenya		1			1		
Nigeria	6	2	4	1			
South Africa	1		1				
Sudan	1	1	2				
Uganda	1						
Zambia	2	1	2	1	1		
Zimbabwe	1	2	4				
TOTAL	20	11	15	2	2		

Table 2 shows that 5 of the 7 Schools at Greenside University were represented by the 50 students in the sample, 44% in School of Business (SBUS); 22% in School of Computing and Engineering (SCEN); 30% in School of Human Health and Sciences (SHUHS); 4% in School of Applied Science (SAS); 4% in School of Education and Professional Development (SEDU). The schools not represented in the study included the School of Music, Humanities and Media (SMUS) and the School of Art, Design and Architecture (SDES), as shown in the above table. This indicates that the majority of ISSAS predominantly preferred Business courses and those related to Health and Science. This spread of ISSAS could have contributed to them forming their own 'minority communities' across the campus, having found mutual understanding with fellow Africans. It could be argued that ISSAS could disadvantage themselves by gravitating towards individuals of their own race early in their university experience as it can segregate them from home students. Also it may appear to UK students that ISSAS prefer to cluster as a separate group on

campus and wish to be left alone. This may also exclude them from some support

systems during their transition.

Table 3: **Courses Undertaken**

Country	SBUS		SCEN		SHUHS		SAS		SEDU		Total
	BA		BA	BSc	BA	BSc	BSc	MSc	BA	MA	
Angola	1										1
Cameroon	1										1
Congo (DRC)	1			1							2
Gambia	2			1		1					4
Ghana	3			2		1					6
Kenya				1						1	2
Nigeria	6			2		4		1			13
South Africa	1					1					2
Sudan	1			1		2					4
Uganda	1										1
Zambia	2			1		2	1				6
Zimbabwe	1			2		4			1		8
Total	20			11		15	1	1	1	1	50

The above data reinforces the message in tables 1 & 2 that the ISSAS in this research

were mainly undergraduates studying business and health related courses. This

possibly reflected national human resources needs and expectations of the students

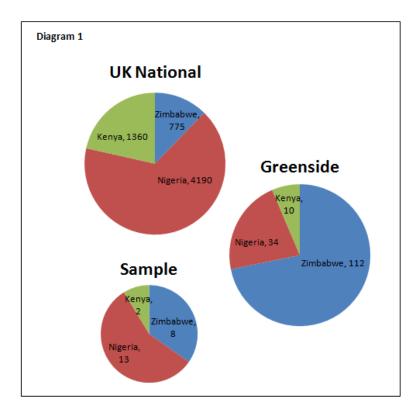regarding gaining employment in their own countries after graduation.

Table 4: Comparison with National Statistics 2009 (first year)

Country of Origin	Sample	%	Greenside University	%	UK National	%
Angola	1	2%	16	6.9%	245	2.9%
Cameroon	1	2%	12	5.2%	175	2.1%
Congo (DRC)	2	4%	2	0.9%	10	0.1%
Gambia	4	8%	4	1.7%	160	1.9%
Ghana	6	12%	12	5.2%	460	5.4%
Kenya	2	4%	10	4.3%	1360	16%
Nigeria	13	26%	34	14.6%	4190	49%
South Africa	2	4%	9	3.9%	415	4.9%
Sudan	4	8%	4	1.7%	75	0.9%
Uganda	1	2%	4	1.7%	325	3.9%
Zambia	6	12%	14	6%	290	3.4%
Zimbabwe	8	16%	112	48%	775	9.1%
Total	**50**		**233**		**8480**	

Table 4 depicts the sample group used in the Greenside University research in comparison to Greenside University data and UK national statistics for the countries included in the sample. These will be referred to as the 'sample countries'. The table shows that Nigerian students are the most populous group amongst the sample countries for ISSAS seeking education in the UK and this is reflected in the findings at Greenside University and also within the sample. However, although Nigerians and Kenyans are the largest groups out of those represented within the study, with Zimbabwe ranking third, Zimbabwean students account for 48% in terms of the sample countries at Greenside University. Therefore they are the largest cluster within these sample countries at Greenside, and second largest in the research sample (See Diagram 1).

Diagram 1

Quantity of ISSAS identified in the three common 'Sample countries' to study across; 'UK National', 'Greenside University', and within the 'Research Sample'

UK national statistics 2008/9 (HESA, 2010) show that the second highest intake of students from countries represented in this sample is from Kenya, however this is not reflected in the sample group or at Greenside University. This presents a research area for further investigation as to the alternative UK institutions that students from Kenya opt to enrol at, and the reasons for their decisions.

Non ex-British colonial countries such as Angola, Cameroon and DRC account for a mere 5.1% across UK national statistics in the sample countries (HESA, 2010), while their representation at Greenside University is slightly higher. Based on these statistics it could be surmised that the prospects of studying in the UK do not appeal to students from non-British colonial countries. This again presents an area in the

research for possible future investigation. The transition of minority non-British colonial ISSAS may become even more difficult as they have contrasting experiences of language, culture and academia, which may separate them from UK students and also other ISSAS and thus provide additional transitional challenges.

Although these ISSAS were new to the country and to Greenside University, it is worth noting that some could be expected to make the transition to UK HE better than others. Because some of the ISSAS were referred by their fellow ISSAS to Greenside University, this perhaps gave them more confidence to refer their friends to the researcher. On the other hand, because the researcher is African and a lecturer at Greenside University, they may have seen him as an authority figure. ISSAS tend to have more respect for their lecturers or those in authority because of social, cultural and economic factors, or possibly because of respect for education. If they saw the researcher as an authority figure that could have had some disadvantages for the reliability of the research and, therefore it was better if they were willing participants who were recommended by fellow ISSAS.

Another aspect which might have prompted the ISSAS to take part in the research was that they were new to Greenside University culture and system and therefore the African traditional way of life and co-operation was still embedded in them. Further, some of the students may have had negative experiences and felt they needed to share their frustrations or uncertainties with someone like them (black and from Africa) in authority, someone they could relate to, someone they assumed could understand them better than a 'white British' person and thus they took the opportunity to speak out their inner feelings and/or expectations. Therefore, for

ethical reasons, the ISSAS all volunteered to take part in this research study and that is why they responded positively during the snowball sampling.

3.5.5 Ethical considerations

The researcher was well aware of potential ethical issues which can easily emerge during the course of the research. In this respect, he paid more attention to the Data Protection Act (1998) and the need to safeguard students' personal identity. Dunn (1999) argues that the planning of research requires a careful evaluation of its ethical issues. Similarly, Saunders et al. (2004) make the point that ethical problems will always emerge in planning research, seeking access to organisations and to individuals, or while collecting, analysing and reporting the findings. In view of all this, the researcher considered the following ethical issues before undertaking any research activities and kept within the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Education Research (2004) and the Greenside University's Ethical Guidelines for Good Practice in Teaching and Research.

3.5.6 Informed consent

An initial consideration in the research planning was gaining informed consent. Diener & Crandall (1978, p.52) define informed consent as "the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions".

In addition, Cohen et al. (2009) point out that the above definition of informed consent could be deduced into four major areas namely: i) Competence, which means that mature and responsible individuals need to have the ability to make decisions based on the information accorded to them; ii) Voluntarism, which implies

that the respondents have to voluntarily make informed choices either to take part or not in the research; iii) Full information, means participants acquiring all the necessary information about the research and how the data collected will be used; iv) Comprehension, implies understanding the nature and scope of the study and being alert enough to understand the situation and possible consequences of the research.

The whole idea of informed consent is not to coerce people into agreeing to take part in the study (Silverman, 2006), but to inform them about the theme, research purpose and the main features of the design, as well as possible risks and benefits of partaking (Kvale,1996). Fontana & Frey (2005, p.715) note that "traditionally ethical concerns have revolved around topics of: informed consent, right to privacy".

Therefore, all prospective respondents received an email (See Appendix 1) inviting them to take part in the research study. The email consisted of the title of research, the purpose of the research and a reassurance of anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher took a number of measures to preserve their anonymity; i.e. changed their names, the name of the university, and used codes to identify the participants. Throughout the study the respondents were informed and briefed about all aspects of the research; i.e. that their identities would be concealed, the respondents' names, references, towns or events would not to be identified in the published materials without their consent, research data was to be secured in lockable filing cabinets, and password protected computer files only accessible by the researcher would be used throughout the research process (Saunders et al., 2004; King & Horrocks, 2010).

The researcher was aware that because the participants were giving consent to be involved in a research it did not mean that he/she had surrendered all rights to

privacy. Bryman (2001) argues that even if participants have given their consent they may feel that some research questions are an invasion of their privacy and they may not want to answer. So, the researcher maintained their trust by acknowledging their rights and respecting, and not interfering with, their privacy. Furthermore, he explained prior to the interview that the respondents were free to ask for more clarification either by email, phone or text and/or to opt out at any time before or during the research. This fundamental option was to ensure that the respondents understood their rights and were not simply deferring to him as a perceived authority figure or someone coercing them to participate in the study.

3.5.7   Interview room

The interview room was purposely chosen because of the nature of the respondents. The room was situated in the Greenside University's central library. The library was a familiar place to students, located centrally within the campus and considered safe and easy to find, because all new students are introduced to the central library during induction week. It is modern and each floor has private rooms for interviews and student group discussions. The researcher could have interviewed the students in his office, but this was deemed inappropriate due to status differences and frequent interruptions such as telephone calls, emails which would not only interfere with the interview process but could also affect the reliability of the data.

The door to the interview room had a glass window which the researcher believed suggested some kind of reassurance. The respondents in the study were both male and female, Christian and Muslim. Some of the respondents, especially female Muslims, may have felt nervous being interviewed by a male, so the researcher

believed they might have felt reassured on seeing that the door had a glass window. The interview was thus brought into the public domain. Some students were accompanied to the interview by their friends. It was not uncommon for either male or female students to attend interviews with their African friends because this made them feel safe, secure and well supported. Hence, extra seats both inside and outside the room were organised as a contingency plan to enable either female or male students to attend, with or without the person accompanying them. In all the interviews, no accompanying person actually entered the interview room.

The seating arrangements were set in an "acceptable manner" for both the researcher and the participants. The interview room had comfortable chairs and was relatively quiet. The chairs were arranged at a slight angle in a non-confrontational and non-threatening way. A small table was placed at an angle between the interviewer and interviewee which created a safe distance between both parties (Gray 2004; King & Horrocks, 2010). Reassurance of participants was considered at all times during the interview.

3.6   Interview session

As outlined above, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each respondent asking open-ended questions. In the first place, the researcher introduced himself as a fellow African, a mature student pursuing a higher degree and explained briefly the purpose of the study and the interview procedures. Oppenheim (2005) argues that it is important for a researcher to introduce oneself and to explain the purpose, scope and conduct of the interview (Tuckman, 1972) and how long the interview is to last (Walsham, 2006). The length of the interviews varied. In general, it took from 45

minutes to an hour depending on the degree to which the interviewee had a desire to talk. Drever (1995) confirms that a semi-structured interview usually takes about 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

The respondents were again reassured of anonymity and confidentiality. Stating right from the outset of the interview the researcher reassured that nothing said by the participants would be discussed without first obtaining permission from them and that at no point was he going to mention their names during the interview. Healey and Rawlinson (1994) argue that assurances about anonymity by the researcher can increase the level of confidence in the researcher's trustworthiness and reduce the possibility of interviewee or response bias. Gray (2004) adds that it is vital to make it clear why the information is being collected and what the interviewer will do with the data. In this respect, the interviewer needs to establish his/her own credibility and to gain the interviewee's confidence (ibid). This is echoed by Saunders et al. (2004) who argue that the first few minutes of conversation can have a significant impact on the outcome of the interview.

3.6.1   Tape recording

According to Oppenheim (2005), it is essential for the exploratory interview to be recorded on tape. King & Horrocks (2010) argue that audio recording is the preferred method in a qualitative research study. In view of this, participants in this study were asked if it was permissible to tape record the interview rather than taking down notes. Healey & Rawlinson (1994) advise that the interviewer should explain why he/she would prefer to use a recorder rather than simply requesting permission. Gray (2004) points out that the use of a tape recorder permits the interviewer to

concentrate solely on the process of listening, interpreting and re-focusing the interview. In this respect, attention can be focused on the interviewee with the ability for eye contact and non-verbal communication (Saunders et al. 2004). Cohen & Manion (2009) say that the importance of recording interviews is to help the researcher to avoid bias, whilst for Walsham (2006) a tape recording is a permanent record of what the respondent said during the interview. Similarly, Borg (1981) argues that recording maximises accuracy whilst Powney and Watts, (1987) assert that the aim of a tape recording is to facilitate the subsequent quoting and summarising of the respondent's answers. With regard to this study, it equally enhanced the consistency and reliability of the information collected as the researcher was able to go back to the recorded information a number of times.

Tape recording did not pose any notable barriers within this study. The respondents were cooperative and agreed to be tape recorded. In this study all the interviews were recorded using a 4-hour digital voice recorder. King & Horrocks (2010, p.45) argue that "digital equipment can produce excellent recording quality and audio files can be downloaded directly to a computer enabling the use of specialist transcription software". In this study, such software was not used as manually transcribing the interviews allowed a more holistic view of the data.

Additionally, the researcher was prepared to abandon the use of tape recording if it created a detrimental effect. The researcher was aware that the digital recorder could not be turned on without obtaining permission from the participant, and if the participant refused consent the interviewer would "proceed with the aid of some ultra

rapid note-taking" (Oppenheim, 2005, p.71). In this respect, the researcher obtained informed consent and got permission from participants to use the tape recorder.

It is possible to find some respondents feeling inhibited by being continuously recorded and this can stop them from revealing confidential information and affect the reliability of the research. However, in this study, the researcher did not perceive that participants were intimidated by the tape recorder.

3.6.2 Interview questions

As already noted in this study, the researcher used open-ended questions to yield rich data. The questions were planned and flexible to provide in-depth information relevant to the research objectives. This enabled the researcher to collect valid information as the participants were able to explain their circumstances without restriction. Pope et al. (2002, p.148) state that, "semi-structured interviews are typically based on a flexible topic guide that provides a loose structure of open-ended questions to explore experiences and attitudes". Hence, this method was particularly useful for exploring ISSAS transition experiences and to elicit their own views, and uncover their issues and concerns that were unanticipated by the researcher.

The interview began by asking the participants to say something about themselves. This question was intended to help the participants to get used to the accent, voice and the manner of questioning. The question was asked quite slowly and in a chatty and non-intrusive manner.

The researcher had a list of key themes in relation to the research aims such as background, decision making and transition processes in order to elicit more consistence from the participants and maintain the validity of data. Some of the questions varied from interview to interview depending upon the data collected from the previous session, the participants' responses to interview questions and cultural and perceptual differences, but all were related to the research objectives. The order of questions and prompts varied depending on the flow of the conversation. Supplementary questions were used to probe for further explanations. These questions were still within the research objectives for the study and able to enhance the validity of the research. The interview and line of questioning was guided by the interviewee's responses with the interviewer adopting a receptive approach. Bell (1999) says that a researcher will normally prompt the respondent in order to obtain a wider variety of information. Furthermore, Robson (2002) states that changes, additions or omissions of questions can be made or aspects explained to ensure the main objectives of the data collection are achieved.

During the interview respondents were encouraged to explain their perspectives and ideas in detail without interruption or being hurried. The researcher provided the direction for the interview by focusing on the aims and objectives of the research. Therefore, the respondents spontaneously talked about things they wanted to talk about but the process was still focused by the researcher on the research objectives enabling him to collect as much valid data as possible. In addition, as explained respondents were under no obligation to participate in the interview and they were free to withdraw information or themselves at any point during the interview or ask for clarification. Walsham (2006, p.323) points out that:

> *people are normally willing to talk about themselves, their work and their life, with reasonable openness and honesty provided that they perceive the researcher's sincerity of interest, feel they understand the researcher's agenda and trust the researcher's statements of confidentiality.*

In order to keep up with the interview schedule, interviewees were made aware when there were 10 minutes left to complete the interview. Fielding & Thomas (2001) make the point that it is the responsibility of the interviewer, not the interviewee, to end an interview. Before the closure of the interview, the researcher asked the respondent if there was anything he/she would like to ask. When the respondent said no, he would switch off the tape-recorder or put the notebook away. Respondents were thanked for their time both before and after the interview. The researcher felt it was important to thank the respondents once more for attending whilst they were moving towards the door – "the hand on door" phenomenon (Robson, 2002, p.277). Once the respondent had gone, some non-verbal behaviours during the interview were noted.

3.6.3   Transcription

Each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document, and a pseudonym was adopted to conceal the respondent's identity. To ensure that the interviews were accurate, they were transcribed as soon as possible, and checked and rechecked. The raw data was reviewed constantly during and after transcription. It took the researcher over 4 hours to transcribe each individual interview which had lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. This meant investing more time and effort in each transcription (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). In view of time constraints, King & Horrocks (2010) point out that transcription is boring and time consuming in a sense that an hour's interview can take between four to eight hours to transcribe depending

on the quality of recording, the respondent's accent and the researcher's typing skills. Despite the amount of time taken to transcribe each interview, the process enabled the researcher to become familiar with the data and enabled him to establish preliminary themes for the data analysis. Lee & Lings (2008, p.228) highlight two important advantages in relation to transcribing one's interviews:

> *Firstly, it gets you intimately connected with your data, and allows your mind to begin thinking about the issues immediately. Secondly, your presence at the interview should minimise mistakes and misunderstandings in the transcription.*

3.7   Validity and reliability of qualitative research

Proponents of qualitative methods as an interpretive approach have pointed out that there are diverse criteria used to evaluate qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). With reference to the interpretive paradigm, merits and rigours of evaluating the validity and reliability of qualitative research are offered by Wellington (2000). He defines validity as "the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure" (ibid, p.30). Reliability is also described by Wellington (2000, p.31) as a "judgement of the extent to which a test, a method or a tool gives constant results across a range of settings and if used by a range of researchers". Despite these terms being used widely in describing research, there are various views regarding the concept of validity and reliability amidst qualitative researchers and there is a tendency to substitute these terms (ibid).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term "trustworthiness" as a criterion for evaluating qualitative methods. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) trustworthiness consists of four components that are compatible with interpretive perspectives namely: - *credibility,* which corresponds to internal validity, *transferability* to external validity or generalisability, *dependability* to reliability and *confirmability* to objectivity.

According to Lee & Lings (2008) credibility refers to whether the research findings bear any relationship to views or data gathered in relation to the purpose of the research; transferability calls for a justification as to whether the findings can be transferred into another context; dependability is parallel to reliability for it is about assuring individuals of the findings and how well they represent the views of the respondents; and confirmability is letting people know that the researcher was not subjective or biased in carrying out the research.

This study maximised the trustworthiness of its research findings through accurately collecting and analysing data as expressed by the respondents lived experiences. What the respondents presented was their account of their experiences as ISSAS in a new academic and social landscape. Such a process reduced the bias of the researcher and confirmed the research inquiry of the qualitative data collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Ballinger, 2006). In view of Lee & Lings' (2008) explanation of the four components, credibility was enhanced through collecting data from African respondents who were new to the UK University system and who had their own individual experiences and perceptions of Western HE which were essential to the aims of the study. This meant the researcher corroborating and interacting with the respondents with a view to augmenting and generating rich data for the research objectives. Regarding dependability, the researcher relied exclusively on a qualitative research approach which was aimed at finding out the respondents' lived experiences and their opinions and perceptions of social situations, without imposing his own views. Confirmability was also enhanced by the acquisition of ethical approval before carrying out any sampling and to abide by Greenside University's policies which safeguard students.

3.8   Qualitative data analysis

It is noted that Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) includes a range of processes and procedures for interpreting data. Gibbs (2002) asserts that QDA is based primarily on an interpretive philosophy. It is about the understanding and interpretation of people and situations under investigation, as well as giving meaning to their words and actions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It is argued that the analysis of qualitative data is fundamentally a personal activity (Jones, 1999) and essentially a non-mathematical procedure (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Gray (2004) describes the qualitative analysis as a rigorous and logical process through which data is given meaning. He argues that analysis entails an initial description of the data followed by a process of disaggregation where data is broken down into its constituent parts. At that stage, connections between identified concepts are made with a view to providing a basis for new descriptions and new insights into the collected data (Dey, 1993). Similarly, Robson (1993) asserts that the approach to qualitative data and its analysis needs to be rigorous and systematic. Lincoln & Guba (1995) remind us that what is at stake is finding the best means to "make sense" of the data in ways that will facilitate the continuing unfolding of inquiry.

According to Gibbs (2002), qualitative analysis is a process that seeks to enhance the data, to decrease their bulk, density and complexity. It is a process through which data in their raw form are transformed into research findings and the hidden messages are teased out (Robson, 2002). It is argued that the process of data analysis involves sorting, reduction, display, conclusion drawing and verification (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The common approach associated with QDA is grounded theory. According to Gray (2004), grounded theory is a qualitative approach dedicated to generating themes from interviews, conversations, discussions and observations. Concepts and theories are developed out of the data through a persistent and controlling process of comparing the ideas with existing data, and improving the emerging concepts and theories by checking them against new data collected specifically for that purpose (Denscombe, 2003).

The initial stage of analysing data using grounded theory involves coding or categorising the raw data i.e. interview transcriptions. Miles & Huberman (1994, p.56) define codes as "labels or tags for assigning meaning to the descriptive and inferential information compiled during a study". In this respect, Cohen et al. (2009) argue that a researcher should examine carefully the interview transcripts in order to identify a set of categories. In this respect, the researcher carried out an initial identification of categories/themes during the process of transcription. Lincoln & Guba (1995) assert that in the process of categorising and coding, the researcher is able to develop a set of categories that can provide a reasonable reconstruction of the meaning of the data that has been collected. Robson (1993) mentions that the first analytical task is coding the materials, that is deciding on which particular segment of, say, an interview transcript falls into a specific category of "requesting the information or expressing doubt" (p.461). Gibbs (2002) adds that coding in qualitative analysis is a way of organising or managing data. He comments that qualitative analysis should not move away from data instead it constantly circles around and between the original data and the codes, memos and annotations that the analyst construct.

To analyse the collected raw data the researcher had to apply a number of methods that were appropriate and relevant to this research. As outlined, the data collected was captured through semi-structured interviews which were tape recorded, listened to repeatedly and carefully transcribed verbatim soon after each interview. This process provided a starting point for data analysis and identification of codes or categories for responses. Through listening to interview tapes before transcription, the researcher was able to organise his thoughts and develop preliminary ideas and relationships. Similarly, during the actual process of transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, he began to identify tentative categories and to make notes in the margins of the transcripts of any emerging thoughts relating to the focus of inquiry.

The method used to interact with and process the data was a manual approach. This meant using photocopiers, scissors, filing/index cards and coloured pens to highlight differences and similarities within and between transcriptions. This enabled the researcher to track back important ideas in the interviews, to get closer to the words and views of the respondents, develop patterns of meanings and maintain links with sections of data. Saunders et al. (1997, p.341) refer to these as units of data and in their view a "unit of data may be a number of words, a sentence, a number of sentences, a complete paragraph or some other chunks of textual data which fits the category". After each interview was transcribed, appropriate categories were developed in the form of words and phrases that were derived from the raw data. This was in line with Strauss & Corbin (1987) who suggest that initially the researcher starts to establish codes and concepts from the data by approaching things with an open mind. Furthermore, the researcher was able to analyse systematically

the data and to identify consistency of themes. Through the analytical process of labelling the units of data, highlighting the sentences with different colour pens, writing notes in the margin of the transcriptions, arranging and re-arranging the data, relationships in terms of recurring words, concepts and themes relevant to the research objectives emerged. Quotes from interviews were tagged where they fitted together and additional provisional categories of possible, likely and unlikely connections were introduced. Oliver (2000) argues that through categorisation, the same data can be utilised to create more categories. However, he cautions that the process of categorisation can be subjective irrespective of whoever does it.

3.9   Summary

This chapter has identified and discussed the approaches employed to collect the data for this study. An interpretive research paradigm in pursuit of answers to the research objectives using qualitative research interviews was applied with the key purpose of understanding the meaning of the "lived experiences" of first year ISSAS at Greenside University. The merits and any shortcomings in data gathering using a qualitative research interview were acknowledged. To reduce concerns and misunderstanding during the interview, the researcher explained: a) the purpose of the interview by giving adequate introductory information to each person being interviewed; b) the way in which information would be used; and c) the confidentiality of information to be collected. Having justified the collection of the data, the validity and reliability of this qualitative research has been explained and justified. A concurrent data collection and initial analysis process helped the researcher to extract immediate meaning from his raw data, and assist him to identify subsequent key themes and patterns. Furthermore, it meant that data was categorised

systematically to connect findings to the research objectives whilst ensuring the reliability and validity of data.

Chapter Four

THE BACKGROUND OF INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN STUDENTS

4.1   Introduction

The previous chapter concentrated on the different research methods and issues involved in collecting the data. This involved analysing the theoretical perspectives underpinning the relevant research process using an interpretive approach. Included in the discussion was the elaboration of the methods used to collect the raw data, ethical issues in qualitative analysis and the issues involved in using such research methods. This involved identifying the categories and codes in order to interpret the raw data in a more meaningful way. This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the research findings from data which were gathered via semi-structured interviews. This analysis will respond to the research aim which is to examine the issues inherent in the transition process experienced by the ISSAS coming to the UK University.

The analysis of the data collected during the interviews yielded a number of themes all relevant to the ISSAS background and experiences. The process involved a thorough examination of transcripts to identify common themes, create categories, attach codes and discern patterns that provided the best fit for interpretation. This chapter presents the story of where ISSAS come from and highlights what makes ISSAS a separate and discrete group from other international students. In view of the ISSAS background, the researcher identified the following categories which

provided an account of the areas under discussion, namely: Place of origin, Colonialism, Attitudes to Education, Religion and Political situation.

4.2   Place of origin

4.2.1   African village

The African village category is concerned with identifying the students' backgrounds prior to coming to the UK, by looking at where the ISSAS come from and their upbringing. This category aims to assess the impact that the village standpoint of the students has on their transition process. An attempt will be made to highlight the factors that are distinctively African because they are the main focus in this study. The analysis of ISSAS places of origin opens up issues of transition from the familiar to an unfamiliar environment such as adapting to a new environment, culture and country.

To put the first research objective into context, ISSAS were asked to identify whether they came from a rural or urban background. Indicated in the findings was that out of the 50 ISSAS that took part in this study 43 identified themselves as being brought up in a rural (village) setting and 7 in an urban setting (town or city). This reflects the general urban/rural distribution in Africa; most people in Africa live in rural areas. The rural lifestyles differ substantially in Africa and bear little or no resemblance to the western interpretation of a village, town and city. One student provided some insights into the African house setting in the village which seemed detrimental to his upbringing and foreground the differences between his home and his chosen place of study:

There are no proper houses in my village. Most of the houses are made out of mud and reeds and thatched roof houses or huts with no electricity. It is not uncommon to find that there are at least three houses; a large round hut which is the kitchen, not far from it will be the storage silo (a hut built on large stones so that it is not on the ground) where all the food (grain) and harvested crops are stored for the family's consumption all year round. Then there will be a house which has the bedrooms. The reason why the kitchen is away from the bedrooms is because people do not want their blankets and clothes to smell of smoke since they cook with wood or primus (paraffin) stoves. In one site there can be more than one kitchen and a replication of all the other buildings that I have mentioned as brothers or family members can build and live next to each other doing everything together.

[Student 48, Zimbabwe]

As narrated by Student 48, in Africa, a village background is determined by simple rounded houses, livestock such as chickens, cows, goats, stable, and people living and sharing things together. From an African point of view, a village is a community that is largely developed and settled by people of close relations. Moran et al. (2007, p.614) state that the "basic unit of African society is the family which includes the nuclear family and the extended family or tribe". In a village, people forge strong relations through common interests, totems and clans. Such a disposition shapes clearly the psychology of such ISSAS brought up in a rural village in Africa. They could be arriving in the UK assuming things operate in the same way as in the village setup or have little appreciation of the experience gap between home and the UK. Such a supposition could further impact negatively on negotiating their entrance requirements and its bureaucracy (a subject that will be discussed later in chapter 5). Note the response from one student from Zambia who emphasised the 'tight-knit' aspect of a village environment:

It (village) is like one big family. It is like a large family set-up living in a tight-knit closeness.

[Student 4, Zambia]

For this student, living in a tight-knit closeness is considered as a large family where the concerns of an individual are a concern of all. Africans generally see themselves

as being part of one big extended family consisting of grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, children and grandchildren living in harmony with one another, celebrating their 'African-ness' through sharing traditional food, songs and dances. This was further summarised by a Nigerian student.

> *Africans by nature are but just one formal family from great grandparents to great grandchildren. We can live happily as long as there is food, songs and dances. We are bonded together in terms of joy and sorrows.*

[Student 26, Nigeria]

Individuals living in a big family as noted by Students 4 and 26 seem to indicate contentment with little - this is what expected of them within their culture of not expecting much. If this is the case then in the context of this research ISSAS may suffer in silence during transition. A consistent theme that Ryan &Twibell (2000) identified in their study was about silence which the students experienced and their failure to ask for help when needed. To reinforce this notion of silence as part of African culture, Student 26 stated that:

> *I always keep quiet even when I desperately want something. In my culture we are not expected to ask or demand anything because we all know the answer will be no - hence we do not bother - just let go and assume there is nothing we really want.*

[Student 26, Nigeria]

Such cultural upbringing has not only implications for ISSAS who come from this background and enter UK to study, but also for tutors or the university who may not be aware of this dimension which the ISSAS may be experiencing.

The findings from interviews indicate that Africans regard their communities as one big family, where everyone looks out for each other. This has also been noted below.

> *People in the village see themselves as a community and related to each other. They have learnt to live together as one big family and to help each other in all aspects.*

[Student 41, Zimbabwe]

This further agrees with Hofstede's (1991) analysis of collective communities. It is a community where individuals engage in the social practices and construct their identities in relation to that particular community. It was clear from the interviews that the community practices are learnt and promoted through all adults adopting more or less the same social norms. Communalism is embedded in the oral traditions and customs of the African people. This is shown in the way African people support one another in illness or bereavement (Rollinson, 2008). The issue of communalism can affect the transition process of students who may assume that every community where human beings live has the same features. ISSAS take seriously this notion of community practice. Britain is an individualistic community as noted by Hofstede (1991). As a result it may affect their transition in dealing with the British nationals and ISSAS may tend to associate with people from their own countries, family, kinship and tribe or from similar backgrounds. As commented by this Gambian student:

> *But one day, I met a lady from Nigeria and through her I met three other people from Africa. Meeting these people from Africa has changed my life completely. They came earlier than me and seem to know more than I. I can talk to them about my problems and they have helped me with sorting out my problems like accommodation.*
>
> [Student 7, Gambia]

Such a dimension, as noted by Student 7, is a reflection of feelings and friendliness and recognition of the newcomer to the community. This was also observed by Rollinson (2008) and confirms to some degree the notion of collectivism as opposed to individualism (Hofstede, 1991) in the relationship between ISSAS. This further supports the concept of 'Race Consciousness', as noted in Chapter 2, Section 2.7.3, where a student may tend to relate to another student of the same colour race or religion. They disregard the existence of the host and other students and adhere socially to 'African' community. This suggests that ISSAS experience adverse

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challenges of adjusting to a new environment and that can create difficulties in their social adaptation.

The students pointed out that living in an African village is not a luxury. One student commented that a village is always associated with rural life where there is poor infrastructure and general under-development. Development in the village is almost always limited to a local school, a small dip tank where livestock go monthly for tick removal, a local grinding mill and a store (for groceries mostly). Very often people in the village have to walk six to ten miles a day to fetch stagnant water from a lake or stream for home use and livestock. Some Africans spend at least a day or two to walk or drive to the nearest town or local hospital. The impact for ISSAS of changing from not having running water to suddenly having water on tap, from not having a proper shower or bath to using an electric shower, from having no toilet (only a pit latrine) to having a flushing toilet is a huge transitional shift for ISSAS. Be that as it may, the starting point for general perceptions of Africans was noted by Wright (2003, p.215) was as being "primitive, backward and deficient in some way". Though Wright's descriptions of an African sounds harsh and can be contested, it is in line with the narration of the Student 48 in this research. Furthermore, the realities of an African village have a huge impact on the people's quality of life as observed in the narrations above of Student 48 from Zimbabwe. Coming from such an environment could result in a transitional shock to a student arriving in the UK; hence, feeling backward, primitive and deficient in some way as described by Wright (2003). The impact may not be visible but could affect the confidence of students, especially when it comes to using some facilities in the public such as the self-service machine.

4.2.2 Culture

In the context of being in a foreign country and university, new ISSAS are exposed to rapid changes which are disorientating. Allied to this rate of change is the issue of culture shock, a term coined by Oberg (1960). Toffler (1970) describes this phenomenon of culture shock as the result of being immersed in a strange culture with no adequate preparation. When individuals are placed in a strange and unfamiliar culture where the original culture ceases to exist and communication is poor, the issue of culture shock is inevitable (ibid). In a similar context, McKinlay et al. (1996, p.379) view culture shock as a "component in the difficulties that international students face when studying in another country", and a predictable issue (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991) students experience first in an alien environment.

> *When I came I was disappointed, I could not believe I was in the UK. I said to myself "Are you sure?" I was seeing dirty streets and old buildings. I just could not believe it, it was like a dream. I was shattered the moment I came.*

[Student 6, Zambia]

As indicated, the ISSAS in this study come from cultures that have no or little resemblance to those found in the UK. According to Hofstede (1991), members of cultures that are collective tend to depend on and support one another so much due to strong, cohesive in-groups unlike those in the individualistic cultures, where ties between individuals are loose. Other cultural differences may include ways of greeting. While an ISSAS may readily put out his hand for a handshake, a British person may not. This can create cultural misunderstandings (Pedersen, 1991) and social difficulties (Sen, 1970). With such differences in cultures, the students reported a high level of disappointment and frustration, a culture shock when they arrived in the country.

There is a lot to say about the culture and the people. The way people do things and behave is not very good. If you are not strong minded and well prepared, you can struggle because there are a lot of things that can make you change your mind. It is better to come here as a mature student than a teenager because you know what you want and what you are doing.

[Student 4, Zambia]

As maybe expected, the Britain I heard and read about was different from the one I entered. Though the houses are closely neat, there's hardly any interaction between neighbours, hence limited help one can expect from them if ever. As a multicultural society, it is difficult to predict attitudes except if it is strictly business where there is high professionalism and good public relations. So the greatest challenge is in establishing a network of reliable friends that help around when one hits a dead end.

[Student 10, Ghana]

Such a move from an African village that has no resemblance to their perception of the UK, then joining Greenside University, represents a significant culture shock for negotiation during transition. Students 6, 4 and 10 identified a catalogue of cultural quandaries as soon as they arrived in the UK. Such initial experiences create negative impressions of the country. ISSAS then face the problem of changing these initial and impressions into positive and favourable impressions. The impact of this experience may not be immediately visible to Greenside University but can distort the ISSAS process of transition in the UK. This issue reinforces the notion that ISSAS are more vulnerable and prone to difficulties in their transition (Maringe & Carter, 2007).

The features of an African village include the following Hierarchy and Wealth, as noted by the ISSAS.

4.2.3   Hierarchy

In many remote parts of Africa, the tribal leaders wield considerable power over the local people. Villages have chiefs, kings, queens or a council of leaders. Data collected shows that there is a general acknowledgement that the most powerful person in the village is the chief who has the role of settling new people in the village as well as sorting out differences and any other issues, and he is helped by the village head. There is usually no reference to women as chiefs or village heads. This could result in a transitional shock for some students coming from a background where women are not in high positions to find women in more senior position in the UK and this can cause further challenges during transition. Two students gave an explanation of how life in the village is managed.

> *A certain number of villages are under the village Headmen with a number of these headmen under a chief who presides over all civil matters except serious criminal offences.*

[Student 15, Ghana]

> *If anyone wants to settle in the village, they have to go to the chief who will know if there is land available. He will want to know where the person is coming from and the reason for them leaving their former village. And usually, they also want to know the person's totems as they normally want people of the same totem clans settling together.*

[Student 47, Zimbabwe]

The description from Student 47 shows the channel that one has to go through before settling in an area. It is a process that is known by the members and recognition of power and authority is observed and it is coupled with respect. Some students in this study recounted that although the settling in another village seemed to be very difficult for an outsider, it has become so much easier, as long as there is space and the person has the fees demanded by the local chief. The most common reasons for people settling in other areas are to do with family disputes which cannot be

resolved, accusations of witchcraft and different religious beliefs. In addition, there are those who have been born and bred in the city, but want to enjoy village life as well, so they look for those villages which are nearer to big towns and cities.

Recognition of the village hierarchy is expected of the members of the village. Hierarchy is passed on to the village teachers, clergymen, doctors and nurses and, as already noted, this is coupled with their decisions being highly respected. The ISSAS are brought up in a society where they have high respect for authority. This suggests these students are perceived as being inferior to those viewed as having authority. It is also noted that the hierarchy extends between the types of positions held in an African community. Such concepts of hierarchy have a detrimental effect on ISSAS transition. ISSAS will find it difficult to challenge or question those in authority for fear of being chastised. Most ISSAS will remain silent and may not seek help as noted by Khan (1979), who found that in some cultures people are reluctant to consider outside help. This is also echoed by Tomlinson & Cope (1988) who examined the characteristics of black students seeking help at university. What seems to be clear is that the barriers to help-seeking by ISSAS are to do with cultural commitment and fear of chastisement by those in authority as was noted by Student 26 from Nigeria. Hence, by coming to study in the UK University, the cultural beliefs of ISSAS learnt from their countries are in disarray as they try to adjust to a new environment.

This notion of respect of authority indicates clearly that the ISSAS perception of hierarchy and upbringing is distinct from other students, particularly if their background is similar to the one given here. In conventional terms, these Africans

are brought up with what may be considered a different set of life experiences and a number of them know what it means to be content with little and still be happy. For some students, it is not until they come here that they realise their previous way of life is so different from that of the UK. The huge difference could have a lot of bearing on these students' transition to western countries and this will be explained in detail later. African students come to study in the UK with a history of diverse and challenging life experiences, which continue to impede and limit their "successful transition" to a UK University. Many of the ISSAS do not want to share their life story with anybody due to fear of being labelled poor, marginalised or excluded, as one student commented.

> *I do not want anyone here to know about my life. People think we are incapable of doing anything. I would rather keep quiet or talk to my fellow countrymen than saying something and others laughing at me.*
> [Student 4, Zambia]

Student 4 had decided to remain silent rather than expose her background in order to ease her transition into the new environment. While this may be a coping mechanism it may not completely help with the transition process.

In addition, the common culture shock ISSAS experienced involved the practicality of addressing the tutors and the relationship that existed between tutors and students. As already observed, ISSAS are brought up in an environment where hierarchical structures are very much emphasised and respected. Hofstede's (1991) power distance theory applies here. The elders and those in authority are respected. Delving into a culture, which is contrary to what is generally accepted as a normal practice, was one of the dilemmas ISSAS experienced.

> *I found it strange to call tutors by their first name instead of Mr and their surnames.*
> [Student 20, Ghana]

Another thing, calling a tutor by their names makes it easier. However, even up to now sometimes, it is actually hard for me to call them by their first names. I am trying to adapt to their culture.

[Students 14, Sudan]

It's a good idea to know the tutors by their first name but when it comes to looking up in the University Directory, it becomes difficult.

[Student 40, Kenya]

It is more informal here than back home. At home the majority of things are lecturer-led so it is less personal than here.

[Student 28, Nigeria]

I was more afraid of my teachers back home than I am now. Tutors here have taken up a position of being more like a friend, so you feel more comfortable going to ask them questions.

[Student 47, Zimbabwe]

It was pretty much a big shock because the relationship between teachers and students is quite close, whereas back home we do not have that closeness and basically just learn.

[Student 17, Ghana]

In my country (Zimbabwe) we have a lot of respect for teachers and recognise that they are adults and ought to be respected, whereas here, students chat and make jokes with them ((tutors).

[Student, 48, Zimbabwe]

The tone of the above statements indicates a hierarchical structure embedded among the ISSAS and an acknowledgement of power-distance as stated by Hofstede (1991). Such powers given to those in authority in African society are contrasted with what the students observed from the indigenous students in the UK. This created a transitional challenge in trying to adapt to the new ways of working and addressing the tutors. Although the ISSAS have adjusted to the culture of calling tutors by their first names, they still want to maintain their own cultural behaviour (Bochner, 1986), which makes their transition process more challenging. However, if these students can get over this cultural barrier, they are able to find the relationship to be more cordial and enabling which, in turn, becomes a positive experience.

4.2.4 Wealth

One of the themes that came out of the research interviews was the concept of "wealth", but it may show a different definition of "wealth". While wealth from a Western point of view concerns money, assets and property, for an African in a village, the conventional measure of wealth entails a different perspective. The African concept of wealth before colonisation was based not on monetary terms but in so many other ways such as children, size of the family, number of wives, land, livestock, (cattle, goats, chickens) and chairs or stools one had in a house (Scoones, 1995). This kind of wealth might be seen as minor from a Western standard, but is very important in the African psyche. A couple of students made reference to wealth in terms of land and livestock.

> *Within the village each family has its own piece of land which can vary from being small to very big, depending on the size of the family and that which can be inherited from generation to generation. On the land a family will have houses in one site, an area for the family animals (cows, goats, sheep etc) and then the fields for the crops.*
>
> [Student 46, Zimbabwe]

> *Wealth in my village is determined by the number of animals owned and the size of fields used for cultivation. The more cattle one has the richer they are considered to be in the village. When I came here I proudly announced that my family had over 500 cattle. Guess what, no one was impressed; instead someone asked if I used to herd them. How degrading! Because my father and I used to employ young people to herd our cattle. These boys are fortunate because part of their payment is a young calf from the herd in their care.*
>
> [Student 6, Zambia]

> *In villages each household has some livestock including cattle, goats and sheep as the main determinant of family wealth. For example, as family we get to eat meat on a regular basis unlike those who do not own such wealth.*
>
> [Student 12, Sudan]

> *In my village there are some families who wholly lead a rural life sustaining their families by marginal jobs like cattle herding, building village houses, ploughing and harvesting, building bridges and/or moulding bricks.*
>
> [Student 9, Gambia]

It was clear that Student 9 from Gambia, makes a reference to what was considered as a normal job in the village and a source of income for the family. By undertaking such jobs the Africans did not necessarily imply that they did not consider themselves wealthy because as has already been explained, wealth in an African context was not based on paper money. Due to the different concept of wealth the Africans come to the UK with the idea that they are from rich and wealthy families. As one student added, having a big meal on the table or slaughtering a sheep/goat for the village party was one of the ways of measuring wealth. Similar observations were made earlier by students 46 from Zimbabwe and 6 from Zambia. In terms of transition there is clearly a cultural shift in what ISSAS perceive as wealth.

Historically, because of different concepts of wealth, Africans were belittled and looked down upon by colonial rulers. In contrast ISSAS could consider themselves as wealthy for being able to have this opportunity to come and study in a UK University. However, other people may not measure it in the same way. It is like everything ISSAS have grown up with; the values they were brought up with are suddenly questioned and measured against the western values, of which they have no concept. They are being made to feel "small" and if they disregard those western values they have no place in Western culture. It is a confusing transition and a conflict among ISSAS.

> *Before I came to the UK, I thought my parents were rich, but now I have come to realise that my parents are not as wealthy as compared to what I have seen so far here in England. For example, I could not believe when one of the English students told me that he had his own car parked outside the halls of residence. In my country, possessing a car and living in a corrugated iron house are considered to be signs of richness.*

> [Student 9, Gambia]

Change as noted by ISSAS is not just about perceptions of the UK, but also their experiences in the UK change their perceptions of home. In this respect, the transition involves fundamental psychological change, which may lead to feeling 'foreign' in the home country as well. It could be argued that living in another country shifts an individual's perceptions of home from either "home sweet home" (Walker, 1998) to "why home is not so sweet" (Sussman, 2000) whilst at the same time asking questions about where one belongs (Bauman, 1996).

4.2.5 Education

The notion of education to the Africans was previously not the same as the colonialist. Africans had their own system of education but it was undermined by the coming of the colonialists who considered it as barbaric, as observed by Wright (2004). One student gave a brief description of what was involved in the education system:

> *Children were taught how to till the land, when to plough and how to harvest the crops. Young women were taught how to cook and how to prepare food e.g. grinding grain, making peanut butter from nuts, how to keep the huts clean, thus mixing soil as a way of plastering. Young men were taught how to hunt for animals and to be future householders. In actual fact there was a lot to learn as the culture in that area permitted. For the Africans, that was considered to be education because it led to acquiring life skills.*

[Student 43, Zimbabwe]

This type of education system may still be going on especially in the villages where a number of the respondents come from and, hence, they may be coming to the UK with this knowledge and some of those life skills. However, the village schools do not certify the skills needed at Greenside University. The early years of learning in African education systems have not received much attention and this can have a devastating effect when these students apply to a UK University. In this respect, the

ISSAS education system can be a stumbling block in their educational performance and transitional process;

> *The education system in my country is different from other African countries. Most of the children are taught by unqualified or inadequately trained teachers who are not even well paid The way I was taught back home is not the same as here. Everything is different- even my qualifications and prior learning are overlooked. I don't think I understand the British education system. It is confusing.*

[Student 49, Angola]

Many of the respondents in this study felt that the colonialists subdued the African traditional education and introduced western education to the locals. This meant that the only effective way to education for Africans was by embracing the education that was imposed on them by the colonialists.

> *In my opinion there is no negative side to colonialism in my country Zambia. Colonialism helped my people in Zambia to be known worldwide. The most important thing that colonialism did in Zambia was the introduction of education and Christianity. These two things have helped me immensely in my life.*

[Student 6, Zambia]

As noted by the Zambian student there would have been missionary schools in local areas which were instrumental in introducing education and religion to the locals. It was during the colonial era, that the young people gradually started to attend the only Christian Mission Schools which were considered superior to any traditional way of learning. Africans had to walk miles and miles to attend the Christian schools. At Christian Mission Schools the emphasis was more on the spiritual and moral, than academic aspects. The impact of Christianity on the transition of ISSAS will be the subject of discussion later on in this chapter.

The introduction of Western education was a mixed bag for the Africans. Some parents were not fully convinced of the new way of learning. One student commented that:

> *I pursued all my primary and secondary education in the school located in my village. In other words, I did not have the opportunity of leaving the village until my late twenties. Village life evokes unforgettable memories.*

[Student 36, Nigeria]

> *When the white men came, they told the locals that education through attending school was the important thing. However, it took some time for the African parents to send their children to school for they still preferred their traditional ways of disseminating information via storytelling and other traditional means.*

[Student 41, Zimbabwe]

Western education became more common to the extent that even in the remote areas of Africa, there are schools for the children to attend. The effect of education has improved the learning opportunities for Africans. As one student commented:

> *Parents tell their children that their heritage is in education rather than cattle.*

[Student 11, Sudan]

> *Education is the key to Africans. Without education Africa will not develop as well as it should.*

[Student 6, Zambia]

As narrated above, the African parents now encourage their children to acquire the modern education for better life styles that are so similar to those of the west. What seems to be happening is the dichotomy between culture and practices; i.e. on the one hand the imposition of colonial practices undermines culture and identity, but on the other hand one might argue that by coming to study in the UK these students have integrated colonial practices into their identity. This implies that there is a

tension between traditional identity and post-colonial identity and that this tension is something that needs to be negotiated in the transition.

There was also general consensus amongst the interviewees that most of the African systems and processes are modelled on western value systems, especially in education. By being exposed to Western lifestyle through education, the interviewees thought that Africans have adopted the lifestyles.

> *As my country was colonised by Britain, the way we live is completely different from the way our grandparents lived. We now wear white man's clothes and most people in my country sleep in houses made of mud bricks and corrugated iron roofs in lieu of grass thatched huts.*
>
> [Student 27, Nigeria]

Such adaptation creates tension between their traditional and western culture. Subsequently, the Africans find themselves torn between two cultures and this can have adverse effects on their academic, cultural and social life. It also makes it difficult for ISSAS not only to adjust to a lifestyle but also to mix and to get a good grounding with other students in the University.

African countries that were colonised by the British had more or less the same educational system as that in Britain. This was better explained by one student:

> *The educational system in my country is not very different from the British one as we were colonized by them. Everything was the same until the year 2000 when the government of Zimbabwe decided that the syllabus, as well as the board of markers, would be under the administration of ZIMSEC (Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council). Yet before, the syllabuses as well as marking were under the British board "Cambridge". Cambridge ceased to exist in 2000 for 'O' level and 2002 for 'A' level. The contents of the syllabus did not vastly change but as you know what's happening now, it quickly deteriorated as time went by.*
>
> [Student 46, Zimbabwe]

The similar education system is assumed as a positive for the student in transition because they tend to expect similarity when they arrive in the UK. This tends to affect the student when they arrive and the differences impact upon their transition process. What was highlighted in the study was that the education systems introduced to Africans during the colonial era are still embedded in their way of living. The African attitude toward education is quite different from that in the western world. Parents pay tuition fees throughout their children's educational journey such as primary, secondary and tertiary. There is no automatic progression from one class to the other as is in the Western educational system. In Africa, students have to undertake a series of examinations per year, and it is only when they have obtained the necessary grades that they are allowed to move to another class, as is the case in some western countries such as France and the USA, but not the UK. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find students of different ages in a particular class. This type of educational system places a financial burden on the parents, who have to rely solely on meagre incomes and the success of their farms.

The findings show that education in Africa has stood still and the colonial structure is still embedded, whereas UK education has become more informal and students are friendly and focused. The African education system is still teacher centred. This will impact on the transition process further because the student-centred education system is new to them and they have to adapt to it. One student commented that:

> *The education system here does not test the students to the full standards, as compared to my country, which is very stringent. In my country students have to be in school whether they like it not, whereas students here seem to be left to do their own things.*
>
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

Student 28 seems to be saying that despite all the sacrifices made to come to the UK the perception of the education system is that it is less good. Such findings suggest that ISSAS expect Greenside University to follow the same educational format as in their own countries. The experience of a student being an independent learner is totally alien to ISSAS. Subsequently, these students find it very difficult to adjust to this Western learning style.

Students are expected to adjust quickly to Western education. But it is much harder for ISSAS to fit in and to experience the connectedness in a short space of time. The adjustment and adaptation to a new learning environment requires time and the rate of transition will differ from student to student. Students who have a good command of English seem to find the adjustment to the unfamiliar environment a little easier.

As observed in this section, the English language is one aspect that the colonial system that impacted on Africans. English has superseded the local language which in most African cultures and being good at English is perceived as prestigious. In case of ISSAS, it is this foreign language that most of the students in the sample were forced to learn and to use at schools and in any official gatherings. This will be discussed more in the following section.

4.2.6 Languages

Evidence from the interviews shows that colonialists left a legacy and their influence on the education system in the African countries still remains. The country of the colonial rulers had to be absorbed through the language. This meant teaching, learning and being tested in the language of the colonialists. English is now used as

the official language in the countries that were colonised by the British, one student added:

> *Our way of communication has changed due to colonisation. Most people in my country can now speak and write in English. We try to emulate our masters by not only learning their language in class, but also being tested in this foreign language. I believe this is due to the positive attitude to education. We Africans value education, as it has brought better life but it is not as simple as it may appear learning in a foreign language.*

[Student 29, Nigeria]

For centuries, Africans considered themselves to be inferior to the white man because of language. The white man used the English language as a means of showing his powers and authority, whilst degrading the language of the Africans (Mazrui, 1967). Student 29 further agrees with the powerfulness of English over the African languages.

> *In my country, the colonial rule has dominated the country to the extent that we do not have an African language as a national language. The common language leaders tend to use to address the nation is English.*
[Student 29, Nigeria]

Student 29 said that learning in a foreign language impacts on their academic performance and illustrates resentment about the imposition of English language and its dominance in his own country. There is also a part of the tension between rejection of colonialism and embracing it as a way to success Colonialism is embedded in the Africans, if one does not engage with the imposed practices then there is no possibility of being successful even in one's own post-colonial country. In Student 29's voice there is a rejection of the imposed practices and this presents identity problems which may be foregrounded in coming to the ex-colonial power to study. The challenge may be facing this need to engage in colonial practice, versus the dislike of it.

The colonialists left the African countries, but as long as the Africans are still studying and assimilating in a white man's language in their countries, the colonial administrators are still in control. Furthermore, Africans speak English in a particular way but when they come to England their 'English' is problematic; local UK people find it hard to understand. This is echoed by Searle (1972, p.41), who states that "mystification through language is perhaps the subtlest and most insidious technique of domination, and is still practised on the black man in any country where he speaks a white man's language".

English language has become an imperative qualification for any kind of job and a medium of communication all over the world. It is worse for Africans because it represents colonial power and makes it hard to get a lot of jobs unless they speak English. Africans are compelled to learn and speak the language of their colonised masters to make easy communication and maintain relationships worldwide. This, as commented already, can aid the transition process of the students from English-speaking nations. The students from countries like the DRC may find it difficult because their colonial masters spoke French. Therefore, this impact is relative.

Although it is assumed that the world has become a global village, the findings in this study show that in fact it has not. People can communicate more quickly using technology but still have their own cultures and ways of being. One student commented that:

> *Education has connected Africa on a global level; thus in terms of business, sports, technology etc. many people are now learned and surprisingly, most African students seem to speak English fluently. However it has not changed the way we do things and live at home.*

[Student 39, Kenya]

The aspect of global education as noted from the Kenyan student above is very clear. While English has become the language of instruction in schools (Sen, 1970), it is also the medium of communication in everyday life at the expense of the local languages. A considerable number of respondents indicated that they were taught English right from their early years of learning. However, learning English as a foreign and unique language did not deter them from speaking their local languages outside the classroom. Many ISSAS in this study stated that they spoke more than two local languages, while English remained the important language.

> *In my country we have more than 400 ethnic languages besides 3 main ones Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo but the most common national language is English. These three languages dominate the North Eastern and Western part of the country.*
>
> [Student 30, Nigeria]

> *I speak English, Italian, Teso, Luo, Karamajong and Swahili.*
>
> Student 25, Uganda]

> *I speak Swahili, Lingala and French.*
>
> [Student 23, Congo]

> *I speak 3 languages, 2 of my native languages and English.*
>
> [Student 1, Zambia]

> *I speak 2 languages, Shona and English.*
>
> [Student 47, Zimbabwe]
>
> *I speak 3 languages, Swahili, Kikuyu and English*
>
> [Student 39, Kenya]

> *I speak 3 languages: Ndebele, Shona and* English
>
> [Student 42, Zimbabwe]

> I *speak very well "Frananglais" which is a mixture of French, English, and Creole.*
>
> [Student 50, Cameroon]

> *I am very fluent in Portuguese language and speak very little English*
>
> [Student 49, Angola]

Speaking different local languages is something typical for the ISSAS. It is seen as a linguistic privilege that Africans are immensely proud of, irrespective of other linguistic barriers. Learning English as a second language is considered not only an honour and privilege, but also a necessity. English dominates all colonial languages and a large percentage of SSA countries have embraced it as a national language. However, the desire to speak the local languages outside school or office diminishes the level of fluency in speaking and understanding the English language. Even when ISSAS come to study in the UK they tend to speak their local dialects with their co-nationals outside the classroom. Such failure to communicate in a foreign language outside represents a significant impact on their education and social transition. Despite this, the use of English is different for ISSAS than other international students because of what English means and its imposition. On another level it is an advantage for ISSAS from English speaking countries in that English is not totally foreign to them and is the language of power and education – again creating a tension of imposition.

Some African countries have over 400 languages (dialects) and some of them are spoken by a small minority. It was clear from the interviews that if one moved from one village where a language is spoken by relatively few people, one would find it hard to find someone in a town or city to converse with. The colonists have disadvantaged the development of many languages in many countries.

Speaking and understanding many different languages (bilingualism) has both advantages and disadvantages. Some commentators argue that bilingualism can lead to confusion of grammatical structure (Paradis, 2005) and it disadvantages students,

whilst others say it increases cognitive capacity (Hakuta & Suben, 1985). Each language has a different grammatical structure and that can lead to mispronunciation and misuse of the English language. It is not only the grammatical structure, but also the differences between written and spoken languages that will have an impact and very often African students write as they speak or speak as they write, because they have been taught a formal or classroom English, which of course does not get used nowadays in the UK. Due to the colonial heritage, the ISSAS have been taught in what is commonly known as the "Queen's English" or "Oxford English". Often, the students may be misunderstood or accused of being very formal and using complex words. One of the students commented that any time she spoke to fellow students, she was told off and asked to stop pretending to be clever; speaking like someone from Britain was something she developed whilst in her country. She spent her earlier education in an all-girls Catholic school run by nuns from Britain and Ireland. Africans can equally have strong accents that may distort some English words. It is also common even among Africans to identify each other by their strong accents. Such strong accents may affect the student's process of transition as the British may find it difficult to understand them hence hindering understanding important verbal instructions, directions or information. The experience of the Gambian student below is a good example here.

> *I find myself saying "I beg your pardon" all the time especially when someone speaks so quickly. The response I get is "what?", " You what?" and one time a male said to me, "Excuse me" and I said "You are excused" and he said that was not the way we speak English here.*
>
> [Student 10, Gambia]

In this Gambian student's situation, it is not the fluency and understanding of the English language that is at fault, but it may be that the language has moved on or the dialect is totally confusing. For those Africans educated in a more formal and

structured way, they may end up disillusioned, failing to understand why they cannot understand the language they used for communication and acquired through education in their home country. Language can therefore prove to be an impediment in the transition process. The confidence they had in the English language upon starting off from their country of origin slowly ebbs away leaving them confused and frustrated. The impact this situation may have on the ISSAS can create further problems for transition.

Understanding the previous status of the ISSAS is important in understanding how their transition process in the UK can easily be negatively affected hence the discussion below.

4.2.7   Religiosity

The discussion in Section 4.2.5 on Education is relevant to this section because of the link that African education has to religion. The African lifestyle has a long tradition focused around moral and spiritual beliefs. Some respondents recounted that African traditions worshipped gods, practised witchcraft and made sacrifices in the form of animals. They treasured their religious beliefs and focused on the idols, but all these were undermined by the Christian colonialist education at the arrival of the missionaries and the colonialists. The missionaries attempted to discount the African traditional beliefs, practices, morals and religious values in exchange for the western religion, beliefs and morals. Some Africans became disconnected from their indigenous African religions with the idea of a new religion being forced on them. Of the two major religions in Africa, Christianity and Islam, Christianity is mainly

practiced in the SSA countries, whilst Islam is mainly in North Africa (Moran et al., 2007).

Indicated in the findings is that many of the ISSAS embraced a religious belief which was held by their parents. Religion in Africa comes from a strong moral point of view. It is a privilege to belong to a particular faith and the whole family takes pride in going to church, which starts with the ritual of dressing up to go to church, unlike here in the UK where religion has become a matter of choice.

The majority of the respondents in this study were Christians, a religion they acquired from the missionaries. Only a small minority group of ISSAS followed an Islamic faith. There was clear appreciation of the missionaries and the contributions they made in Africa. Two students commented that:

> *Missionaries have been supportive in terms of building schools, hospitals, colleges and even universities and also providing local and overseas scholarships to the best students.*
>
> [Student 48, Zimbabwe]

> *Most people in my country who got highly educated during the colonial era passed through some mission schools, where there was funding for their education.*
>
> [Student 6, Zambia]

The first missionaries planted a seed of western religious faith in the African people. Such faith is embedded in the lives of ISSAS. It provides the framework for making sense of the realities in life. Three students declared emphatically:

> *Religion is very important, because it has made me what I am today. Without it I think I would be really lost to be quite honest. Basically I grew up in a family of religion. I am Seventh Day Adventist. I go to church on Saturday. I have been going there since I was young and because of the morals they teach at church as well as culture influences, you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that, it is still with me, even if I live alone. Sometimes if I want to do something I ask myself is it ok to do it, like in terms of religion or even*

of culture and it makes me to be a cautious person in terms of lifestyle , so religion is important to me.

[Student 41, Zimbabwe]

Christianity has helped me to be the person I am today. I am guided by these morals instilled in me from an early age.

[Student 16, Ghana]

Religion is part of me and wherever I go, I have to practice it. If it was not through prayer and God's intervention, I would not have had this opportunity of coming to study in this country. I prayed everyday that God would guide me, show me the way to England. My faith is very strong and has been made stronger by my parents.

[Student 50, Cameroon]

ISSAS' experiences of church in the UK are quite different from what they were introduced to by the Christian missionaries. To some ISSAS, the religious practices were quite a shock.

It was a real shock. You think, is this really a Christian country? From the programmes on TV, what you hear, they try to make you not believe in anything religious.

[Student 39, Kenya]

To my amazement, I boarded a train from (M) airport to the University and on the floor was a bible with pages torn and scattered. That shocked me. They don't have anything to do with religion. I don't know which country can change into such a state. They have lost track of the very principle and philosophy, and I fear very much for this country.

[Student 18, Ghana]

In my country, most people belong to a certain religious belief, but I was quite surprised to see people here not believing or saying there is no God or since they were born they have never been to church; may be the only time they go to church is Christmas day, and to me, I am not only shocked but also amazed.

[Student 43, Zambia]

From the respondents above, it is evident that religion is an important aspect in their lives and they have expectations of Britain as a God-fearing nation, but are disappointed by the broken moral fibre. Some ISSAS compared the amount of time

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they spent at church services in Africa to the UK services and stated that there was a massive difference. One student commented that:

> *In the faith there is no difference but in practice there is a big difference because the social life overrides the spiritual in this country (UK). It appears that the time allocated to church services here in the UK is reduced to 40-50 minutes whereas in Africa the services take around two and half hours. Here everything is about time and yet when they go for social life they have all the time in the world and do not complain.*
>
> [Student 4, Zambia]

What was highlighted was that ISSAS were attached to religion as it was a way of life in Africa. They have been born into families that practice and believe a particular faith and hence, the values and significance of this faith are embedded in the children. Because of the experiences that most Africans countries have had either through colonisation or from their own African leaders, religion was the only hope that they held onto and it was this religious conviction that helped them in their transition process. Their faith provided motivation to move on, to carry on despite the circumstances surrounding them. It was a source of inspiration and the church a place of refuge in times of despair. Because the parents introduced the faith to the children, they feel they are under an obligation to obey the parents, a stance highly recommended in Africa. Respect for parents and elders is not questionable or debatable – it is a key for harmony in African culture and village life (Moran et. al., 2007).

For some ISSAS embracing religion and faith was one way of escaping from such beliefs like witchcraft. There was a general consensus that in Africa, people still delve more deeply into witchcraft and play an active part in the communal and traditional rituals. One student added that witchcraft is still rife in large parts of Africa:

Although we the Africans practice Christianity, our traditional beliefs and witchcraft are still considered part and parcel of our everyday life. We still offer sacrifices in form of animals and chickens to our ancestors.

[Student 44, Zimbabwe]

Indicated in the findings was that most ISSAS normally looked for a church as soon as they arrived in the University. The church seemed to be a suitable place where they expected to find help and to make a better transition. As has already been noted in the narrations above, their faith in the religion motivated them and was a source of inspiration when things were hard. Some students may even be accepted into some African families and treated as one of the members of the family. Any time they felt lonely they would often be associating with people from their own countries or neighbouring countries or from the same church or religion.

The findings in this study show that some ISSAS were disappointed by the churches in the UK and, in particular, those which were African-led churches. One devout student commented that most African-led churches here in the UK were more business organisations, asking for money all the time. Consequently, some ISSAS shunned their religions and chose to go to other local churches such as the Pentecostal churches because they realised it was not the way churches operated "back home".

The wider experience of ISSAS and the culture show how much religiosity is part and parcel of their being and when they came to the UK this was not the case. Authors on the issue of transition do not mention religion during the educational and social transition because it is not part of what the UK education system or orientation is all about. ISSAS find religiosity missing and there is nothing within Greenside University to counterbalance it. Whilst there is no separation between the state and

religion in the UK, UKHEIs do not let religion enter into any of their practices. In other countries, like the USA, where the state and religion are separated by law, religion is discussed and thought about in a much more central way within the Universities.

This notion of religiosity makes the ISSAS worthy of being regarded as a separate group compared to other international students and to think of them differently. They are a separate formation and have particular ways of being, even though there are differences between African countries. In terms of transition, the absence of religiosity within education systems forces ISSAS to "move out" at an early stage of their stay during their UK experience, and "move in" to the inclusive churches outside the University.

4.3   Colonialism

Africa is a very big continent comprising many countries. African countries were largely under the colonial regime of Britain, Portugal, France and Germany (Maringe & Carter, 2007). The impact of colonialism varied subject to who the colonialists were. Each African country had a different colonial regime and experience and the colonial government systems varied from country to country. However, what seems to be a common denominator is that the colonial administrators suppressed the Africans and left the continent scarred. There was a general view that the colonialists divided and ruled the African countries to the extent that they imposed religion, life style, and education on Africans and tried hard to delete the African sense of history and beliefs (Boahen, 1987 & Césaire, 2000). Colonialism could be considered to have done more harm than good. Some ISSAS commented that when colonies were formed, most of the African wealth such as minerals was channelled to the

colonising nations in the West. Similar observations have also been made by Boahen, (1987) & Khapoya, (1998). This suggests that when ISSAS come to the UK, they expect to find a country reflecting the wealth obtained in their countries; however, this is not the case as already noted by Student 4 from Zambia and Student 10 from Ghana.

Some ISSAS in the study who came from countries that were under British colonial rule still remembered the value systems and the attitudes that were prevalent in colonial times. Students from countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa were armed with such colonial experiences in this study. One female student expressed her negative views about British colonialism:

> *During British reign there was generally an unfair land distribution with the few British farmers about occupying vast chunks of our fertile land while the majority of natives were limited to unfertile mountainous areas.*
>
> [Student 44, Zimbabwe]

Similarly, another student who expressed his frustration with the British regime in his country said that:

> *For the natives to take on a professional job one had to be highly educated whereas the white mate had to be simply literate. Even then the white person would have a better salary and more benefits which were unavailable to others. They were preferred in promotions. In corporate structures there were limits beyond which the native blacks would never reach regardless of their qualification or experience. They had their own well-equipped schools, recreation facilities and even buses and trains had special coaches exclusively for the whites. Even the judiciary was biased towards them except in extreme cases. There was a time the black population was not allowed to vote as the parliaments were exclusively white.*
>
> [Student 22, South Africa]

A student from such a background as Student 22 may find it difficult to trust the white British nationals, hence making the transition process problematic. This may further negatively affect the relations they may have at university. On a positive side, who their colonial rulers were is linked directly to each international African

student's desire to study in the Western universities. They may have the assumptions that their former colonialist would treat them well and make their stay better. Further, the known language of their former colonialist is an added advantage.

In the context of this research, the notion of colonialism informs us about ISSAS transitional issues. Colonialism may appear to be an historical event, something that happened a long time ago, but it continues to have a far reaching impact on ISSAS. To most of ISSAS in this study, colonialism is still very alive in their minds and in the African continent (Maringe & Carter, 2007). What colonisation meant for Africans was total control of human and material resources (Boahen, 1987). One of the major difficulties Africans had to deal with was the separation of the countries which created ethnic divisions and loss of their cultures and communities (Jarret, 1996; Khapoya, 1998; Césaire, 2000). This division meant that each African identified him/herself with their country of origin. When ISSAS leave their countries, for example to come to the UKHEIs for their study, they refer to themselves as students coming from a particular country in Africa i.e. Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan. However when they arrive in the UK they are referred to as 'Africans'. They differentiate themselves from the UK residents and become part of 'Africa'. They almost seek a new identity in the face of 'newness' and 'denying' their own countries. In order to fit in, ISSAS call themselves Africans rather than stating their country of origin. Such demise of identity affects their transitional process.

Transition is really identity work. Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit (2010) view transition in terms of "shifts in practice within or between communities coupled with

identify transformers" (p.206). They argue that transition to an individual is "underpinned by the negotiation of external and internal factors in both personal and university contexts" (p.277). When ISSAS are in a period of transition and in a foreign country, their identity is at its most vulnerable. It is at this point that ISSAS are forced to notice things about themselves that they would not have noticed otherwise. Because of different practices in a new environment, ISSAS are compelled to look at their African identity in the face of such differences. In addition, the identity of Colonialism and being African in a former colonial power positions ISSAS in a very particular way in Greenside University.

4.4 Upheaval in Africa

This section will focus on the upheaval in Africa and how it can impact on the transition of ISSAS especially if there is political instability. Respondents in this research who came from SSA countries that have continuously experienced instability were very careful about what they were saying about the political situation. There was a common consensus that some SSA countries were experiencing political upheaval and there was no peace. Two students described the political situation as rather alarming:

> *It is not good. It is depressing. Inflation, people dying, there are no jobs.*

> [Student 45, Zimbabwe]

> *I think a lot of people do not have confidence in the government. The government has nothing to offer to the people, except the people who share the same tribe with the political leaders.*
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

Boaduo (2008, p.96) points out "the African countries that have experienced political instability include Angola; Burundi and Rwanda; the DRC; the Republic of Chad;

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the Gambia; the Ivory Coast; Uganda; Nigeria; Mozambique; Ethiopia; Liberia; Sierra Leone; and Somalia". As can be noted from the respondents in the research there are students from Sudan, Uganda, Congo, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Nigeria. Students coming from such countries could have problems with confidence in governments, lack of trust, insecurity, and they could also be suffering from depression. All these elements could affect their transition process; for example, they may have trust problems with those in authority, trusting only their close friends. There could still be others who may have problems telling the truth about themselves for fear of releasing information about themselves that could easily be used wrongly. Such a situation can be difficult to deal with, especially when important information is required and the student is not cooperative.

Two students noticed the political changes in their countries but also commented on the dilemmas of corruption that have plagued African governments.

> *Now my country is stable compared to how it was before. We have a stable government now. The only problem that we are all now experiencing that needs to be tackled is corruption.*
>
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

> *The problem that has affected Africa and still is, is that of patronage and corruption amongst our political leaders and businesses as well. Otherwise despite that, Africa would be progressing on a better level than what it is.*
>
> [Student 47, Zimbabwe]

The issue of corruption in Africa is widespread (Mbaku, 2007) and has affected adversely the social, economic, political and cultural stability of African countries. Moran et al. (2007) link corruption to poverty in Africa. They argue that corruption or bribery as regarded by the West, results from tribal responsibilities which the individuals carry especially when they leave the village for either jobs or education in the city. The Western world, and in particular the media, has dubbed the African

leaders as corrupt, but fails to show the impact it has on the rest of the people. ISSAS in general tend to be treated with scorn and derision by the UK authorities, especially at the border control. Such maltreatment may be due to the relationship which the UK government has with a particular African country. This kind of inhuman and degrading treatment at border control has a devastating effect on an ISSAS and can have an immense impact on ISSAS self-confidence and trust of authority. As we shall note, most students in this study have not forgotten their first experience at the border control.

It could be argued that very few African political leaders are trusted by both the Africans and Western world, and this in a way has crippled Africa's economic infrastructure, leading to the stagnation of African countries. Moran et al. (2007, p.616) conclude that: "Many African state governments have been corrupted by greedy political and military rulers who use public monies and offices to enrich themselves and their families at the expense of citizens and foreign business persons".

Corruption has implications for the SSA students who come to study in the UK if they were brought up in a system where such conditions are the norm and need to readjust to a new system that does not embrace corruption. It is not straightforward. Such students who only know corruption as a means of getting through obstacles may want to practice the skill in Britain hence embarrassing themselves or even endangering themselves. These students may be more disadvantaged in comparison to other international students.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has given a story that is distinct to ISSAS. It has captured the ethos of ISSAS before they enter the UK and how this tends to impact on their transition process in the UK Universities. It has been noted that most of the ISSAS in this study were brought up in a village which is totally different from what is perceived in the west. Such a background with a strong collective element is a common scenario to all the respondents in the study. The ethos is embedded strongly in them from an early stage and can be difficult to forgo, hence the bearing it has on their transition is distinct from other international students.

Therefore, ISSAS bring a completely different background, one often associated with remote and disadvantaged areas of their respective countries. These elements of ISSAS present a major transitional burden on the students and the respective staff and University dealing with them. The leap they make can be likened to jumping from darkness into light, which epitomises a transitional challenge.

Elements that include education, colonialism, religion, English language, political instability and the like can cause a variety of restrictions which impact on the students differently during their transition. The collective bond, evident in a number of responses above, bears its own impact on the students' demeanour and attitude and has a way of affecting the transition on the students.

The chapter has shown that, while it is assumed that because of colonialism, ISSAS share a common language and religion with their ex-rulers. The way they perceive the role of their colonialists and the way they practise religion or talk about their

backgrounds is very different and has had an impact on how the students transition in UK universities.

The next chapter looks at the main factors that influenced the decisions of ISSAS to study in the UK. It points out the transitional issues they experienced and the negotiations they had to make in this complex process of entering the UK and Greenside University.

Chapter Five

DECISION TO STUDY IN THE UK UNIVERSITY

5.1   Introduction

This chapter seeks to continue the analysis of the findings alluded to in the previous

chapter and focuses explicitly on the ISSAS decisions to study at a UK University.

Such a decision plays an important part in the life of ISSAS. Maringe and Carter

(2007, p.463) provide an overview of the choices and decision-making of ISSAS and

they argue that:

> *The outcome of decision making is a choice and both come under the*
> *influence of a range of factors including the broad context in which a*
> *decision is made, the environment, organisational and the individual*
> *influences and the inner personal factors which mark the individual's*
> *internal value systems and perceptions.*

In relation to Maringe & Carter's associated concept of choice and decision, ISSAS

decision to undertake studies in the UK and the process they have to undergo is

complex. Such process requires negotiating and renegotiating with the family,

hosting nation and university. On one level, this process might illustrate some

resilience where ISSAS have to overcome a lot of problems to get to study. On

another level, this process is very long and difficult and it takes a lot of energy. Such

process plays a significant part in enhancing the ISSAS transition experience.

This chapter begins by examining the ISSAS aspirations to study in the UK, looking

at the difficulties they encountered in making the decision. The exploration of

decision-making is made using the framework provided by Altbach et al. (1985) of

pull and push factors. It then explores the negotiating of bureaucracy to enter the

UK, looking at the challenges of obtaining a visa as part of the transition to get to the

country, and the effects of that visa process. This is followed by negotiating university bureaucracy, looking at the issues of penetrating the University. Overall, it is clear that other people's influence and other factors play an important role in the decisions ISSAS make to get to study in a UK University.

It is important to note that there will be themes, emerging themes and sub-themes in the discussion. Reference will be made to the previous chapter to distil and disseminate these research findings. A similar coding for identification as used in the previous chapter will continue to be used.

5.2   Aspiration to study in the UK

The UK has been valued as a single preferred destination for the respondents in the study. The aspiration associated with studying in the UK can be categorised into specific areas, including push and pull factors (Altbach et al., 1985; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Li & Bray, 2007, Maringe & Carter, 2007). The notion of push factors refers to the decision students make in terms of "whether to go" and this may be due to the unfavourable conditions in their home countries (Altbach, 1998), while pull factors address the question of "where to go" based on the perceived opportunities in the host countries (ibid). The push and pull factors associated with ISSAS in this research were not homogenous across all respondents, but there were some commonalities.

One of themes that emerged from interviews was the national choice. Most of the ISSAS had some ideas of the country they wanted to go to and the UK was one of them.

> *I always dreamt of coming to the UK because most people who had been here in this country told me that UK was a nice county and I believed them.*
> [Student 5, Zambia]

> *I think UK is a dream place for every African. To come to the UK is considered to be a blessing from God because many people want to come here but they face so many stumbling blocks in the process. I did say a prayer, asking God to give this opportunity to come to this country, and He (God) heard my prayers.*
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

With respect to other ISSAS national choices, it was found that some of them preferred other English-speaking destinations such as USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada (Keteku, 2002).

> *I wanted to go to Canada and America, but then I came here and now I realise that it was a wrong decision.*
> [Student 31, Nigeria]

> *I wanted to go to America because they are the first in the world, they like the challenge, and they also have a good business school.*
> [Student 20, Ghana]

For some students, the parents dictated the country where they wanted their children to go.

> *The truth is that I never liked England and never had the interest to come and study here. It was my father who forced me to come instead of going to America.*
> [Student 27, Nigeria]

Some ISSAS were aware of other major destinations of English-speaking nations and would have preferred going somewhere else but circumstances dictated otherwise. Clearly, the UK cannot claim to be the only well-established country for international students. The UK competes with other countries, such as America,

Australia and Canada, in terms of those students who want to undertake HE in the English language. This is highlighted by Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003, p.318) who state that "the UK Government, the British Council and the UK universities nowadays face fiercer competition in the world markets of international education".

Despite the competition for ISSAS in this study, Greenside University appeared to be best option as this Nigerian student confirmed:

> *I had to decide whether to come to this University or another one in the Southwest. It feels good when you know other universities have also considered your application. I decided to consider this university based purely on what I thought about the University as compared to the one back home. This in itself is a privilege and blessing that God has bestowed by my family.*

[Student 37, Nigeria]

The decision for this Nigerian student sums up the ISSAS in this study about their choice of the UK University, which is based on perceptions and comparison of the UK University and those Universities in their countries of origin. The findings show that all these ISSAS did not attend either the open day or visit the university. Prior to joining the UK University, the home students have the opportunities to attend open days and to speak to course leaders for more clarification. In some cases the universities invite potential students to attend an interview. This can help with the transition from secondary education to HEIs. For the ISSAS, such missed opportunities can add more pressure in terms of adjustment, social integration and easily affect their transition process to the new environment.

The ISSAS choices of Greenside University were based mainly on the available modes of communications and their determination to engage with the channels in their respective countries. These included searching the internet, attending

international road shows, contacting recruitment agents, asking friends (who often do not give the right information) and then making direct contact with the university by post, phone, and e-mail.

For some ISSAS, finding a UK university that offers the right course and accommodation close to many of the students' amenities was found to be more challenging. Whatever information they gathered by any means available in their countries could easily be misinterpreted and this could have had a positive or negative effect on their university choice and transition. Solomon (2002) argues that the youth have limited patience and internal discipline to consider all information as important in their decision-making.

A number of ISSAS in this study indicated that they relied on the internet as their most common source of information in applying to the HEI of their choice abroad. Although they found it interesting to browse the University's website, it was costly in terms of travelling to local towns to find a place that had an internet connection and in terms of charges incurred for the use of the internet. Hence, coming to a University like Greenside which has a wide range of computers and laptops, available 24 hours, 7 days a week might have been overwhelming, difficult to adjust to and a challenge in their transition.

It was reported that some students relied on their friends who gave them first-hand information.

> *It was more friends and relatives back home who had influenced my decision. They told me about the University and how easy it was to complete the application forms.*
>
> [Student 4, Zambia]

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Interestingly, some of these ISSAS were influenced by their immediate relations who had either studied abroad or lived in the UK.

> *I have a niece who studied here, although she did not finish her course. She told me it was a good place to study. So I checked if a Business Course was available, and it was, so that is why I came to study here.*
>
> [Student 8, Gambia]

> *My maternal grandfather did his post graduate education in Leeds, so when I was about 17 and I was cleaning his office I saw one of his theses from Leeds University and I always remembered that.*
>
> [Student 23, Ghana]

> *I came here because my brother was here, so I knew that I had somewhere to stay for the first few months and so on.*
>
> [Student 19, Ghana]

> *I have three sisters, a niece and their children here in the UK.*
>
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

> *My dad came here for his university as well so he is the one who influenced me.*
>
> [Student 5, Zambia]

As already highlighted, the parents have a strong influence in the African traditions and it is paramount to listen and to obey them. It is clear that some of the ISSAS believed vehemently what friends and the immediate relations told them about the UK University and thought this would ease the pressure of going to another country. It is not uncommon to find such ISSAS whose parents have had an educational background to have a positive outlook (Tiereny & Auerbach, 2005) when it comes to encouraging their children to study abroad. It is also not uncommon for such students to have accepted all that information from relations on face value without considering the consequences of living and studying in another country.

In the context of national choices, some of the ISSAS did want to come to the UK and, if this is the case, their stay in this country could prove difficult and affect their transition. Such students would find adjustment to new surroundings and culture of the country horrendous. Because some ISSAS appear to have to come to the UK by "default" it is difficult to remain optimistic during tough times. If this is so then the transition of such students can be problematic and difficult to manage. It can easily affect the ISSAS educational performance and eventually lead to dropping out of courses.

5.2.1   Political factors

Some ISSAS in this study made reference to the political situation in their countries as one of the main push factors indicating the chance to study in the UK. Broadly, in Africa, the political situation is often associated with corruption and violence as expressed by some respondents.

> *The political situation in my country is dire. I was married and my husband was passionate about politics. One of our businesses was a farm where we lived amongst the white farmers. So we were the main targets. They (Government militants) burned down the farm and we practically lost everything. I had to move back in with my mother for a couple of months and later came to the UK.*
>
> [Student 46, Zimbabwe]

> *I came to the UK leaving a husband and kids with the youngest being only two. It is a heartbreaking decision but one that has to be made. Back home we had lead a very good life, running a successful business, but it all changed because of the political climate.*
>
> [Student 41, Zimbabwe]

> *My country is at war. The so called Lord's Resistance Army People are involved in killing, abducting and stealing people's property. I was tortured, starved and forced to carry stolen goods by this group, but eventually I managed to escape. Life became so difficult that I had to leave the most affected area. I guess this added to my decision to come to the UK to study.*
>
> [Student 25, Uganda]

So many people there are struggling, no food, no proper jobs, and no real life. If you are not a member of the ruling party, it is not only you who will face the consequences, but the whole family and relations, irrespective of age.

[Student 43, Zimbabwe]

Clearly, the political factor was considered particularly relevant in their aspiration to study in the UK. Given the nature of the situation in their countries, most ISSAS in this study were concerned about their chances of survival as well as gaining a qualification, hence they opted to come to the UK. The experience of war and its effects impact upon these ISSAS. Some of this is beneath the surface, but nevertheless leaves them vulnerable and scared. Because these students have huge aspirations and want so much to come to the UK, they overlook the experiences of war, remain silent and live as though their countries and people back home are safe. Such experiences suggest that a disorienting dilemma for ISSAS is triggered by the political situation and that forces them to make the transition from the old to the new experience in the UKHEIs.

5.2.2 Economical factors

From the findings, ISSAS indicated that economic factors played an important role in their aspiration to study in the UK. Africa is generally considered to be a poor continent despite its riches in natural and mineral resources. It is claimed that the yield from these resources benefits a few and in particular those who are in prominent positions in that particular country. For most ISSAS, especially in rural areas as noted in Chapter 4, it is a matter of survival, living on meagre resources generated by their own effort, family and community. Due to the poor economic climate and crisis in most African countries, individuals are always in search of "green pastures" outside their countries of origin as illustrated below. This would

lead, in some cases, to aspiring to undertake courses in Western universities, searching for employment and ensuring economic return from studies.

According to ISSAS in this study, the economic situations in their countries were bad and they believed that by coming to the UK to study there would be opportunities for getting extra money to support their relations back home.

> *My country is very poor, people have no jobs. They (parents) wanted me to come here so that I can both study and work. They expect me to send money at least every month. I do not know if I will be able to fulfil their request.*
>
> [Student 18, Ghana]

> *I am here to study but I also want to work as well in order to send money home. The people back home are waiting for something (money) from me.*
>
> [Student 4, Zambia]

> *I came with the intention of working so that I can provide some help in terms of money to my family. I was told that there were opportunities of getting a part time job or working extra hours. I need the degree but also the money. If I do not send money to my family, they will starve to death. No financial help from the government to support the poor family like mine.*
>
> [Student 22, South Africa]

> *My brother suggested that I come to the UK to study because of the economical problems in my country. He paid some of my fees but he is expecting me to do some work and send something (money) to him so that he can look after the business.*
>
> [Student 20, Ghana]

> *I came here because I thought it would give me the opportunity of a better life and an education. Yes I want to make extra money to help the family back home, but there is no progression individually at all. I suppose the consolation at the end of this is that my mother and family will be living a comfortable life, where others are dying of hunger or lack of medical services, caused by the poor infrastructure in Nigeria.*
>
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

The findings suggest that ISSAS have lots of things to contend with when they come to study in the UK. They are trying to deal with a whole range of issues, at home and in the UK. Even when they arrive in the UK, these students have to bridge home

issues in order to feel comfortable in living, studying and being members of the University. Such demands require ISSAS to be practical and pragmatic about the possibilities available for them.

The economic situation in Africa is not a new phenomenon. This study has shown that a good proportion of ISSAS have to work hard to get sufficient money to come to study (Lulat & Altbach, 1985). Getting the money to pay the fees is not sufficient; there are other expectations from their immediate relations that these students will in turn send money back home (ibid).

There is a general assumption that African students go overseas for economic reasons in order to support their extended families- an implication for some students. However, this is not a rule as some come away from nationalised education standards to attain internationally recognised qualifications. The evidence from the findings suggests that most affluent parents and politicians send their children abroad.

> *My family is considered wealthy enough compared to other families in the village because all my brothers and sisters were offered a better education and opportunities to study abroad.*
>
> [Students 6, Zambia]

What seemed clear from the findings is that most ISSAS in the study were first in their families to come to the UK to study and there were expectations that they would help financially their siblings and families whilst studying, as well as on their return. These students aspire to come to the UK and they have to deal with both the family and personal issues which are substantial. Coming to the UK might be exciting but to most ISSAS it is very challenging and affects their social and academic transition.

5.2.3 Capacity Factors

Although there are established HEIs in Africa, it appears that some ISSAS were also compelled to leave countries due to limited places in their home universities. Some African countries like Botswana only have one university, which limits the number of students that can go there.

> *I am from Zambia but my parents work in Botswana. In Botswana, they have only one University and they could not take all of us who had finished our sixth form and that is why I decided to come here to undertake my higher education studies.*
>
> [Student 6, Zambia]

There were examples in this study where ISSAS were driven out of the universities because of the disruption and uncertainty of course delivery which often prolonged their academic years. Responding to the same question of disruption, the following student stated that:

> *Universities in Zambia can close due to student disruption once or twice in a year hence lengthening the period that one spends there.*
>
> [Student 4, Zambia]

Probing the students further on the reasons for the disruptions, they were able to identify politics as one reason. A number of political parties seem to use the universities to further their interests. These disruptions, if violent, could lead to the closure of the universities, hence lengthening the period one spends at the university.

Many times, the lack of academic resources and teaching professionals in some African universities forced ISSAS to seek academic studies in the UK. For example, Student 13 below was concerned about the problems within his local university so he decided to come to the UK.

> *The Universities back home lack the necessary resources such as books, computers, proper labs and some of the tutors do not have the relevant experiences of teaching students at a higher level.*
>
> [Student 13, Sudan]

Highlighted by Student 6 above is the desire to live and study where the parents worked but as it turned out, he had to come to the UK. On the surface it may appear to be a good move but deep down for this student there is a feeling of detachment from his family - breakage of a family bond. This can have a negative impact on the student's social and educational transition as he may not be able to concentrate fully due to the loss of family ties. What seems clear here is that there are dichotomies inherent in transition, which are simultaneously good and bad, challenging and exciting, fulfilling aspirations but neglecting present needs.

5.2.4   Academic Factors

A large proportion of respondents indicated that a foreign qualification is more highly considered than its African national equivalent. The UK is considered as an academic champion and is ranked as one of the first English-speaking destinations for international students (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003) with four of the top ten world universities being Cambridge, Oxford, University College London and Imperial College London (THE, 2010).

Some ISSAS in this research aspired to come to the UK because of the belief in the value of a UK qualification.

> *Obtaining a UK degree was my main driver. It (degree) is highly valued and as a person who holds it (degree) you are marketable.*
>
> [Student 50, Cameroon]

> *Foreign qualifications are still respected over local ones.*
>
> [Student 36, Nigeria]

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There is a belief in my country that a UK degree is better than an American degree because the British are serious minded and the Americans are more social and fun seekers.

[Student 29, Nigeria]

Some ISSAS want to broaden their horizons and also think that if they get an English education they are going to get a better job in their home countries. This is evidenced by students stating that:

Studying in the UK opens up more opportunities not only here, but much more at home. One becomes an international asset rather than a national one.

[Student 17, Ghana]

If I go to Africa today and produce my education papers, I am likely to be more valued than the person who did the same course, but with local qualifications. Anything western is still seen as a status or reputation. As a result, most students will prefer to have a western recognised qualification than that of a local university.

[Student 19, Ghana]

I came here not so much for myself as I had an above average life style, but when the Government scrapped Oxford and Cambridge Examination Boards in favour of nationalised curriculum, the principle naturally infuriated me to realize that my children would never be internationally competent. A person with a diploma from abroad is generally preferred to the one with a degree from a national university.

[Student 44, Zimbabwe]

I want a UK degree, go back home and become an important person. I know my life would improve.

[Student 40, Kenya]

The advantages of obtaining a western qualification seem to outweigh the African local qualifications. This can be echoed by Yang et al. (2006) who argue that international students aspire to achieve a Western education as a means of getting better jobs, improving their conditions of living in their country of origin which they would not acquire if they obtained a local qualification. This is in parallel to identity issues, at once being proud to be African but at the same time observing that what is offered in their own countries is less valued – this creates problematic identity.

From the responses, the British qualifications seem to have a monopoly in a number of SSA countries. Employers tend to rank the UK qualifications higher than those in the local countries. Even after probing the respondents further on this issue, they could not give a justifiable reason for their preference. It was not because those who have the qualification were more intelligent than their local counterparts it was just because it was a UK qualification. It may be that because the UK is a developed country a qualification from there would rank one ahead of the others.

Because a UK qualification is more respected in Africa, it would seem that ISSAS have got a strong reason why they have to get their heads down and work hard. In this respect, the ISSAS are prepared to put up with quite a lot and to give up so much if they think they are getting a better and useful education that is going to help them in the future. This indicates clearly transition, and the parallels of suffering and opportunity.

Some ISSAS just wanted to get experience of being somewhere different. As two students commented:

> *I just wanted to study in a different environment altogether.*
> [Student 5, Zambia]

> *I wanted to widen my horizon and to further enhance my academic qualifications in another country.*
> [Student 49, Angola]

The ISSAS in this research needed to get themselves and their families out of poverty, wanted the pride that one has from being able to study abroad and the knowledge that the UK is the education capital of the world. For others, it was just the need to get out of Africa that brought them to the UK. What the ISSAS seem to suggest is that a combination of their perceived values of British education, the

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exposure to a Western qualification and the excessive demand of limited spaces in the universities are some of the driving forces to pursue their studies in the UK universities. This shows how aspiration is an important militating factor in understanding the choice to make change and face the challenges of transition.

Another factor why ISSAS come to study under the British Educational system is to do with colonisation. As already reported in Chapters 2, 4 and 5, colonialism impinges on their decision to undertake HE in the UK. The results from the findings show that there were various factors that influenced the African decisions to study in the UK.

> *Most people from my country come here because the country was colonised by the British, it is the only country we have learnt about.*
>
> [Student 43, Zimbabwe]

Student 43's response shows that Britain has been the dominant Western country the student had to learn about and the British education system was another pull factor that was identified by a number of students as a reason for choosing to come to the UK.

> *Because Britain is recognised around the world, it has a good education system.*
>
> [Student 5, Zambia]

> *I chose UK because the educational system back home is run in line with the British system of education.*
>
> [Student 27, Nigeria]

> *Because the education system and the degrees here (UK) are highly recognised in my country.*
>
> [Student 2, Zambia]

> *It was because it was easier to get in than America for example and the education system is quite similar to that back home as well.*
>
> [Student 48, Zimbabwe]

The reasons why the British education system seems to be preferred are because the system is similar to that of the students in this study, and the value added to the UK degree in Africa is a common factor for most of the SSA students in the study. In addition, students are wooed by the university's brochures and website (Nworah, 2006) which are colourful and show student facilities available for use at the university such as computers, fully-stocked libraries, availability of services and part-time jobs. Based on what Student 40 had gathered in her first weeks, she was able to make some comparison between her experience of UK facilities and which seemed completely different to her own.

> *The British education system is preferable as there are more resources and facilities widely available with not many restrictions. For example back home if you were at Uni or college, you have to look for most books yourself and library books can be used in the library only and not taken out.*
>
> [Student 40, Kenya]

Historically, the UK is known for spearheading the industrial revolution. But, over the years, the UK is credited generally with influencing world education compared to other first world countries and is renowned for its academic standards. This suggests that a large group of international students would rather come to the UK, but this is also the case for ISSAS. Africans who come to the UK to study face all hardships and the challenges of transition in order to pursue their studies in the UK rather than anywhere else in the Western world. The evidence points to the fact that most ISSAS in this study preferred UK as their academic destination and obtaining a UK qualification was a key opportunity to undertake their studies at Greenside University.

5.2.5   The English Language Factor

There are few internationally-accepted languages in Africa, and English tops the list. Some of the respondents chose the UK because they wanted to improve their English, while others chose the UK because they already were able to speak English, hence assuming that this would help with the integration and transition process as is shown in chapter 6. This is echoed by Maringe & Carter (2007) who argue that the English speaking nationalities choose to come to the previous colonial masters as they already know the language and partly because the teaching derives from their masters. This is confirmed by the respondents in this study.

> *I wanted to improve my English as it is a big competitive advantage in business. You can speak it (English) everywhere.*
> [Student 23, Congo]

> *Because my country Zambia is an English speaking nation and can relate to the English way of life, this also influenced my coming here and I thought I would do better here rather than going to any other country, because I would fit in properly, because the standards are more or less the same and ethics and everything.*
> [Student 4, Zambia]

> *I chose the UK because of the Educational system and the English Language.*
> [Student 40, Kenya]

> *I wanted to come to the UK because of its colonial background and also a lingua franca is English and I felt I would be more fluent and at least comprehend more compared to other countries.*
> [Student 7, Gambia]

There have been good and bad outcomes from colonisation. Despite the challenges of their identity, the ISSAS have not only learnt to speak the language of their colonists but also want to improve their communication skills, as noted above. However, coming to the colonialist country to pursue studies and having the ability to speak English is not a panacea for the problems currently experienced by ISSAS. It is not part of the UK or University policy to acknowledge students based on their

country of origin. Such perception can lead to ISSAS feeling that because they are from the colonised countries they would be treated differently. Similarly, the aspiration of increasing their knowledge and command of English language does not seem to materialise. When the ISSAS come to the UK, as illustrated in this study, most of them do not integrate with either the host or other international students. This is often due to race consciousness where skin colour and identity play a dominant role in their life in the UK. Whilst they may be able to speak some English in their own countries, they find it difficult to communicate fluently when they come to the UK. This may be due to their unusual accent, fear of making mistakes or being judged. Such dilemmas can force them to congregate with students who may seem to be like them in terms of skin colour, identity, culture and language. In every circumstance ISSAS find themselves keeping quiet and rarely participating in the wider group, which can be an impediment in the transition process as well as an issue for the tutors and University who may not be aware as to why these ISSAS have low levels of participation and involvement, both in and out of the classroom.

Although some of the ISSAS' aspirations to study in the UK may differ slightly, the underpinning meaning is the same. The British education system and an increase in the command of the English language are merely a stepping stone for all ISSAS. What they want is a qualification that is respectable, recognisable and can lead to the possibility of future success. To achieve this, they have to forfeit their social needs and cultural aspects of University life and stick to their goals. Such strong ambition of getting a qualification affects their ability to integrate due to a language barrier or to get involved in any aspects of university. This can be detrimental to their transitional process.

5.3   Negotiating bureaucracy to enter the UK

One of the significant parts of the ISSAS transition process was the need to negotiate the entry requirements to the UK. Such negotiation is bureaucratic, complex, lengthy and takes a lot of energy. It challenges the ISSAS rights and hinders their transition process. The UK government has set specific requirements which all non-EU students have to fulfil before being granted leave to enter the UK. This requirement is expected to be obtained from the individual country of origin and in most cases is not straight forward.

Being granted leave to enter the UK has always been a complex process that foreign students have to go through particularly in Africa (Sidy, 2007). Tight border controls, immigration legislation and the perception that they may be wanting to come to study as a way of getting out of Africa, means that issuing student visas has become very strict and the process of being granted a visa is difficult and complex, causing so much stress.

For anyone wishing to come to study in the UK, he or she must have all the necessary documents including an acceptance letter from the university, and evidence of funds to cater for both tuition fees and costs of living. Providing the evidence to the embassy is not a panacea, as the British embassy can reject the visa proposal or application if the candidates have not met the requirements. As noted in Chapter 2, Section 2.6., Lipset (2009) argues that some of the main reasons why international students are denied visas include: insufficient funds, incomplete, incorrect and insufficient documents or fake visa documents.

What was highlighted in the findings was the difficulty of getting the necessary documentation and the challenges of obtaining a visa. One student commented that:

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One of the difficulties is caused by the demands of the student bank account statements, which are required by British immigration systems to show that a student has sufficient money to use during that academic year.

[Student 29, Nigeria]

For Student 29, the issue was about getting the necessary evidence to justify that he had the money to pay for his studies. It is interesting to note that most of the Africans, especially those living in the rural areas, do not have a bank account. The little money they have is often kept 'under the mattresses or in a hole'. Even if the banks may be available in the rural areas, they may be a distance away. Therefore, such demands by the embassy to produce bank statements may be an issue to some of the parents who wish to have their children educated in the UK.

There are those African parents who have been let down by the African banking systems, especially in politically unstable countries. This has resulted in parents preferring to give cash to their children to carry rather than relying on the bank transfers. One student stated that:

My parents did not have a bank account. They used my uncle's account to show evidence to the British Embassy and to pay for the tuition fees. I came with £5000 cash to pay for accommodation and upkeep. I was too scared to bring all that money.

[Student 29, Nigeria]

Some students felt resentment towards visa fees. Many acknowledged that the visa fees and procedures were so difficult and lengthy in their home countries and this to some extent affected their initial decisions of studying in the UK. Before the visa is processed, the candidate is expected to pay in advance the non-refundable visa fee as noted in Section 2.6.2. The average cost of a student visa is £140 (at the time when this study was carried out). This is followed by an interview which can be stressful. Some of the British workers involved in this process seemed to have an air around

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them that tended to put applicants on edge. They were not friendly as some students

noted. Many of the students who do not obtain the visa tend to re-apply and pay for

this repeatedly.

> *I was denied a visa because the clearing officer was not sure of my accommodation in the UK, not sure if I had enough money to pay the tuition fees and living costs. He concluded that I did not have the right intention to come to study in this University.*
>
> [Student 7, Gambia]

Getting a student visa from the British Embassy is very hard as shown in these two

poignant statements:

> *It is very difficult to get a students' visa if you don't have the necessary requirements. You've got to prove beyond doubt that you've enough money before submitting the application form to the British Embassy and it's not guaranteed that you will obtain the students visa.*
>
> [Student 33, Nigeria]

> *If you've an admission letter from University, the school fees in your account and some amount of money left in your account after paying the fees, you might be lucky to obtain a students' visa. You can imagine what someone has to go through before they can come here.*
>
> [Student 37, Nigeria]

Both Students 33 and 37 use the word "you" to refer to themselves and people in

general. Interestingly, they all agree that the British Embassy asks for financial

evidence to support the application form. They insist that having the financial back-

up is not sufficient to obtain a visa. The tone of these two students indicates that

submitting an application form and other supporting evidence to the British Embassy

does not assure them of a visa. It is a decision they have no influence over and this

stops them from booking the flights or preparing for the journey.

The importance of a visa is indicated in Greenside University's documents sent to prospective students and also shown clearly on the website. However, there were discrepancies in the support given to enable the SSA students to obtain a visa. This is well narrated by Student 9:

> *In the prospectus they tell you about visa support available but I don't think they (International Office) help students with visa support. When I applied for the first time I was denied a visa for one thing. In the visa application form I was asked a few questions such as "How long will your course take? How many hours per lecture are you going to attend?" I took it for granted and I wrote on the form I was going to do a full time course for a year instead of three years; I don't have a timetable, I don't know how many hours the lectures are going to take per week. Instead they expected me to say 12 hours per week. So all those details I did not have. And to be sincere, I checked on the internet thinking they may be in there but all in vain. When I got here I discovered that they had all the information, but not on the internet.*
>
> [Student 9, Gambia]

Student 9 insists that the information given with regard to completing the application form is misleading. The student highlights a common problem most ISSAS encounter when their UK Embassy asks for additional information they have no knowledge of or access to at the time of applying for a student visa. This creates unnecessary stress, a denial of a visa and a loss of money paid to process the application form; money they can ill afford to lose.

Processing a student visa takes time and money. The time taken to process a visa especially for the SSA students sponsored by the British Government, NGOs, or Government organisations is very short, at least a week. Self-sponsored students have to wait a little longer and often they are called on to attend further interrogation at the British Embassy. This may be due to inadequate financial evidence or forgery (Lipset, 2009), as will be discussed later in this chapter. These students may even be travelling distances, from the village to town for the first time, and this can be intimidating.

The first time I was called for the interview at the British Embassy, I dreaded it because I had not travelled far away from my village. I was totally confused. I had to ask a friend of mine to accompany me to the Embassy. We had to wake up very early morning 3:00am to be precise to board a bus. In the middle of nowhere the bus broke. We had no other option except to jump in the back of a pickup truck. The journey, less than 150 miles, took more than 8 hours. When we arrived at the Embassy, I was told to go away, complete the correct form and to bring more financial proof.

[Student 4, Zambia]

A percentage of those invited to return to the British Embassy will be denied a visa, some having to go through the process of applying for a visa up to three times. This has a financial impact on their already vulnerable financial situation.

What seemed to derive from the respondents was that the University sent out admission letters to help students get a visa after being reassured that the student had enough funds to pay the tuition fees. Greenside University asked potential students to pay a large deposit, and in this case ISSAS, to pay either a full amount or fifty percent of their first year tuition fees. Interestingly in the admission letter there is a clause as one student commented:

In one of the letters I received it said "if you failed to get a visa, you would not get a refund of what you paid to the University. And even if you are refunded, you have to prove that. And then there would be still the administrative charges, so there would not be a full refund anyway.

[Student 9, Gambia]

This shows that potential SSA students in particular, those who fail to obtain a visa experience a double charge causing financial loss, namely the non-refundable visa fee, the University's administration fee and/or the chance of losing the tuition fee deposit. Such double loss on the part of an ISSAS is unbearable, causes more pain to him and the family at large. The issue of visas does not only inconvenience students but universities as well, as narrated in the following account. The student had to go

on a different course altogether because a number of the expected students were denied visas.

> *Denial of visas has affected universities as well. For example the course I applied for back home was changed when I came here because there were few of us and hence I was asked to do another course. The other students who were accepted did not get their visas, we were told. This programme has since been removed because of the limited number of students on the course in this university.*

[Student 41, Zimbabwe]

From the quotations above it is possible to conclude that many ISSAS undergo a long and complex visa application process before they get permission to enter the UK. Part of the ISSAS transition is to get to the UK but the process challenges their rights and very often they are denied a student visa. While there may be a few students who obtain the visa within a short space of time, the general view is that the ISSAS have to wait longer and there is no guarantee of obtaining a student visa (Lipset, 2009). ISSAS visa applications are assessed by the British personnel who may have limited knowledge about the culture and systems of a country; they use the UK bureaucratic standards to ensure the individual meets specific visa eligibility requirements which may not be applicable in most of African countries. These may include a birth certificate, a bank account, a home address etc. With such demands from the UK authority, the ISSAS are compelled to negotiate and renegotiate their entry requirements to the extent of occasionally using false documents.

There will be incidents when ISSAS forge documents. Such incidents of forgery may not be the fault of the students, but the process creates a situation where forgery seems the only way forward. There are different kinds of bureaucracy in the paper work in Africa. Evidence from the interview indicated that not everybody in Africa is issued with a birth certificate. One's birth, especially if born in a remote village,

may not be registered. There is also less consideration given to the fact that this child will one day be required to produce a birth certificate or leave the village to go and study abroad.

> *I had never heard about a birth certificate until I started finding out about coming to the UK to study.*
>
> [Student 14, Sudan]

> *I have never had a birth certificate. I had one done when I was making my application forms. I did not even have a marriage certificate because I married in the village.*
>
> [Student, 10, Gambia]

In comparison with the UK systems, one student commented that the national insurance number equivalent system does not exist in Africa, and one may not even have a home address. The students find themselves in a difficult situation when called on to provide proof of identify and financial situation when applying for a student visa. Because the system demands these documents the African students may create them in a typical, inimitable and pragmatic African way. It may not be that they deliberately want to cheat the system; it is because they want to comply with the system.

The way in which ISSAS perceive the whole process of visa application proves to be a crucial factor which affects their transition. Although this may be perceived generally as a normal transition, in the case of the ISSAS this experience could be described as a bigger or unplanned transition. Such experience stands outside the bounds of ISSAS way of life and is not considered to aid their transition to the UK.

Because of the UK and University bureaucracy, so-called "measures" are put in place to aid ISSAS in obtaining the student visa and ISSAS are made to believe that

these measures work and it is done in the interest of the students. However, the effects of visa application procedures do not make the ISSAS transitional process easier. It is very clear that some of the ISSAS in this study found it hard to get a student visa and support they got from the University was inadequate. In this case the University must take some responsibility to help students in meaningful ways in order to ease the pressure of obtaining the visa. The challenges continue.

5.3 1   Recruitment agents

As already observed the western universities have put some measures in place to assist students with visa applications (UKCISA, 2004). Most of the UK universities have signed up with agents in some African countries to facilitate the visa process. The agents work as advisers or counsellors to help students complete the visa applications and check documents before they are submitted to the British High Commissioner, which should lead to fewer rejections of applications. What seems unclear to potential students is that the agents do not issue visas or influence the outcomes. The final decision comes directly from the British Embassy of the country where the application is made.

The agents represent more than one University and are not employed to work exclusively for one university which also seem unclear to ISSAS. It is noted that Greenside University maintains its links with their agents by regularly visiting and partaking in the recruitment process. In order to continue forging links whilst the Greenside University representatives are in Africa, they invite the British Commissioner in that country to attend the presentations and ask him or her to talk to potential students about what the embassy wants from a visa application, the

documents required, the do's and don'ts, tips and advice of how to use the agents as well.

> *When I got the documents from the international office there was a letter of acceptance to take to the British Council. I told them (International Office) that I had never travelled before; they directed me to an agent for education counselling. They helped me with the checklist and all the accompanying documents.*
>
> [Student 44, Nigeria]

Student 44's reaction to the official letter from the University was to avail himself of an agent. It is clear that a number of agents tend to employ local staff to help the students. Representatives of these agents may or may not have been to the UK nor visited the Universities they represent. Such information is not disclosed to the potential students. While employing the local staff is an advantage to some students who may find it easy to relate to them, the advice they give may not be reliable or valid enough because they would not have travelled to the country in question. The answers they give to some questions may not be fully accurate. Some unsuspecting students, particularly those from rural areas, may be duped by these agents whose validity is difficult to determine, thus resulting in loss of money.

> *I was so naïve about the whole process and the role of agents. I remember giving money to an agent with the hope that she would speed up the process of my application form. I actually got to meet her a couple of weeks after and when I asked her whether my application form was already processed or not, she asked me to give her more money. I felt upset, angry, cheated but could not do anything to this agent.*
>
> [Student 33, Nigeria]

Another student commented that some agents have become money-making businesses, demanding large amounts of money to complete the paperwork required. He added corruption is also rife, with some staff attempting to push one's documents to the top of the list, if some substantial amount of money is paid. They may assure the student that they have a 100% success rate for administering all visa documents

passed through them. The compensation syndrome does not exist in Africa, hence unsuspecting students lose out. A student from Zimbabwe stated that:

> *Corruption does not exist at the British Embassy. It is rife at the agents or British council where a number of local people have been employed as staff. The local staff may demand a sum of money indicating they will help push the documents through or guarantee approval.*
>
> [Student 45, Zimbabwe]

The use of agents in effect shows the vulnerability of ISSAS and naivety of universities. It highlights the dark side of the African systems which most universities may not either know or be unable to challenge. The victims in this process are the ISSAS, who not only aspire to enter the UK but also end up paying exorbitant amounts of money to agents to speed up the process. It is clear from the findings that there is very little knowledge about agents' hidden agendas and what the University or British Embassy does in terms of assisting the students in starting the transition. When ISSAS start processing their documents they are very vulnerable and very often unaware of the process. Hence, the agents take advantage of these susceptible students and dupe them, and neither the UK government nor the University has a say in the mischievousness acts of local agents.

> *When I realised that it was the bribe I had paid, I wrote to the British consulate and the international office here in the UK and explained my predicament, but no one responded to me up to now.*
>
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

5.3.2 Distributed Phenomenon

The ISSAS in this study highlighted the issue of uneven distribution of scholarships across their countries of origin. Some respondents were aware of the meagre scholarships offered to ISSAS by the British Council and non-Government organisations, and pointed out that these were made available to a lucky few and to

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those whose relations had prominent government positions. Note the response from one student to the question on funding:

> *The government does not seem to help the people who need sponsorships; maybe it's to do with the population. In Africa and especially Nigeria, there seems to be no scholarships for people like me, unless you are extremely intelligent. So there are very few people who get scholarships. But the country is rich because of the oil. So if I was in the position I would give people Scholarships for research because it benefits the country.*
>
> <div align="right">[Student 34, Nigeria]</div>

The response asserts a firm notion of corruption that is prevalent in most of the African countries. It indicates transition as a distributed phenomenon. Clearly, it is not just about the country and the University ISSAS are going to, but also the systems and processes in the home country. In this instance, the ease of transition is not just in the control of the University but also in their countries of origin.

From the tone of the response above, there is noticeably an abuse of the sponsorship systems and a misuse of the available resources. Student 34 voices the outcry of all students, who have no access to government scholarships and recognition that scholarships are one of those things which imply "survival of the fittest". He reiterated out of frustration that such selection of individuals for a scholarship:

> *is almost like selection of the purest, choosing the best of the best; the far brighter students are usually offered the scholarships.*
>
> <div align="right">[Student 34, Nigeria]</div>

In his view, there seems to be an element which implies that the more privileged and connected, not necessarily the most intelligent, are offered such scholarships. It is clear from this study that most ISSAS did not fit into this "box" of the privileged ones. They did not have close relatives in government positions to support them in obtaining the scholarships. The financial options these students were left with were

<div align="center">155</div>

to seek financial aid from parents, friends and relations or use their life savings, a decision not taken lightly.

> *I had to spend a fortune to come here. My father is sponsoring me, so it is not what I wanted to do but I had to.*
>
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

> *My dad had to do so much for me to be able to come here. He did not want to owe anything. He wanted to pay my fees so that I could be free to do what I wanted to do.*
>
> [Student 1, Zambia]

The responses show the hardships parents have to undergo. To some degree, the parents would like their children to study in the UK, to get an educational qualification superior to others in the country. Living in obedience to parents and traditions can have a detrimental effect on these students, especially in their transition to the new culture, country and systems. The consequences of this may lead to dropout or changing course in the first few months of their studies in the UK, as noted by Tinto (1987).

In the survey carried out by UKCISA in 2004, it was noted that 75% of foreign students were self-sponsored. This issue is echoed by Ryan & Twibell (2000) who argues that foreign students often have to borrow money from friends and relatives in order to pay the tuition fees and other expenses. This puts much pressure on ISSAS in terms of studying and searching for ways of paying back their sponsors during their studies and on return to their countries (ibid).

In this study, it is clear that the majority of ISSAS were self-sponsored and others borrowed money from relations to cover the cost of tuition. But it is also presumed

by the sponsors, including family, that the students would work to supplement their studies and that they would also send money back home.

> *I wanted to come to study here in the UK but I did not have sufficient money for both fees and upkeep, so I borrowed money from uncle who is expecting to be repaid as soon as I finish my course.*
>
> [Student 2, Zambia]

> *The decision to come here was determined by the financial situation. My cousin and friends put some aside for me and paid half of my fees. I know I owe lots of money which my people are expecting soon.*
>
> [Student 19, Ghana]

> *I do not know how I am going to pay back the money I got from friends to come here. Soon they will be asking for their money back. I have to get a job. The Agents back home assured me that jobs are available for students. Is it true? If I do not get a job quickly, my friends will never trust me. I am hoping that I can find a job quickly. I do not want to let my friends down.*
>
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

The students' responses indicate that the money they borrowed has to be repaid gradually and this is a major issue which can have an adverse effect associated with adjustment. At this stage, the students would not understand the implications of finding a well paid job and studying until they actually gain one in the UK. The pressure and the burden of sending money home will start building up and this could lead to giving up the course and suspending study in order to work.

One student concluded that although it may be difficult to leave family, the people back home have the comfort of knowing that their lives are going to be better off, after their child has completed the course.

> *When they (people in the student's local area) talk about the money one can make when they come to the UK, one would think it 'grows on trees', but the reality is that it is those jobs that most people hate that one has to work long hard hours.*
>
> [Student 48, Zimbabwe]

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Making reference to what Student 48 from Zimbabwe might have heard from other students who are or have studied in the UK, it suggests that the money ISSAS work for doing manual jobs may seem little but when it is sent back home and converted in the local currency, it is a lot of money.

> *The people who receive the money back home end up living a better comfortable life than those who send the money to them. Money can be sent to a household that has up to 5-7 people or in some cases more, and not one of them works, they will all be living comfortably from the money they receive from the UK.*
>
> [Students 48, Zimbabwe]

5.3.3 Farewell

Leaving home to travel to university creates excitement and worries for both parents and their children. It is common practice in Western society to have a send-off party or meal and to say goodbye to friends and family before being accompanied to university and to the respective accommodation. This process may be considered a good way of helping the student in their transition. However, the findings from this study paint a different picture when it comes to preparation and farewell for ISSAS. Most of the students in the study did not have enough time to prepare nor have a send off party due to a number of reasons. For those who had a send-off, necessity dictated that it was on a small scale because of financial constraints and fears of how their communities would react to their leaving.

> *Only mum and dad knew I was going until I got a visa, so I told my closest friends a week before I left. I didn't tell the extended family despite living in a close community. If I had told them, they would have said "why do you want to go there, just get a job.' But my dad understood what my dream was. I did not want any friction in relationships with other people in my family.*
>
> [Student 34, Nigeria]

Some of the respondents would have liked to have a small function to celebrate with friends and families before departure to the Western world but certain issues would

not allow this. It has already been made clear in this study that the time taken to gather all the required documentation, complete and submit the application forms and have them approved is a lengthy process. There was always the concern that there was no guarantee that the visa application would be successful. Some students felt that there was no need to tell anybody in case of jealous tendencies, while others did not pursue the idea of a farewell party for fear of being bewitched. There were still others who feared leaving their people behind, and could not bear the sense of loss of family and friends.

> *I was scared of telling people that I was leaving because some people in my village practice witchcraft and it is very easy to bewitch people.*
>
> [Student 21, South Africa]

> *I could not tell anyone because I was not sure whether I was coming or not to the UK. Besides, some of my colleagues at work were jealous when I accidentally told them that I was planning to apply for a place in a UK University.*
>
> [Student 19, Ghana]

> *I had to make up my mind either to stay with my own people or go to pursue my studies overseas. It was a hard decision and I did not fancy telling the wider community in case they said no. This makes me feel sad.*
>
> [Student 20, Ghana]

At this stage of transition, which requires letting go of the old situation (Bridges, 2003), the ISSAS started thinking about the loss of the people close to them and the community at large (Hosftede, 1991), as voiced by Student 20 from Ghana. They had to go through a stage of push and pull (Bridges, 2003) knowing that they had to leave the familiar for the unfamiliar environment, a decision not taken lightly. A wide range of emotional feelings (Evans et al., 1998) came into their decision-making (Maringe & Carter, 2007). This represents a parallel of the transition experience and the work of negotiating identity – happy and excited but also fearful

of judgement. It seems that for the transition to be successful the good has to outweigh the bad.

There is often no one to accompany them to the airport and the experience of not having a close relation to say goodbye could also distort the whole process of transition. In some cases, the last image they may have of their families or community attachment will be from a bus, or from the window of somebody's car from the village giving them a lift to the airport, who may not be pleased that they are leaving.

> *The most painful experience was the time I left home for the first time accompanied by no family member to the airport. I knew my parents could not afford to pay for both mine and their transport. At the time I did not mind at all but now I feel so ashamed and angry to say the least, that neither my mother nor father dropped me off at the airport. It is not fair – I am not happy about the whole experience.*
>
> [Student 11, Sudan]

Student 11 from Sudan depicts the ISSAS feelings of separation and loss of family ties which emerged as one of the students' concerns. All respondents in the study seem to have a generally high regard to family ties that goes far beyond the nuclear family.

Strong family ties and the importance of extended families, as already discussed in Chapter 4, are taken into account before any decision to leave the community is made. Besides their personal background and educational experiences, many of the respondents in this study acknowledged their families were under great strain to let them leave and travel outside the country.

> *Before my parents said 'yes' you can go and study in the UK, they sent me to my grandparents for our tribal rituals where they poured the herbs and asked the spirits if they would let me leave the family home for a specified period of time. With my grandparents' and ancestral blessings I was allowed to leave the home.*
>
> [Student 33, Nigeria]

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It was noted that families were constantly inundated with a variety of decision making responsibilities which form part of the African community setting. In essence, the elders make the final decisions and no one in the community may oppose them. However, there was also a degree of family and community encouragement to pursue studies abroad.

A crucial phase acknowledged by ISSAS in the study was the decision to leave the familiar environment such as the family, village, friends and jobs to go to an unfamiliar environment. Van Gennep (1960) views this stage as a separation. He contends that such movement is essential if something different is to happen, but can be difficult to contain. For an African student a decision made by the family members and elders is considered a blessing as commented by Students 30 and 40.

> *I am pleased that the grandparents blessed me before I came otherwise I would have had misfortune.*
>
> [Student 30, Nigeria]

> *It is not common practice in my tribe to let the young people go to places far from their homes. The elders have the right to either say yes go or stay here until you are old enough to look after yourself. However, I have been one of the lucky children in the family to be given this opportunity to come and study here in the UK. I consider it to be a blessing not only for me but for my family at large. Hence I owe my parents a lot.*
>
> [Student 40, Kenya]

> *I know coming here to study is a good thing, but I can't see myself finishing the three years studying and having no direct contact with my parents. Surely leaving the people at home for this length of time is going to have an impact on my life.*
>
> [Student 9, Gambia]

For students from SSA countries the process of undertaking studies in a UK University can be complex and lengthy. It requires personal, family or employers' decisions. Initially, negotiations and re-negotiations between a potential candidate

and family members or employers have to take place to enable him or her to embark on this long process (Tinto, 1987). As shown by the response of Student 40 above, this may be in terms of seeking permission to leave the family and/or the village for the first time, coupled with asking for financial assistance, obtaining permission to take temporary absence or to resign from a job, searching for sponsorship, making a decision to borrow money from friends and immediate relations or to use their savings.

Because the ISSAS have been longing to get their visa, the effects can be both exciting and painful. The practices such as saying goodbye to the family and community which would have helped in their transitional process are often not implemented for ISSAS. This may be due to individual circumstances. In Bridges (2003) view, the failure to get ready for endings is one of the largest difficulties individuals encounter in any transition. In the case of ISSAS, this is the first family and community loss they experience in their transition which at no point is revisited during their educational experiences. It is not part of the tutors or university's policy to examine the transitional experiences of these students. However, if this loss is not attended to it can jeopardise the students' academic and social transition and eventually result in stress (Evan et al., 1998).

From the quotations above, it is clear that ISSAS in this study experienced a double loss that is of separation and loss of family. Although some ISSAS received blessings and permission from their relations to leave the county and community, it did not prevent them from feeling this loss. This was evidenced during the interview when some ISSAS cried when they were talking about how much they missed their

families. The attachment ISSAS have towards their families does not ease their transition in a new environment. Most ISSAS said they preferred to keep quiet about their loss which to some extent affected their academic, physical and social adjustment.

5.3.4 Trip and leaving

For most fortunate ISSAS who have been waiting a long time to enter the UK, the effect of a visa is considered to be "good news". It means "getting ready and going", leaving at once what they have been doing and starting on a long and challenging journey. Such moving away from the familiar may seem trivial and neither the UK government nor Greenside University systems aid students in this transition process as one student commented.

> *Neither the UK government nor the University is bothered about the journey we had. No one seems to show any interest in us. I guess we have to live and learn everything in a hard way.*
>
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

The home airport is the first place where the validity of the visa is checked. ISSAS, like any other passengers travelling abroad, have to go through security checks, body searches, X-ray machines and a third search if they are flying to the UK. Due to the 9/11 bombings in America, and the 7/7 London bombings, new sets of border controls have been put in place in every country, in particular the Western countries. With such tight borders, it is not uncommon to go through the passport controls three times at the home airport to ensure the students have valid visas and are not carrying anything dangerous. One student commented that she experienced three checks:

> *The first check in South Africa is to make sure you are not bringing any bombs to the airport and going to blow up the airport or the security at the home country. The second check is that you are not a threat to the aeroplane*

and fellow passengers and the third one is that you can comply with the UK regulation and not be a threat to the UK.

[Student 21, South Africa]

Because of the excitement of getting a visa and leaving the country, some students do not check properly whether their student visa has a seal or not. As a result when they arrive at the airport they are not allowed to board a plane. One disappointed student stated that:

> *I was issued a visa by the British Embassy in my country but they forgot to put a seal in my visa. When I arrived at the Airport check-in, I was refused a boarding pass. I had to collect my suitcase, hire a taxi back to the British Embassy to get a seal on my visa. Although I had missed the flight, I told the officials at the British Embassy that I could not wait for another day because my course had already started, so they arranged for me another flight to the UK.*

[Student 25, Uganda]

The issue raised by Student 25 can be seen as incompetence on the part of the British Embassy for not issuing the visa with a seal, but it is also incumbent on the student to check. It seems the student had to pay unexpected expenses which were not reimbursed by the Embassy despite it being their oversight in the first place. Such situations show clearly how the potential students are less informed about the kind of visa they are issued with. The universities have a duty of care for students coming to study with them but that often does not happen and the students are alone to face the different challenges.

The departure fee is another issue, which if ISSAS have no relatives or friends that have travelled before, they may not be aware of it.

> *I did not know about the departure fee. I did not even have the money to pay. This caused me so much stress because even my father, who had escorted me, did not have any money on him. I had to dig for money I had sealed and hidden to pay for my tuition fee. I almost missed my flight.*

[Student 6, Zambia]

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Such experience of a Zambian student is not uncommon for ISSAS students who have never had an opportunity of leaving the country or who do not have bank accounts. Being at the airport is like being in a "no man's land" (Bridges, 2003) where things seem to be unreal. It feels as if one is shut off from the outside world with no free will, and one can neither go back nor forward, unless one is being told to do so or when the announcement says, "board your plane." One has to rush in the queue not knowing what to expect in the aeroplane, a challenge for the ISSAS students in this study. The boarding of the plane and leaving the country marks the end of the home transition and the beginning of another transition. This is echoed by Bridges (2003) who argues that once one transition ends a new transition commences. In the context of ISSAS, the first hurdle of leaving the country, which is epitomised by gaining a visa, is over but there awaits another challenge at the ISSAS destination in terms of the validity of their visa and other documentation. It opens up another dimension of the ISSAS transition process, as one student summed up the feelings:

> *I had never flown out of my country before, hence I was filled with many feelings about the journey and what was awaiting me. I was coming to England. I had wanted to come to the UK a number of times but never had an opportunity or the money. When the opportunity emerged, I did not let it slip through my fingers. So I proudly boarded the plane, put my head down, and closed my eyes as we flew off leaving my beloved motherland Africa.*

[Student 5, Zambia]

Clearly, Student 5 talks about all the apprehension that comes with a new experience of leaving the familiar and the associated loss of moving forward. Bridges (2003), as noted in Chapter 2, talks about the fear of letting go of the old situation and the strong attachment to the past, which seems to be in line with the ISSAS experiences. It is a contemplative moment where an ISSAS intuitively experiences fear and

excitement of leaving Africa for the first time to embrace new and transitional challenges (ibid).

Having gone through the decision-making process about where to study, making the application and being successful, students are now faced with challenges that will make the transition a reality.

5.4   Bureaucratic Selection

University choice emerged as one of the themes in this study. Generally, international student aspirations to join a Western university are based on location, city, academic course and the reputation of the university (Pimpa, 2003), course suitability, academic reputation and teaching quality (Souter & Turner, 2002). For the ISSAS, factors include national and international recognition, quality of teaching, learning opportunities and easy job applications (Maringe & Carter, 2007). As already observed in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, UK universities have invested so many resources in terms of attracting international students (Barron, 2005). They use various and complex methods such as the internet, alumni and bursaries to attract overseas students (Nworah, 2006 & Harris, 1997). In addition, they employ recruitment agents to provide extra information about the UK courses in order to increase the flow of foreign students (Altbach, 1998).

Without doubt, such investment in international students has benefits for these universities in terms of revenue and interaction with other cultures. This can only be fruitful if the international students decide to submit applications to HE institutions of their choices, to get the offer and accept it.

Universities have measures in place to ensure that the students they select have the required entry points or equivalent, a good command of English and a high IELTS score (Hyland et al. 2008). Those with lower scores are expected to retake the test. These tests are offered by the British Council in respective countries. Some students in the study had the required level of English but had to undertake the ELTS or TOEFL qualifications to prove that they meet certain standards of English language.

> *I sat for the test at the British Council in my country because the university wanted me to have at least a grade 5.5 score. I got a 6.5. The British embassy had included it as one document I should show. It is expensive and I had to look for money again which was annoying because I had a merit at GCSE in English so what was the point.*
>
> [Student 3, Zambia]

Having gone through the application process when faced with selection and given the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will get the place, they will often see the first response as the only answer. They will send out many applications and the university that responds first is the one the student decides to join.

> *For most African students time influences their choice of the university. I chose this university based on the response I received from the International Office. It was instantaneous and encouraging and that is why I followed it to the letter. Like, I made many enquiries from four other UK universities but the response was poor.*
>
> [Student 46, Zimbabwe]

> *Other UK universities did not take me first time and it was this university that offered me a place and that is why I came.*
>
> [Student 13, Sudan]

Judging from the responses given, ISSAS have limited choices of Western universities. As soon as ISSAS send their application forms to the respective universities, they become powerless to the extent that they cannot apply for a student visa or make any travelling arrangements. In this respect, Greenside University is

powerful in determining the ISSAS academic future. This University can decide to open or close the doors for ISSAS and whatever decision is reached it cannot be refuted by these students. The University's decision is always final; they have the "key" to open the doors and there is no recourse for students regarding the decisions the University might make in terms of choices of students. Whichever university offers them a place, it is the one they choose without further thought. In such circumstances, it can be high risk in their decision-making and detrimental in their transitional process. It may also have a detrimental educational impact in terms of course choices.

5.5   Summary

What really comes to the fore in this chapter is each student's determination to come to study in the UK university system. That speaks loudly of letting go of all their familiarities to delve into an unfamiliar environment. A lot of students have demonstrated that they decided to come to the UK because the education system is more respected and is expected to be a passport to a better working life in Africa. However, they have also shown that the UK was not their first choice in some cases. This shows how a quick response from a UK university helps the student make the UK a first choice. The lack of thought on the choice of the university has its own implications for the student.

The visa challenge is one that stands out as a road block affecting a number of students and the universities as well. The stress the whole process may cause the applicants may never be understood nor well explained by the African students due to language limitations and cultural differences. The documentation requirements

and other issues surrounding the process need clarification due to the cost involved. This includes clear communication between the student and the university in question. The use of agents in this process is an efficient operation. However, due to corruption and fraudulent activities in some countries concerning the agents, the universities should take more responsibility for management of agents.

From the findings and discussion in this chapter, many SSA students see the decision to study in a UK university as the way forward and are prepared to subject themselves to separation, forgery, difficult visa processes and to travelling huge distances in pursuit of what they consider to be the right qualification for them and their family's future. The influence the family has on the choice of the university and the country, show how important family ties are on an individual. This leads onto another transitional experience of studying in the UK. The students have demonstrated that the transitional process is not an easy one. It is crowded with so much apprehension, anxiety and fear, although they go through it with so much determination.

Chapter Six

TRANSITION IN THE UK AND AT THE UNIVERSITY

6.1   Introduction

This chapter continues the discussion and findings pertaining to ISSAS transitional experiences. It focuses on the wider government's bureaucracy and its impact on ISSAS and then moves to Greenside University and the community surrounding the University. In view of this, the study explores the social and academic issues and how these impact on ISSAS transition. In the course of their studies ISSAS have to negotiate and renegotiate their experiences continuously in order to learn and to experience a sense of belonging.

Moving from one country to another for the first time can create a number of challenges for the students. Some of the challenges are a distraction but some are legitimate and may result in positive identity shifts. Furthermore, these challenges may be due to not knowing what to expect at the place of destination or may be created by anxiety over the anticipated changes. In the case of ISSAS, the move from the familiar to an unfamiliar environment could be one of the first big transitions which they have experienced in their life-time.

The issues surrounding the transition in the UK will be discussed in relation to their first experience at the airport. This will lead to a discussion of the university transition which is central to students' overall experiences in this study. Linked to the students' transitions is a discussion of the themes around the social experiences namely: accommodation, friends, loneliness and homesickness. In addition to the

ISSAS transition, like any other international student is their academic experiences which involve the induction, classroom, teaching methods, working with other students and how ISSAS handle the practices which construct and deconstruct their transition to university life and in particular Greenside University

This chapter will follow the same codes used in the previous chapters to identify the respondents in the study.

6.2　The transition at the UK port of entry

An emerging theme linked to being in the UK is the ISSAS first transition experience that they experience at the UK port of entry such as border control, custom and excise and the airport lounge. All ISSAS in the study travelled directly from their countries of origin, were unaccompanied, newly-arrived and it was their first time being in the UK. Thus, their memories of the first encounter in the UK were still fresh and they were able to narrate their transitional experiences openly.

6.2.1　So near, So far - Border Control

At a port of entry, all travellers or goods must receive permission to either enter or leave the country under official supervision. What emerged in the study is that every international student entering the country will have to go through check points before being granted permission to enter the UK. For most of the international students this will be their very first transition experience being in the UK after disembarking from an aeroplane or ship.

The reception an individual wishing to gain entry to UK will have at the port of entry is often subject to the relationship that exists between Britain and the individual's country of origin. It will also depend on the type of visa the individual is travelling on (Karanja, 2008). Business people will be treated with extreme tact and gentleness, but some international students are viewed with scepticism (UKBA, 2010). Such scepticism comes from a number of assumptions made by border control staff. This perhaps includes their personal and professional perception in this case that most international students do not return to their motherlands after graduation and that they gain entry to the UK not to pursue their studies but to concentrate on work. These are based on the myths that grow out of the way and how the press deals with immigration. It is also believed that some students come under false pretences and often end up seeking refuge after their visa expires (ibid).

Most ISSAS find the first reception at the port of entry that is passport control not only unfriendly and authoritarian but also quite daunting. This is not an unusual transitional experience for anyone entering border control. However, what is different for this particular group of students is that they are judged on two things namely: that they are ISSAS and that they are coming from developing economies (Neumayer, 2006). It also becomes an issue of whether they have the right visa. This form of procedure that is bureaucratic affects their initial transitional experience in the UK.

Highlighted in the interviews is that at the port of entry ISSAS have to prove beyond reasonable doubt that their University is recognised in the UK, their intended area of study is not offered in their country and that they have a legal place at the University.

Africans, and in particular ISSAS, are usually checked thoroughly and, in some cases, they could be subjected to detention for some time whilst immigration officers make enquiries to validate the visas, their educational institutions, where they are going and who they will be staying with and how long they will be in the UK (see Student 4 from Zambia).

This leads to the feeling by many that every African is treated like a suspect of some sort or other when they first enter the UK. The way an ISSAS is treated and the subsequent follow up is subject to these misconceptions (see Students 4, 29 from Zambia and Nigeria).

Some of the respondents had, from the researcher's analysis, the most horrendous experiences at this transition stage of entry into the UK which could haunt them throughout their stay in the UK, University and beyond. Detailed below are some of the students' first-time transition experiences with the UK border control:

> *When I came I was led into a room whilst they said they needed to make some inquires. They asked me so many questions about myself, my life and also about my brother who was waiting for me in the arrival lounge. I was going to live with my brother for a short period of time before going to the University. Most of the answers that I gave they wanted to see if my brother would say the same so as to try and catch that we were lying and may not be related. Personally I think the way we are treated is not right and it breeds negative attitudes on both sides. Most of the people that I know have had negative experiences at the hands of the immigration authorities. We definitely are not VIPs!!*
>
> [Student 4, Zambia]

> *I spent hours at the airport being questioned and that really frustrated me. I think my country helped build this country, but you are treated as not even a second class citizen. In Africa white people are respected, just because of their skin colour, no matter whether they are educated or not. And here, they look at you like you are nothing, and it annoys me.*
>
> [Student 29, Nigeria]

The UK border control treatment as reported by Student 4 portrays a commonality with most of the ISSAS that took part in this study and highlights their transitional experiences. It shows what they felt and what the researcher believes to be an emotional and psychological abuse. It has also nurtured in these ISSAS a deep-seated distrust of UK immigration processes. Students 4 and 29 indicate that ISSAS are treated as "third" class citizens in a country that colonised them. From the tone of their voices, the responses show anger and resentment not only with migration officers but also with the country that was their master for so many years. Such treatment affects their transition and adds to their uncertainty of what lies ahead. A negative picture is painted as one student commented:

> *Countries like UK do not have a welcome sign for the African students. No one at the immigration desk seemed to care about the people who were in the same queue like me, a black student and non-EU national. The UK that is renowned for its hospitality does not seem to be the same country the African students are prepared to spend the next three years of their academic endeavours.*

> [Student 50, Cameroon]

Generally, Student 50, like many other ISSAS, found the immigration to be not a particularly friendly place. His experience is significantly different from other international students as it shows the lack of consideration for visitors on the part of immigration officials who are meant to be first contact when one lands in a foreign country. Having had this negative experience the students are left with a feeling that the hospitality they were led to believe they would receive before leaving their home country is not going to be a reality. The reality narrated at the UK border control is one of the initial transitions that most students have to face in a foreign country. Incidentally, these students would not only have gone through the experience of transition in their own countries but would have gone to the great expense of paying

the visa at the British embassy before coming to the UK. They would have already had the application closely scrutinised by the British embassies in their home country. Their cases would have been looked into already before they were issued visas and upon arrival the visas were being reviewed yet again. ISSAS go through a double scrutiny and this may not only cause a devastating impact on their transition, but also make them a distinct group of students. One student commented in simple terms that:

> *The immigration process is set up for people to fail. My visa would have been enough to justify that I am a genuine student.*
>
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

As observed, the entry into the UK is not straightforward, especially for SSA students. From the findings, it is clear that there is nothing that prepares the SSA students for the scrutiny of their documents, luggage and the way they are looked at (skin colour) at the border control. In addition, nothing is stipulated in the pre-preparation pack to prepare them for either the behaviour shown or the prejudices some officials may have. Students have to rely on unsubstantiated information gathered from their countries of origin, and which is probably contrary to their experience at border control.

> *When I got my UK visa after being rejected three times, I was convinced that everything would be ok and when I was checked at the airport in my country I thought am now a UK student. Nobody told me back home that I would be scrutinised at the UK airport. In actual fact, I was asked so many questions and my documents scrutinised by customs officers at the airport. I felt angry and at some point, I thought why they do not send me back home.*
>
> [Student 31, Nigeria]

> *Before I left my country, a friend advised me to keep all other documents secure preferably in my suitcase except the passport, admission letter and flight tickets, which I did. On arrival at the UK passport control, the officer who checked my passport asked for additional documents, namely a letter confirming my accommodation, tuition fees, certificates of prior education etc. When I told him that there were in my suitcase, he changed the tone of his voice. He made me look stupid in front of all other passengers.*
>
> [Student, 18, Ghana]

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I was told back home that once you have a student visa, you are treated well at the UK airport but that was not the case, as I was treated as if I had committed a crime. The officer fired me with so many questions which I never anticipated. I wish someone had warned me. May be I would have been more prepared.

[Student, 31, Nigeria]

The whole experience at the UK port of entry impacts on the students' transitional process. Some ISSAS had to show proof that they had paid part of the tuition fee and others had to show additional documents. It was clear from the findings that such documents were packed securely and accessing them readily may have taken some time. Prior information would help minimise the anxieties and apprehension that accompanies these checks and could ensure a smooth transition for these students.

These ISSAS experience at the border control is the first phase of their big transition into being in the UK. Because of rigorous scrutiny and the attitudes of immigration officials, these experiences leave the students scarred with negative feelings and questions of who they really are for example who are we (Phillips, 2002) part of things, do others care about us and make us feel we matter. At the same time, they may be asking why they chose to come to the UK. The next transition phase is their experience at customs and excise.

6.2.2   Customs and Excise

In some cases, ISSAS having cleared border control and in particular the passport control may believe this to be the end of the official entry process into the UK. This may be the reality for most travellers from other countries too, but for some of these students it is the contrary as they have yet to face another official challenge and unplanned stage of transition. ISSAS will have to pass through customs and excise

where they face a different type of scrutiny, that of having their possessions and luggage checked. Passing through customs and excise appears formal in the main with these inscriptions and colour signs "Declare" (Red) or "Nothing to Declare" (Green). Most people head for the "Nothing to Declare" sign without knowing that the host country has the liberty to spot and search anyone deemed to be carrying something unusual.

The passing through of luggage at customs and excise appears to be for only those who import and export goods. Most people seem to pass easily through the "Nothing to Declare" exit but not some ISSAS. Like any other travellers, the ISSAS in this research headed for the Green sign, the "Nothing to Declare". However, some were stopped, searched and let go as one student commented:

> *After 8 hours in the air I arrived at (M) Airport. The University had assured me of someone waiting for me upon arrival. I collected my luggage proudly. I was in the UK, I told myself. As I proudly pulled my suitcase away heading for the way out, I was stopped by a lady in uniform who introduced herself that she was with the security and was working for the airport. I looked around and noticed I was the only one stopped. I had talked to someone on the plane and they had promised to take me down to where the university person would be waiting for me and if they will not be there he was ready to help me get to my destination. He was told to go as this lady opened my suitcase explaining that it was routine. What wrong have I done, I thought over and over again. I could not ask her because she said it was routine. My belongings were lifted out of the suitcase, shook and placed aside attracting the attention of passer bys. I was panicking, sweating and embarrassed. 'What crime have I committed?' I finally asked. 'No crime.' She answered casually. She called out to her friend and said, 'look how much a small suitcase can carry. Okay, you can pack your bag and go.' So they both left, leaving me to re-pack my suitcase.*
>
> [Student 5, Zambia]

It is clear that like most of the passengers she had travelled with, Student 5 headed for the "nothing to declare" exit feeling positive that she was now in the UK, only to be detained. This student was subject to three negative experiences which

traumatised her: 1) The opening and searching of her bag in public; this was totally a "humiliating experience"; 2) Somebody was with her who would have made her transition a much nicer experience because they were prepared to help her, but were told to carry on. The lifeline she had was suddenly no longer there; 3) She had no knowledge on why she was detained because she was the only one singled out – could it have been because she was "black"? Throughout her ordeal she questioned whether this was the kind of welcome she deserved. She was made to feel "inferior" and marginal (Phillips, 2002).

In addition to the negativity experienced by ISSAS at border control, there was a common feeling that the immigration process has been set up with the intention of failing people, as was noted earlier by Student 25 from Nigeria. Another student from Ghana commented that:

> *Well, when I landed at the UK airport, it took me several hours just to get through the Customs and Immigration. While I was waiting I distinctly heard 2 immigration officers stating that they needed 15 more people to send back. This was as if they wanted to meet a target but I thought it wasn't right mentioning it in front of me. The whole immigration process was not a good experience.*
>
> [Student 20, Ghana]

The reported conduct of the immigration official by Student 20 raises further issues around whether border controls are meant to deter particular groups of people from entering the country (Anderson, 2009) or whether it is about ticking boxes and filling quotas. Generally, ISSAS have a negative connotation that officials are sceptical about them based on their personal experiences.

> *I think there is a negative attitude towards African people. They don't see you as a person but just as someone poor and not intelligent; they don't expect anything from you.*
>
> [Student 46, Zimbabwe]

Although the majority of the students had a bad experience of the airport, there were those in this study who stated that they had a "lucky" experience.

> *I think I was lucky, I arrived at the Airport on Sunday morning, so maybe they were tired, because what I have heard is that they check your passport, check your luggage with dogs, but I did not experience any of that. So my first arrival, everything was ok.*
>
> [Student 40, Kenya]

Clearly, Student 40 had heard about the various checks that are carried out at the airport and some of the methods that were used. He viewed the lucky experience as a surprise in light of the things he heard back home. What was different for him is that he came in on Sunday which suggests that there were fewer flights and reduced personnel at the immigration checkpoint. Student 40's observation raises the question whether immigration differs on a Sunday; whether this is a day when there are less flights and rules relaxed or whether this is a day when there are less officials on duty with a more relaxed attitude, or officials with less training, less experience or with a less prejudiced or jaundiced view.

Most students in this research had negative views of their official encounters at the airport. To some students, their start in the UK has been clouded by this experience. These ISSAS arrive into the UK at a time when they are most vulnerable, tired, frustrated and naive. On arrival they start to realise that there is no going back and they are travel weary. This experience, however, marks only the start of their bigger transition being in the UK.

6.2.3 Outside the of port of entry

What emerged in the interviews is that another phase of transition exists; that is, the experience of leaving the port of entry. Generally, international students arrive at the airport hoping to find a family member, friend or someone from the respective university waiting for them. Some make all the necessary arrangements to ensure this happens, while others have different experiences. It is common practice for UK universities to have a representative, a member from the international office or union, waiting for the new students at the port of entry to ease their transition. In turn, it is also the students' responsibility to inform the international office of their arrival date, time, and plane number. This information is provided in the pre-arrival pack and on the internet but can be overlooked by students coping with huge transition issues during the lead up to their departure, or if posted, it may not have been received prior to the departure. However the reality does not always meet the students' expectations especially when their arrival time is overlooked. The vast majority of ISSAS in this study expressed their disappointment when they were inside and outside the port of entry. Their expectations of meeting someone from the university were very high. Much to their dismay, there was no one from Greenside University waiting for them despite having provided travel details prior to arrival. The findings from this study indicate that despite their individual experiences, most of ISSAS encountered difficulties, coupled with negative feelings, abandonment, a state of confusion and isolation whilst at the UK port of entry.

> *I had a very unpleasant experience the first time I came here. There was nobody from the University waiting for me despite completing the form online. I was confused, disturbed and angry. I did not know what to do. I was compelled to ask other passengers for other means of transport to the University.*
>
> [Student 49, Angola]

I was assured that there was going to be transport from the airport to the university. Because of the delay of the plane, I arrived three hours later. By the time I arrived, I guess the organised transport had gone. I was perturbed because I had not the slightest idea where I was going and how to catch any other means of transport. It was a painful day, an experience I will never forget.

[Student 13, Sudan]

I can't believe why nobody was waiting for me at the airport. I informed the university about the arrival date and time. I guess there is lack of communication in the international office.

[Student 36, Nigeria]

The transition experience of the above students questions the roles and responsibilities of International Office at Greenside University. In the absence of proper systems, ISSAS find themselves in the process of survival mode, which Schlossberg et al. (1995) describe as "moving through" the experience of disorientation which is particularly stressful in a new environment or culture.

Due to long processes at the border control, which the UK does not acknowledge as an inconvenience, one student who had hoped to be helped by a fellow passenger she had met on the plane was very disappointed (see Student 5 from Zambia). When she got out of the airport, the person she had talked with on the plane had gone which added to her stressful experience. The student had earned herself a friend and a contact person to help her through this part of the transition process but, by the time she had cleared border control, collected her luggage, passed through customs, it was too late and the friend had gone.

I got out an hour later. My new friend had left. He could not wait for that long. I was stranded at the airport only to leave five hours late. No one from the university was there to wait for me. I was hungry, angry and afraid. The people looked unfriendly and busy with their own programmes. Right away I had a strong instinct - I wanted to go back home, I want to fly back home, I was home sick. The exciting feeling left me feeling very apprehensive and fearful of what else would be awaiting me in this land I had for so long looked forward to. A journey I have both regretted and appreciated started badly. [Student 5, Zambia]

One student used his initiative to hire private transport to the university. However, the experience left him shaken

> *After seven hours flight from Africa to (M) airport, I went outside the airport building to get a taxi. But I remembered what my mum advised me to do; to bargain and to ask for discount on everything in the UK. She said that "if the taxi driver says he going to charge for example 20 pounds from the airport to the students' residence give him or her just half the price, but unfortunately her advice would not work in the United Kingdom. The most ridiculous thing happened when I tried to bargain with the taxi driver and to negotiate the price. The taxi-driver's reaction was so funny, he threw away my suitcase. So I realized that people here don't accept bargains and mostly all the prices are fixed.*

[Student 9, Gambia]

Student 9's experience as a result of advice given by the mother highlights the differences between cultures and the difficulties of cultural change. One's previous culture cannot apply in a different country altogether (Hofstede, 1991). While the mother did the best she could, given little or no knowledge at all of the foreign country to advise her child, it did not apply to the circumstances he found himself in. He would have been equipped to deal with the situation had he been advised by the University who were better placed to provide information to the student. Alternative information in case of any arising circumstances should also be given to aid transition inside and outside of port of entry.

Here, the respondents clearly highlighted the transitional dilemmas in the first phase of their entry into the UK. It indicates that the majority of ISSAS leave their countries unaccompanied by parents, friends or family member and have no means of knowing other students going to Greenside University. They rely heavily on information given by the University's International Office, Students' Union, friends or family members, to ease the transition. Subsequently, information rendered that has been given inaccurately, leads to feelings of anger, frustration and feeling

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unwelcome. What should have been a life-time experience of positive memories after landing on British soil becomes a horrible and negative experience.

For the students met at the port of entry, it is a different experience altogether. As shown from the following experience, it raises one's self esteem, assures one's security and is evidence of having been properly welcomed.

> *I was very proud of myself. I felt welcomed. I was so excited when I saw this lady with my name on a card. I gave her a hug. We have since been friends.*
> [Student 48, Zimbabwe]

> *Fortunately one of the lecturers from the School of Education was very sympathetic. When I arrived at Manchester Airport, there was transport waiting for me. It took me straight to the halls of residence. I guess if there was no organised means of transport, I don't know what I would have done!*
> [Student 17, Ghana]

In this section, a number of themes emerged as students arrived for the first time in the UK. A large group of ISSAS felt ill-prepared, unable to cope and not fully oriented which did not establish a positive welcome to the UK. Lack of adequate information about what is expected at the border control, the experience of being singled out and finding no one to meet them did not aid their transition instead it added to their frustration. Clearly, ISSAS' experiences at the port of entry include transition issues such as prejudice, fear, neglect and feeling criminalised. Because of the huge aspirations of being in the UK and studying, they were not deterred from continuing their journey to the University.

The emerging themes included the nightmare journey to Greenside University and the different levels of resilience despite the challenges of ISSAS life experiences. The journey from a local port of entry to Greenside University is about 50 miles, an hour and half on the train or an hour by road or by organised University transport.

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For some ISSAS, the journey took longer than expected, as stated by the Nigerian student.

> *I arrived at 8 am at (M) airport and was only able to arrive at the University at 4pm, hungry, tired and angry.*
>
> [Student 34, Nigeria]

It is a daunting experience to spend unnecessary hours on the journey that should have taken a shorter time in a foreign country. It is a disorientating experience and can have a major devastating impact on their transition process. For the ISSAS who travelled by public transport, their experience was influenced by preconceived ideas based on their general perception of transport in their own country.

> *Trains in my country are not reliable, so when I was advised to take a train from the airport to the university, I just said wait a minute…what? When was I going to arrive? I did not want another 9 hours en route to the university. I was tired. Now listen, on the train this lady came with some merchandise. She went; 'do you want a coffee, or tea love?' I was hungry so I thought well; they have the same services as on the plane so I got myself a tea and some crisps. She came later asking for money. What? Why didn't she say she was selling? I hadn't even changed my money into pounds except what I used to board the train. I only had US dollars. I was embarrassed and I still am.*
>
> [Student 6, Zambia]

Student 6's experience illustrates four major issues which may seem trivial but stressful for any ISSAS newly arrived in a foreign country: 1) the fear of spending more agonising hours on a train as compared with the travelling on trains in her country; 2) a clear indication of lack of practical information of the services provided on the different modes of transport in the UK that lead to the student's destination; 3) feeling belittled, dehumanised and lowered as a result of not knowing the differences between the services provided on the plane and the trains; 4) lack of local currency which would free her from such embarrassment.

The transition process from the old and familiar to a new environment is a common experience. Cook & Leckey (1999) consider this transition to be one of the greatest hurdles new students have to go through in HE. It is a process that all students have to engage with in terms of the academic, cultural and social transitions. In terms of ISSAS, such process requires "Refreezing" (Lewin, 1952) which challenges existing culture, and creates a new change and the experience of "Changing" (ibid) that involves a period of uncertainty which leads to new ways of doing things.

For ISSAS the process is unique, tense and can be unsettling especially in the first few months of their stay in a UK University, a phase described by Lysgaard (1955) of "feeling bad". ISSAS in this study come from miles and miles away to be educated in the UK. As already observed, during the course of their educational journey to the UK they experience more and more rapid transitional challenges.

6.3   Negotiating the Social Experience

The general perception is that all new students experience some form of transition. They have to move away from the familiar to unfamiliar environment, unplug from the old and plug into the new environment (Bridges, 2003), pass through the different phases of separation, transition and incorporation (Van Gennep, 1960) and some experience a crisis and confusion as they embrace the new phases. To some students the move is slow, progressive and a life-time experience. However, the degree of transition experience for the home students may be different from the international students. A large number of home students, who leave their homes to study in the UKHEIs, have had the chance to meet the course advisors and to visit the university and the community surrounding the University. It is also a common

practice for home students and their parents to view the accommodation prior to joining the university. Home students have the opportunity to regularly return to their homes, especially when the feeling of loss of close friends, routines and support from family that comes with first-year homesickness is at its highest. In contrast, the international students do not have such privileges of going back home when they are in crisis or state of confusion. International students move into a country, culture, social and academic life that has no or little resemblance to their reality. In terms of their transition, there is always more work to be done in the case of ISSAS.

The theme that emerged under negotiation of social experience is accommodation which had great impact on the ISSAS transition at Greenside University. As already noted, ISSAS faced the transition hurdles right from the start of their academic journey and even at week six they were still negotiating and renegotiating these hurdles. They might have expected to face some hurdles, but not the tough transition problems that many new students find to be the biggest and most challenging hurdles they face in their first year of University life.

6.3.1 Accommodation

It is important that all students have a decent place to live during their university life. ISSAS likewise have to make a decision about their accommodation before coming to the UK. It is one of the requirements of the student visa to provide an address prior to entry. Because it is merely an address that is needed some ISSAS overlook it and ask friends to give them an address and a letter of confirmation.

It took a long time to process my application form because I had no proper address where I was going to live whilst studying in the UK. Hence, I asked a friend to ask his relation who was living in the UK to send me a confirmation letter about my accommodation. All that I wanted was to come to the UK irrespective whether I had a genuine accommodation or not.

[Student 37, Nigeria]

This means that some ISSAS faced a pressing situation on arrival of finding suitable accommodation (Sen, 1970), which appears to be difficult especially in a new and unfamiliar environment. It is normal practice for universities to send detailed information to first year students about the University's accommodation. Whilst in their respective countries, ISSAS are supposed to receive a package from Greenside University with information regarding the recommended accommodation, they are expected to choose and apply directly to those accommodation providers. What is, however, clear from this study is that not all ISSAS in this study were made aware of that; some may not have received this information before their departure, whilst others were dealing with transitional overload.

It should be said that universities take it for granted that the students, and in particular ISSAS, would understand what type of accommodation was available, what the costs involved are and how they should go about making these arrangements. The reality is that both the process of getting accommodation and funding it is often more complex than students are able to cope with.

When I came I asked for an emergency accommodation. To my disappointment, I was told to get one for £110 per week.

[Student 28, Nigeria]

Another issue highlighted in the study was that some students were so stressed and confused on arrival that they could not remember the name or location of the arranged accommodation.

> *From the Airport I took a taxi to drop me in the students' accommodation. The taxi driver asked me which students' accommodations I was going to. I had no idea. I thought there was just one accommodation. After that we went to Storthes Hall and the person in charge told me that I did not have any reservation. However, he managed to get me a room at a cost.*
>
> [Student 17, Ghana]

The implication for this student was that his journey from the airport included driving around aimlessly looking for his accommodation, resulting in him spending more than he had previously budgeted. The response from Students 17 and 28 are indicative of not being informed fully by the University about the type of accommodation available and costs involved. Furthermore, as noted by Student 28, a recommendation of £110 per week is far beyond the normal charges the University recommends to students and is beyond their means. In situations where the student is new and no University support is available, there are no other options except to secure accommodation outside of the University at a higher cost. Such failure to live in an organised accommodation on the first night of their arrival in the University shows a breakdown in the system and has an impact on ISSAS transition.

Although Student 34 from Nigeria secured accommodation, he encountered not only a disorientating experience in a country where everything seems unfamiliar, but also had the problem of coping with a daunting experience of becoming independent:

> *First of all, I'm not an independent person, I have been living with my family, my mum does everything for me. I do not know how I am going to cope living in the halls of residence where I have to do everything such as buying food, cooking, washing etc.*
>
> [Student 34, Nigeria]

Student 34's response indicates that some students are not self-reliant; they have lived with their families back home and this is going to be a significant transitional experience which will require a massive adjustment to the new ways of living (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). Because the "rite of passage" (Mensah, 1993) is an important stage in the life of Africans (Rasing, 1996), some ISSAS in this study had not gone through the tribal rituals and rites of passage which signifies a series of transition from childhood to adulthood (Delany, 1995). Living independently would symbolise maturity from an African perspective which some ISSAS were not ready for before coming to the UK. Such inability to live independently would have a transition impact on the student's social life.

Most ISSAS come to the University during winter time and without a clear picture of what constitutes students' accommodation, what facilities would be provided and how to cope with extreme climate changes. Unlike the indigenous students, the ISSAS have no opportunities of viewing the halls of residence and other university accommodation prior to accepting their offer.

The findings show that these ISSAS expect to find decent students' accommodation - more or less like a hotel with towels, bed linen and bedding (blankets). Their experience was very different to their expectation leading to some students being dissatisfied. There were various reasons for this dissatisfaction such as lack of directions to finding their accommodation, lack of bedding, lack of warmth, lack of cooking equipment and how to use what little facilities were provided that came as part of the accommodation package such as heating and kitchen facilities.

I went to the room and the room was extremely cold and I didn't figure out the place of the heating system. There was no blanket, no bed sheets nor duvet on the bed so I put on my jacket upside down, put my legs through the jacket sleeves and I slept so badly.

[Student 9, Gambia]

I arrived at the recommended accommodation, I did not find any cooking equipment or bedding and the heaters were not working. I had not been informed that there would be no bedding or food and I could not have a bath along with many other things. I was unable to change my money into British pounds because I did not know where to do this as I had received no information concerning this issue. I was just lost.

[Student 17, Ghana]

I was given my key and when I entered my room there were no beddings or anything. So I got a lift to the University and went to the international office. I met one of the senior lecturers and she listened to what I needed that day and advised me to go to a place where I could get the stuff that was affordable. She called somebody who made arrangements for me to stay somewhere that night.

[Student 49, Angola]

The students' responses indicate a transition dilemma which the ISSAS experienced with the meagre accommodation facilities. Such dilemmas show that the University did not give ISSAS enough information regarding the nature of accommodation and facilities provided, at least not in a way that was accessible to the international students. There is an assumption that people in the UK know that one has to provide everything so perhaps they do not bother to state this, implying that the information assumes knowledge. What seems clear is that this information needs to be presented unambiguously and this would require negotiation with students to seek out their experiences.

It is also observed that ISSAS use the knowledge acquired in their own countries to gauge the sort of accommodation they would like to live in. Such comparison is based purely on the type of buildings and houses available in their local rural and urban areas.

I thought it was different from my country, well organised and structured, but it was quite a surprise. But we live in better houses back home; you see buildings here that we would never live in back home.

[Student 35, Nigeria]

I live in Halls of residence and I pay £85 per week but what I get is just a small room and I share facilities like kitchen and toilet with some flat mates. It's too expensive. I think the essence of providing students halls is to live comfortably but not to be exploited by property owners.

[Student 27, Nigeria]

Living in established accommodation created another transition dilemma of not knowing the value of a pound. In the eyes of the new ISSAS, £85 per week appeared to be a small amount of money until they converted the pounds into their local currencies and realised how expensive this meagre accommodation was. At this stage, the ISSAS did not know the landlords were exploiting them and nor did the University help them in this transition

Most of the UK universities have student accommodation located not far from the campus. The University in this study does not own any halls of residence. Private companies have built student accommodation within the vicinity of the University which it recommends to all first year students. Students are obliged to enter into an agreement with the owner of the students' accommodation by signing a contract commonly known as Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST) or Shorthold Tenancies in short. It is a fixed contract for a set period of time, namely a number of weeks or months.

Some ISSAS signed contracts as soon as they arrived and regretted this later on; some ended up paying a hefty amount of money and some vacating the halls of residence prematurely.

> *As a matter of emergency, I was given a room in one of the halls of residence. I signed a piece of paper to prove that I was a new student. The next day I went to the office and they told me that I had to pay about £87 per week, so I told them the person who was paying for me could not afford that, so I had better leave. But they said that once I had signed off the contract, I would be held to the contractual agreement but they told me I had no choice. I called my parents back home if they could help and they said sorry. It was almost £400 per month for just accommodation.*
>
> [Student 13, Sudan]

> *I was advised to get into one of these expensive accommodation facilities and I could not pay but instead after leaving the place I was charged £400 for signing a contract I was made to sign when I arrived at 4pm after staying at the airport the whole day. I had nowhere to go. So what was I supposed to do?*
>
> [Student 7, Gambia]

The cost of living, especially unexpectedly high accommodation charges, meant that students were sometimes homeless and, in some cases, unable to find their already arranged accommodations. Reflecting on the nature of accommodation and the cost involved one student commented that:

> *The recommended accommodations by the University are decent but not cheap for students in general. I have been told that there are private accommodations which are cheaper but demonized. However, the University did not advise me to rent a private accommodation.*
>
> [Student 39, Kenya]

The findings suggest that a small proportion of ISSAS were sponsored by the British Council, their governments and organisations did not experience many difficulties in their transition to the respective accommodation. Some of the ISSAS who had their accommodation sorted well in advance were briefed prior to coming to the UK. None of their issues regarding the recommended halls of residence and costs were as compelling or as urgent as the ISSAS who were not as well prepared. In comparison, the ISSAS who were self-sponsored and lived in halls of residence were not only dissatisfied with the accommodation but also experienced transitional difficulties associated mostly with cost, contracts and poor facilities.

This study shows that some ISSAS took the risk and opted for the private rented accommodation. These students experienced significant challenges in their transition. They found the alternative accommodation horrible, dingy, poorly furnished, costly and unsettling, the area uninviting and unattractive and the landlord terrible, unfriendly and disrespectful. The colour and identity of these students, which are clearly noticeable by the landlords, play a key part in this situation. All these could be worse for ISSAS as it may not be based on their expectations. Subsequently, they were forced to move to other private accommodation.

> *I was advised by this guy from my country. Hence, I got a small room, but there was no heating. So, I left there as well, because the second night I felt like I nearly died. I lost £100, but I had to move out. A student from my country accommodated me in his small room for a few days until I found a decent private accommodation.*
>
> [Student 43, Zimbabwe]

> *I have moved three times in the last few weeks. I had to move out of the private accommodation because I was paying £300 per month. I could not afford it, so they let me go. Because I had no money, I was not cooking, so I ended up eating just bread most days.*
>
> [Student 24, Congo]

The basis of these responses provided an understanding of how the ISSAS are very vulnerable and how they make decisions with naive advice, relying on others who might have preceded them, and how they can be deprived of their physiological needs. ISSAS experience transitional difficulties and even when they are in a dire situation, they tend to keep quiet until the situation is beyond repair. Such an attitude could be based on culture differences (Hofstede, 1991) and cultural relativity of the quality of life (Hofstede, 1984) which are embedded fully in their past (Goldstein, 1995), so that even when they join the University they find it hard to change. With such strong culture deeply rooted in them, ISSAS search for other ways by negotiating their transitions which, as noted by Students 43 and 24, requires moving

until decent accommodation is found, which most ISSAS did not anticipate and/or were not prepared for. In the course of this movement, ISSAS often lose money, go hungry and distance themselves from University life. It is clear that these students chose private lodging that were cheap and in locations that were not recommended by the University but had no choice because of limited funding. This further shows how this University is not in touch with the reality of ISSAS once they arrive, and how the private landlords exploit these students who probably may not know their rights. Without any first-hand information given by the University, these students will not even know that the bond paid can be claimed back (see Student 43).

6.3.2   Social world of University

The theme that emerged regarding ISSAS social life was that they purposely regressed into their past-life experiences and recounted that they missed the social life in their countries of origin. Some ISSAS commented that:

> *Socialising is part of the culture in Africa as many things are done in groups, whether as friends or families. The one thing that I miss most from home is the social aspect. We socialise every single day. You find that there are designated open areas in many locations where people go out every day after work to have a barbecue and socialise with friends.*
>
> [Student 43, Zimbabwe]

> *In the villages they have large village halls where music groups come to hold shows or just an ordinary radio and records may be played. People of all ages just come and enjoy themselves dancing, talking and catching up on local events.*
>
> [Student 46, Zimbabwe]

Leaving home to study in a foreign country can be a stressful experience. Memories are evoked especially when faced with unfamiliar situations. The above quotes show the extent to which ISSAS are still attached to their previous social experiences and how much some want to go through the same social transitional experiences at Greenside University.

In Britain, a lot of the reasons for going to University are the "social space" of a year off, independency and social life. Very few students are duly immersed in reading textbooks (BBC News Magazine, 2010). But for some ISSAS, the need for social life is minimised due to educational demands.

> *It is because I am in* a *different place. They (British students) all want to go out, but I did all that at College and High School. I am here to get something out of it.*
>
> [Student 15, Ghana]

> *I know I am missing out on like social life, it will pay off later. My first priority is to learn and to do well in all subjects.*
>
> [Student 34, Nigeria]

Clearly, the two students' quotes sum up some ISSAS ambitions to come to Greenside University. They prefer to spend more time studying than spending it socialising. It is a route to success because they are not here to enjoy life but to learn. Perhaps for them, having a social life would be fine but because of their career trajectory they are not trying to make a life here, they are passing it by, and are on a journey that has ups and downs. They are more educationally motivated than socially motivated. Hence, their social transition within the University will be different from the home students and this will have an impact on ISSAS incorporation (Tinto, 1987) within the life of University students.

The findings show the importance ISSAS attach to friendship. Generally ISSAS identify themselves as 'brother', 'sister' or friends, a notion already covered in Chapter 2 as part of race consciousness. What seems to be a common denominator is that ISSAS identify themselves as "true" Africans especially when they are in a foreign country because they are black and their social support networks are from Africa.

All my friends are from Africa, either I know them or not, I don't hesitate to contact them. But as for the whites, they can talk to you sometimes and other times they ignore you.

[Student 20, Ghana]

I must confess that I have met African friends and they have been very supportive. Some of my friends are from countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Gambia and there are other Black friends from elsewhere.

[Student 47, Zimbabwe]

I know Nigerians, they go everywhere. If I had come here and did not meet any Nigerian I would have gone back, I would not have stayed.

[Student 30, Nigeria]

It is quite difficult to make friends because generally people have wrong assumptions of us, we are looked down upon and then there is the problem of trying to communicate because of language or accent difference.

[Student 23, Congo]

At this stage of study, having stayed in the University for at least 6 weeks, ISSAS are starting to make friends but generally with those who share the same skin colour or come from the same continent or halls of residence. They are still very conscious about their identity, race, language and associations. Such differentiation may be due to the ways they socialise or make friends back home, as compared to the British social setting. Partly because the British students tend to be less predictable and reliable, it is difficult to know if they want to be friends or not. It is in this regard that the ISSAS form Communities of Practice as stated by Wenger (1998) where they learn to survive and to interact with each other regularly as one tribe in a foreign country, define their identity and help each other cope whilst studying in the University.

The ISSAS perception of friendship is paramount for understanding their identity and their participation in the social setting. When these students are in the University, they face different social challenges and these raise questions as noted by Schlossberg, (1989) such as "are we part of things; do we belong; are we central or

marginal?" It is here that they are reminded that they are not part of the perceived homogeneous society around them. Generally, ISSAS do not feel as if they are part of a homogeneous group society in Africa, although there are differences. It is only when they move from the familiar, seeking the person they are in this new community, Greenside University that they form a collective group as Africans, rather than have separate national identities at home. It is at the University that they identify their commonalities with the other ISSAS who are different in the same way. In Africa, these students do not recognise themselves as belonging to Africa or being called 'Africans' or 'black', but as individuals belonging to a particular country, community, clan and tribe. When they come to the University, their countries, tribe and social entity are lost which results in them seeking a new identity in order to fit into the 'African' group.

> *I have not met anybody from my country which makes me feel sad. No friends as such. However, I have availed myself to other African students in order to have someone to talk to. It is not what I would have liked to do but I feel conditioned –something I never dreamt of feeling lonely and foreign when I was at home with my own people.*
>
> [Student 50, Cameroon]

What has emerged in this research is the collective identity that is, the African identity which brings all the ISSAS in this study together. With this understanding of "African identity", it makes these students be thought of 'others' (Said, 1978) grouped together to represent an entity. To ensure that they fit in the University social settings, these ISSAS have had to negotiate and renegotiate continuously their social transitions.

In trying to negotiate their transition in University life, some ISSAS experienced disconcerting issues such as discrimination and prejudice. Some students commented that the issues of racism and prejudice could be noticed and some students experienced abuse, name calling, segregation and rejection.

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But I have seen it and have been abused. I have been called a black bitch by a driver at the traffic lights right in front of the university.

[Student 40, Kenya]

I was told not to touch anything in the refrigerator because my hands were deemed dirty

[Student 19, Ghana]

I have attended a seminar and when we were asked to get into pairs, I was left alone with no one to pair up with and there is a group with three people not two. Why, does no one want to pair themselves with a black student?

[Student 26, Nigeria]

When having a cup of tea during break time I stood alone in a crowd, lonely, confused, angry and looking foolish. Why I asked myself?

[Student 7, Gambia]

I still don't understand why most of the whites will grin at me. I have until now responded with a smile and a greeting thinking that spells friendliness, but my greeting has not been appreciated.

[Student 41, Zimbabwe]

Other students concluded that:

Some people think Blacks are stupid and not educated. They think coming from Africa means we do not know anything. I think some people are discriminating us because of our accents.

[Student, 20, Ghana]

Over here, because you are a foreigner, you are treated with a low level of respect. And we come here for various reasons, but they think we are all refugees. And if they looked at my history they would understand why I came here and not another country. It does not bother me much, but it can be offending. [Student 49, Angola]

Although discrimination is not fully overt, these quotes shed light on skin colour stigma and discrimination within the University setting. What is highlighted is that some ISSAS experienced discrimination and prejudice in their first few weeks at the University. Despite such negative experiences these students did not respond to the abuse and prejudice, they remained silent and never reported such incidences. It is

not uncommon for ISSAS to keep quiet in such circumstances due to the respect they have towards other people or due to lack of confidence (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Perhaps some of the British students were not aware of such behaviour being offensive to ISSAS. Such discriminatory issues had an impact on ISSAS social transition and some found it very difficult to join the home students in any social gathering.

Furthermore, feelings of loneliness and isolation emerged as one of the themes in the interviews. In the absence of family, friends, and social networks, new students often experience transitional shifts of personal loneliness and social isolation (Sawir et al., 2008). In terms of ISSAS, it is a double shift of being not only far from the close family and relations but also being in a foreign country. As already observed, some of the ISSAS are the first in their family and country to come to the UK, while a large proportion also have no immediate relation living in the UK. Noted in the findings is the linguistic barrier as another impediment that prevents ISSAS such as Student 48 from mixing with fellow students, causing personal and cultural loneliness and isolation.

> *I have been here for the last three weeks and I seem to be the only one who has not managed to find a close friend. I guess because I came late and everyone had already established some kind of relationship. My friends back home think that I am an extrovert and easy to make friends. I am always the first to suggest things. But that perception is proved wrong. I find it very difficult to start a conversation or to be involved. I guess this has to do with the fear of others (students) not able to understand me when I speak in my African accent or appreciate me as an African. I think I will always be on my own. To tell you the truth it is a hard life studying here in the university where you have no friends or college mates.*
>
> [Student 48, Zimbabwe]

Feelings of personal and cultural loneliness as well as social isolation were reported throughout the study by ISSAS. During the interviews, the problem of loneliness triggered tears and regrets of why they chose to come to this country where there is nothing comparable with their life experiences back home. Increasingly, some ISSAS had to look for other coping mechanisms to temporarily occupy themselves as a way of passing the time. The following statements show clearly the deep feelings of loneliness and/or isolation, exacerbated by some of their experiences in the UK University.

> *Honestly, I felt so lonely especially in a foreign country that you cannot even compare a single thing between the two countries.*
>
> [Student 7, Gambia]

> *For the first few weeks in the University, I was on my own. I had no choice but to spend time in the library, in my room or in the lesson, so it was depressing.*
>
> [Student 42, Zimbabwe]

> *The first few weeks I felt isolated. I am older than most students and a lot of them already seemed to know each other from School or Colleges, but you don't know anyone yet. And nobody tries to make friends, not even other mature students or international students.*
>
> [Student 17, Ghana]

> *I felt isolated, maybe it's because I know I am here for my personal gain, so it does not matter if people talk to me or not. That is an advantage of being a mature student; you know why you are here and who you are.*
>
> [Student 44, Zimbabwe]

> *I have not been anywhere outside University. I am scared to go too far in case I do not find the way back.*
>
> [Student 22, South Africa]

What seems clear is that all the respondents are going through the same feelings and barriers. They say "I feel lonely", "I feel isolated"; it is hard but to some extent perhaps they expect it to happen and are prepared to face it in order to achieve what they desire. Due to loneliness, some of the respondents stayed indoors away from

other people and would only come out of their rooms for lectures or when otherwise prompted, but still did not want to leave the room. One student commented:

I can be in my room for 24 hours without going anywhere apart from attending lectures. So I came here because I had an appointment with you.

[Student 19, Ghana]

Some ISSAS would have expected such issues to arise and were prepared to do something about it in order to ease their transition, but their effort fell through, as one student commented:

We as African students, we tend to separate and isolate ourselves from the whole group. So what we have been doing is that every time we see ourselves going towards isolation we then jump out from our comfort zone and just go and try to mix with others. Unfortunately, when some people see us coming to them they walk away and that is annoying.

[Student 49, Angola]

The experience of loneliness and isolation is not a new occurrence amongst new students. But international students experience these issues more than any other students in the first months of being at university (Sawir et al., 2008). In the context of ISSAS, such issues of isolation and loneliness are more complex. Because of the various barriers they encounter in their social life it is very difficult for ISSAS to overcome such issues. Since the University does not provide a complete social outlet, ISSAS learnt to hide their emotional feelings by staying indoors only to come out for lectures and to pretend as if all was satisfactory. Just because ISSAS have learnt to cope and live in isolation and loneliness it does not mean that the University and tutors cannot do anything to help. They have a pastoral duty to help these students adjust well to University life. Such temporal solution to isolation and loneliness does not diminish the importance of social transition within the University.

The meaning which emerges from the social world of the University is that of a massive identity shift, in the face of the new environment there is a shift to being "African" and so towards a more collective identity, but also there is also the notion of difference and negotiating that difference. These can form barriers to joining in the social world of university. The respondents were interviewed in the first six weeks of their arrival at Greenside University, so the stories might have shifted as they progressed in their academic courses. Hence, the two analytical notions, those of direct prejudice and of being different and not fitting in, might have changed as they became "incorporated" into University life.

6.3.3   Homesickness

One of the features of transition from one culture to another is homesickness (Adler, 1975). For some students, the adaptation to a new environment such as the University takes longer and what emerges often from this transition is homesickness. This is a common factor to all first-year students (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Kazantzis & Flett, 1998). According to Stroebe et al., (2002), homesickness has a significant impact on international students' transition. Such students find themselves preoccupied with thoughts of being away from a familiar and secure environment including home, friends, relations (Brewin et al., 1989) or school. Instead, they find themselves in an unfamiliar environment of new students, new ways of learning and living (Mori, 2000). These thoughts can be overwhelming and can lead to feelings of homesickness either at the beginning or later in the academic year.

For most ISSAS, the feelings of homesickness seemed to come earlier in their academic year and often so overpowering that some of these students found it hard to contain, as this Nigerian pointed out:

> *If I had enough money to fly back home, I would have gone back. It took me at least a few weeks to get myself back up. It's like nobody wanted me or was willing to help me.*
>
> <div align="right">[Student 36, Nigeria]</div>

Strong emotional feelings of homesickness were evidenced clearly in this study, especially when ISSAS cried during the interview. One female student said, "Do not make me cry again". In another interview a male student said that, "after the lectures I would go to my room and cry because I was missing my family back home". In African tradition, the males are considered to be brave and strong and not endorse any emotional issues. They are not expected to cry and if they do it is a sign of powerlessness and cowardice. This male student seems to have broken the African traditional values and beliefs and the only way he could feel connected to the reality of his family' absence was to go to his room and cry.

It is clear from the findings that in the first few days and weeks upon their arrival at the University, ISSAS experienced homesickness as these students point out:

> *At first I thought at last I have arrived at the University, It was a good feeling but later on I started feeling homesickness, I was missing everybody, my family and children.*
>
> <div align="right">[Student 13, Sudan]</div>

> *I miss my mum and dad. I wish they would come to my rescue.*
>
> <div align="right">[Student 19, Ghana]</div>

> *I came with my friend's sister but when she left I phoned her nearly every day. I knew something was wrong with me. I wasn't reading all I did was watch Telly to keep my mind off things. I couldn't sleep at night. I couldn't handle it. I cried every day. I had no one to talk to except my sister who lived miles and miles away from here.*
>
> <div align="right">[Student 29, Nigeria]</div>

I felt really neglected, so I spent a lot of money to phone back home, to speak to someone who would understand me. I went an extra mile to say hi to the English students but some just walked away from me. I tried to interact, because I've come here to make friends as well, but I was just on my own all the time until I met a student from my country.

[Student 34, Nigeria]

I phone home every week and some other weeks every day. It is very hard to leave the family behind

[Student 5, Zambia]

I felt homesick but did not phone my parents because they would have paid for my flight back home and I did not want to give up the course after the first month. I did not want to go home as a failure.

[Student 22, South Africa]

It is very difficult to be here on your own without a family member. It's very easy to get side-lined and as there is no one to support you, very easy to end up doing things you wouldn't normally do just because you are trying to fit in or resolve a personal problem

[Student 20, Ghana]

Indicated above are accounts of students' attachment to both family and friends back home and replacing them with limited social networks of people of same skin colour- race consciousness within and outside the university. ISSAS in the study show strong family values and family bonds and leaving them behind adds to their feelings of homesickness. It is clear that some of these students are mature and have made sacrifices to come to pursue studies in the UK leaving behind their families a tough decision to make. But this is a significant part in their transition process which they have to negotiate during their academic years at Greenside University. For most ISSAS, in time, these desperate feelings do not persist; they are mitigated as new relationships are formed in the course of their University life.

In relation to homesickness and being new in the UK and at Greenside University, a recurring theme that came up during the interview was the reference to "back home"

and "back at home" phrases noted in a number of students' responses above (see Students 48, 36 and 22). The two phrases were used interchangeably in the interview. Back home simply refers to 'where one comes from", as one student explained:

> *When they (Africans) speak of experiences they have had or to explain anything about where they are from, they just use 'back home'. Even if one becomes a citizen of another country, 'back home' is always talked about, referring to country of origin. In other words instead of saying "in Zimbabwe" one says 'back home'. Usually it is used where one has fond memories or misses home.*
>
> [Student 42, Zimbabwe]

For some international students, the concept of home may not refer explicitly to one place but, as noted by Gargano (2009), to a multitude of destinations or localities that helps them to put both origin and tradition into proper context. He further argues that "the families, friends and communities that compromise the social network of a student may be spread across multiple geographical spaces, not just located in home and host countries" (p.341).

Making reference to home does not necessary imply the place of origin or an important place in somebody's life, but to some people i.e. some ISSAS, it might be a way of hiding themselves from their place of origin. As this student from Zimbabwe explained:

> *There are some people who use that term back home to shy away from telling where they are born as they are embarrassed of their identity or their country of origin. For instance there are quite a lot of Zimbabweans who come from Matabeleland and speak Zulu language who say they come from South Africa, because they are not proud of their country or what has become of it. On the other hand there are those like myself who are proud of our identity, know what a great country Zimbabwe used to be and know that the world will not look down on us just because our government has destroyed the country, so when I speak of "back home" it is to do with mostly good memories, pride, comparison and preference.*
>
> [Student 47, Zimbabwe]

Central to the concept of "back home" is the attachment ISSAS have towards their traditions and countries which they seem to deny when they are referred to by the university as a "collective identity". Cultural traditions are very important to the Africans and giving them up is not a task they accept very readily. The values instilled in them are deeply embodied. Referring to back home is a clear indication of their identity and a deep feeling of homesickness. These students do not want to lose sight of their identity in the maze of life in the UK and University. Such continual reference to country of origin makes the transition to the new country and University rather difficult for ISSAS.

Transition is an identity work (Chapman & Pyvis, 2005) and is an important feature that gives these students a sense of belonging. It guards their individual characteristics and suggests uniqueness of each person. In this respect, the notion of "back home" adds to their attachment to their community and relations in their own countries. It is an awareness of race consciousness which is central to the social life of ISSAS, as evident in this research at this University. It is here that ISSAS students are reminded of their colour and identity and to fit in this group they call see each other "brothers" and "sisters", adding to the concept of "back home" where the past and present play a part (Wenger, 1998), and cohesiveness and stability are epitomised (Cullingford & Din, 2006) in a new environment.

This notion of identity and participation is very important in ISSAS social life. They not only feel a sense of belonging as "Africans" in the University but also the pride of being representatives of their own countries and Africa in general.

I feel great because I am representing Africa. It is quite good when you see an African who has obtained a UK University degree. Like back home where we come from, it was not very easy to go to University. It was really tough especially as a mature student; you needed the relevant qualifications plus entry points.

[Student 48, Zimbabwe]

As an African, I feel like, I am here to represent some people like actors and icons, to encourage other people to come to the University. I always say, take what you can from the University and then go and help other people back in Africa who cannot get the same opportunity.

[Student 31, Nigeria]

The above quotes indicate further ISSAS attachment to their countries. It is clear that these students are playing a dual role of being students as well as ambassadors for their countries back home. This puts much pressure on the way they have to behave as ambassadors and as role models. Some long for representation in order to feel connected with their own people and the University. They are aware of some of the issues they experience in the University and having a representative would enable ISSAS who are either extroverts or introverts to speak out rather keeping quiet about the massive issues that matter to them, especially in the first weeks of semester one. The following students' comments evidence this:

When I first got here I wanted to change my decision, so I needed more advice. I was very confused and went to T (friend) and I changed my mind about British Education. I was very confused and nobody was ready to listen or discuss my problem. They just pretend.

[Student 49, Angola]

I think the biggest problem that international students face is the lack of proper representation. I know the university talks about diversity etc on website and in the prospectus, but it is just about ticking legislation boxes.

[Student 21, South Africa]

I think students from my country or part of my continent have the problem that they are not represented in any way at the university. Therefore any problems we have are not addressed and there is no one to ensure that things are going smoothly for us.

[Student 18, Ghana]

If it was not for you I might have faced so many difficulties, but the fact that you have had these experiences yourself, you know what to say to motivate me or any other foreign student. The other problem is that no-one seems to care about problems that may be faced by foreign students, because there is no info or office that one can take their grievances to.

[Student 48, Zimbabwe]

So in my view if a person has a problem there is no one that I know who could help. I think the problem is that the universities just feel that since there are other community groups like the Muslims and Caribbean, they think that all foreign students are represented. It would help if the university had a survey or questionnaire set out to find out if all the students' issues academically and socially were being catered for. That way we may find a voice. I admit the library staff are excellent but there no black staff there to represent us.

[Student 44, Zimbabwe]

I called at the Student Support Advisors in the library level 4, but I did not see any black person among them.

[Student 6, Zambia]

Underrepresentation of ISSAS on-campus can have negative impact and a failure to use the University support services. In their study, Wilton and Constantine (2004) found that the impact of underrepresentation of students of a certain ethnicity (blacks) in the common services (union, library. canteen, reception) within the university can increase the rate of homesickness and students' attrition and have a great impact on their transition.

Highlighted in the interviews were other external factors affecting ISSAS initial transition in the UK, and a contributory factor to their homesickness. The most prominent at the early stage were weather and food.

To a number of ISSAS coming from a temperate zone, where the temperature is considered to be humid throughout the year, acclimatising to winter weather where the temperatures are below average and daytimes get darker earlier compared to

Africa's sunrise at 7a.m and setting at 7p.m, is a challenge. Such changes in weather conditions can have an emotional effect on students and could lead to falling ill.

> *I did not imagine a country like Britain to be very cold.*
>
> [Student 31, Nigeria]

> *It's too cold here and I am not very pleased with this horrible cold weather. It is nice and warm weather back home in Congo.*
>
> [Student 24, Congo]

> *I was so cold that I fell sick; went to see a Doctor who gave me some tablets and advised me to keep warm.*
>
> [Student 21, South Africa]

> *I have started to acclimatise in terms of weather and other things but I was surprised about how cold this country (UK) is.*
>
> [Student 20, Ghana]

While the information in the University documentation tries to explain that the weather can be cold, it is not until the students go through it that they understand the extent of the definition of cold. In spite of feeling cold, ISSAS are prepared to tolerate the cold in order to get what they want and this must be a big thing in their life. In trying to acclimatise, ISSAS are faced with the last phase, "Refreezing" (Lewin, 1952), and are starting to tolerate the changes.

Another theme connected to homesickness was the lack of traditional African foods. Students in the study would previously have had a different diet and foods compared to UK food products. In addition, not all ISSAS had been involved in buying and cooking food or using either gas or electric cookers. To some students, this a culture shock, a big and unplanned transition. Getting used to student life in a foreign country which calls for independency is not straight forward especially for ISSAS who are still to undergo "rites of passage" from childhood to adulthood, or for those

male and mature students who relied on their wives in terms of cooking and housework back home. Some of these students have to challenge their traditional beliefs and go through a transition process of purchasing food and learning how to cook with normal UK kitchen facilities. For most of the students in the study, and in particular the male students, it was a gradual transition.

> *I did not know where to buy the food from.....and nobody showed us the local supermarket.*
>
> [Student 5, Zambia]

> *I went to buy food but I did not know what to buy because no one advised me.*
>
> [Student 29, Nigeria]

> *I have never cooked and going to buy the food stuff was one of the most challenging experiences encountered living in halls of residence.*
>
> [Student16, Ghana]

> *The shops advertised in their brochures from the union are not the best for buying local food and other products.*
>
> [Student 18, Ghana]

> *I find the English food not good compared to homemade food back home.*
>
> [Student 25, Uganda]

> *I ate more or less the same things every day, either burgers or sausages or fish and chips. I am not used to eating fast food all the time, it was strange.*
>
> [Student 26, Nigeria]

> *I stayed in the University for two weeks surviving on only a bottle of sprite and biscuits.*
>
> [Student 50, Cameroon]

Clearly, ISSAS encountered some dilemmas in terms of finding what type of food to buy and where to buy it. Such dilemmas are in-line with what Bollag (2004) describes as common negative experiences international students often encounter namely, accommodation, food, weather and social relationships. From the ISSAS

point of view, it is evident that this University did not introduce the students to the British diet, the local supermarkets and places where they could purchase their local food stuff. As a result, some students resorted to eating poorly, having an unbalanced diet of fast foods that were readily available. Some ISSAS expected to face this challenge, used trial and error methods and were determined not to give up. To some students, such dilemmas of not knowing what to do must have had a significant impact on their transition process.

6.4 Negotiating the educational the experience

The education experience is significant in the understanding the ISSAS transition process and how they handle the practices that construct the University life. Transition is about participation in practices valued by the University and factors which support or undermine such participation (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; O'Donnell et al., 2009). It is about what occurs to students at the University everyday and how these students manage their educational experiences.

Because the ISSAS in this study wanted the Western education so much they were prepared to endure all the hardships in order to get a qualification that will help them in future career. This must be their big motivation and learning. In their educational experience, the themes that emerged had impact on their transition include: induction, classroom and teaching methods.

6.4.1 Induction

Unlike the home students, ISSAS in this study did not have the opportunity to attend University's open days. Because they have high aspirations to study in the UK University, a comprehensive introduction to the University life is very important. Commentators on effective transitions for undergraduates Billing, (1997), and McInnis & James, (1995) emphasise the importance of induction as a means of enhancing a smooth transition of new students into higher education.

UK universities have an induction week, commonly known as "Fresher's Week" (UKCISA, 2004). Greenside University is no exception. During this week, new students are introduced to the University operational systems which include the library, Information Technology (IT), Central Support and Student Services. In addition, students are provided with information regarding the social and academic life of the University. New students, in particular the international students, tend to play a passive role (Edwards, 2003) and often the information they receive is rather dull (ibid) and in large volumes which makes it hard to retain. In case of ISSAS, this must have a challenge as some ISSAS remarked:

> *I attended the induction and found it interesting but I could not remember most of the things. I think it was partly my fault for being generally unfamiliar with the regional accent.*
>
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

> *I collected all the papers I could lay my hands on but I don't think all the information was useful. How do they (university) expect us to read all that stuff? You know it takes time to read and understand the information we were given during the induction week.*
>
> [Student 23, Congo]

The above comments suggest that Students 28 and 23 experienced some issues with the English language/accents, coupled with cultural barriers in an unfamiliar environment. Generally, the process of induction is a formal means through which

all new students that arrive during the fresher's week are officially introduced to the University. The methods used to orientate the new students in the University may seem straightforward but according to some ISSAS in this study it was difficult to grasp all the information related to education and social life. This suggests the sessions that were held in the induction week did not take into account the students' academic, cultural and social background or whether the students were indigenous or international. Laing et al. (2005, p.244) argue that "the effectiveness of these sessions (in the fresher's week) in helping the students to adjust to higher education may be limited". This shows that the level of understanding and retaining of the information at this transition stage varies; possibly exacerbated by the state of mind they could be in due to stress of arrival in the UK, travelling to the university, accommodation problems and more. When Student 28 said, "I could not remember most of the things", the tone of her voice seemed to suggest disengagement in the activities that took place during the induction. This is affirmed by another respondent who commented that:

> *Access to information was particularly difficult when I first started Uni, and I think also the fact that they do not actually have a proper induction on how to find the support services, the whole exercise of an induction is a shambles.*
> [Student 4, Zambia]

Some of the ISSAS in the study missed the fresher's week. The reason for not attending the induction week differed.

> *I did not attend the induction week because the information I received did not state, so I came the following week when the lectures had already started and when I spoke to my tutor, he filled me in on the induction process.*
> [Student 48, Zimbabwe]

> *I came late and therefore I missed the registration and the general first week of orientation where they tell you what you need to know.*
> [Student 16, Ghana]

From Student 48's account, it is clear that the University sent out information that was confusing and not specific enough which forced the student to miss induction week. Out of desperation and missed opportunity, some ISSAS search for ways of achieving what they want. In this case, Student 48 wanted to know about University life, so he took the initiative to speak to the tutor who willingly offered information. This means that if the University's current tutors are willing to provide first-hand information, then some students could be able to access all the available information during induction. For students who arrive late, especially the ISSAS who encounter major problems caused by delays in getting the visa, flights and finances and have only vague ideas about University life, there is no official induction. This raises an issue as to whether the University does bother about the transition process for the latecomers who have genuine reasons and pay the same amount of tuition fees.

Within a week of having arrived on campus, settled to some extent into their accommodation and being put through some sort of induction programme and registration, ISSAS find themselves faced with yet another stage in the transitional process, one of finding the places where to purchase things. It is clear from the findings that the generic induction is not enough for ISSAS. The specific needs of induction that represent particular barriers for ISSAS in an unfamiliar environment are ignored. These needs include induction to the local area; for example, places to shop (traditional foods), churches and making relationships. In addition, the induction does not prepare students, and in particular ISSAS, for what they are about to experience in the classroom. If this is the case, one might expect the new students to be apprehensive about going into the classroom especially during the first few weeks of term 1.

6.4.2 Classroom

The challenges and the impact on transition for ISSAS are also extended into the classroom environment. One of the great concerns for ISSAS in this study was their anxiety of the way they would fit into the classroom setting. They became aware of their identity, differences in skin colour and their participation in the education system when they turned up on the door step of the University, but became increasingly more conscious about their physical features when they entered the classrooms for the first time.

> *I don't feel accepted, maybe tolerated. I always feel like a foreigner here, I think I always will.*
>
> [Student 36, Nigeria]

> *They all have their own little groups already and nobody would come and sit with me. That made me feel isolated and I am the only African and black person in my class as well.*
>
> [Student 15, Ghana]

> *I came late so I did not have the chance to build relationships with other students.*
>
> [Student 22, South Africa]

Alienation and isolation seem to be a recurring issue in the life of ISSAS. These students expect to be isolated as soon as they realise that they are different, but the extent of this isolation is disturbing. Some ISSAS commented that they found English students unfriendly and that they appeared to be remote so it affected their participation in class. In the view of some of ISSAS the issue of racism seemed to be one of the underlying reasons for the English students' unwillingness to participate in group activities.

> *I think the English students are very reluctant to accept international students, probably because they perceive that they are going to get a lower mark if they end up doing group work with them, or they don't want to leave the international students feeling quite isolated.*
>
> [Student 25, Uganda]

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They (British Students) really give us (African students) the cold shoulder, no smiling, no relationship at all.

[Student 32, Nigeria]

Based on the first few weeks of their transitional experience in Greenside University, a couple of students concluded that:

The major problem probably is that people in the United Kingdom are so complex to build a friendship with them.

[Student 11, Sudan]

Life here in the University has been very hard. I found it difficult to penetrate into the already established groups. So I ended up getting "married" to books or became a book worm.

[Student 45, Zimbabwe]

I had to force myself to talk to people and in the class; it was like the English students sit on one side and the international students on the other side.

[Student 23, Congo]

It is not uncommon to find that home students are perceived as uncaring and not willing to accept students from other cultures in their groups. Russell (2005) found that international students considered UK students to be "cold, unfriendly, rude and closed to different cultures" (p.7). Furthermore, the ISSAS experience in the classroom was not helped by their reserved attitudes towards the home students. Such attitude creates a massive distance between ISSAS and home students and can have a massive impact on the students' transition and educational process.

Given the economic crisis and the need for the universities to recruit many foreign students (Böhm et al., 2003 & UKCISA, 2006), some of the courses are occupied predominately by foreign students (Peters, 2005). Such situations can be disconcerting for the ISSAS who want to mix with the British students in order to gain a UK experience and widen their social networks. One student commented on her experience when she entered the classroom for the first time.

It was a culture shock because there were quite a few students who were not English. I did not expect to find other nationalities in an English University.

[Student 13, Sudan]

From the students' narration of their in-class experience, it is clear that, there are two recognisable groups in the classroom namely the whites and blacks. In addition, there is also fear of associating with each other or working together in a group. This is more pronounced by the behaviour of the home students who exhibit greater cohesion and confidence while working with each other, but less willingness to work with international students (Turner, 2006; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994). In such situations, there is less regard given to the international students who can benefit potentially from working with the home students. On a similar theme, Caroll & Ryan (2005) found that the home students' rejection of international student is based on the notion that there would be a mismatch of knowledge and abilities in the two groups if they worked together. In their conclusion, Ledwith & Seymour (1999) noted that there is an assumption that UK students feel more comfortable when they work with students who have similar academic background, language, social life and mindset. Such perception affects students who might be labelled as having less cognitive ability, or who are non-participative and quiet such as the ISSAS. If this is the case, then ISSAS will find it hard to engage in the classroom and to widen their academic horizons during lectures and this may an impact on their transition in the classroom.

6.4.3 Methods of Teaching

Another theme that emerged from the interview was the teaching methods. Generally, all new students in the university are in a transitional phase which opens new ways of learning and methods of teaching. Methods of instruction in UK universities, which seem unfamiliar for most newcomers, include: lectures, tutorials, seminars, discussions, individual and group work. A number of ISSAS tend to have followed what could be regarded as a more traditional learning path before they get to UK universities. They are accustomed to lecture methods where a tutor delivers the information to large groups of students, so adapting to new methods of teaching is not easy (Sen, 1970).

> *For me the major challenge I have is trying to understand the system of education in UK and in particular this University. I am used to a lecturer coming to lecture, me taking down notes.*
>
> [Student 10, Gambia]

> *Firstly, the lecturer back in Nigeria spoon feeds you by giving you notes to read. You do not need to read and understand.*
>
> [Student 27, Nigeria]

ISSAS face the challenge of unlearning their lived educational experiences in order to adapt to a new way of learning. In such transition, there is no time given for adjustment or questions asked by the University or tutors about the ISSAS previous methods of learning. It is taken for granted that these ISSAS will switch automatically, and without negotiation, their long and acquired learning methods in the primary, secondary and colleges. Such students find it very hard to keep up with the different approaches to teaching and learning. Because they want the education and have paid a lot of money and gone through hardships both at home and in the UK, ISSAS are compelled to follow the teaching methods quietly and without questioning. This adds more pressure to these students in terms of their cognitive ability and academic performance.

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I did not realise how much you have to do outside lectures and in groups. It is frustrating that sometimes you have to rely on others to do well. It is a different way of working and I am not used to.

<div align="right">[Student 14, Sudan]</div>

For ISSAS learning has been about individual achievements in some way and not group work. Now, all of a sudden they have to work in a group, which is against their experience of learning. Such adaptation to a new method of teaching and learning adds to their transitional challenge of fitting into the group. As already noted, home students are inflexible when it comes to working generally with international students. With this preconceived ideas, ISSAS find themselves feeling rejected and working with black students or other international students in class.

Similarly, the methods of testing were highlighted by the ISSAS who commented on the different assessment processes. In the UK, universities test the student's understanding in the form of assignments, group work/presentations and in some courses a combination of assignments, case studies and exams. ISSAS find University summative assessments in the form of giving presentations and academic writing difficult to relate to their own learning experience. This transition can be tough. In terms of assessment, ISSAS are familiar with term tests and final examinations at the end of an academic year. They learn by rote or use cramming techniques to get through examinations, which basically means regurgitating tutors notes.

I am used to a lecturer coming to lecture, me taking down notes, then going over the lectures then sitting for tests or examinations at the end of the year.

<div align="right">[Student 10, Gambia]</div>

If I know I have an exam tomorrow, I can "gate crash it", I can just cram everything, use things like, the planet, the nine planets, like my educated mother or whatever, whatever. I can just for each topic, give it a name, or create and write the song down. And once I am able to sing the song, I can

remember each note, each letter and what it stands for. In the exams, I reproduce that song. As soon as I am out of the exam room, that is it, I cannot remember anything.

[Student 37, Nigeria]

The emerging view from ISSAS is their previous heavy reliance on tutors' notes and examination skills. Student 37, in particular, insisted that to pass the exams required memorisation and regurgitation of the teacher's factual information. It is all to do with book learning, learning by rote, associations and memory triggers. When they were probed on how the UK assessment systems works compared to theirs back home, Students 6, 17 and 26 responded:

But it seems a different ball game here, like most of the system is done through assignments and for my modules I will be writing assignments with no examinations. The challenge here is what is expected of me. I need to know how assignments are written and how to write because it is quite different from what I am used to because I have tried to interact with people, to ask and I think what they are telling me about assignment is quite different from my perception of things.

[Student 6, Zambia]

But here, all they do is explain; they give you handouts and they expect you to read more. So you are on your own and if you don't read, that is your problem and not the tutors.

[Student 17, Ghana]

They (tutors) help you to develop your mindset, to think deeply, to read more, to use your own words, in your own language and not having to cut and paste like we do in my Nigeria.

[Student 26, Nigeria]

The students are of the opinion that the assessment and pedagogy in their countries do not focus on the individual student's way of learning. At Greenside University, there was a positive correlation between the way students were taught and assessed, indicating a higher level of learning across all disciplines. This meant a transitional shift of putting more effort into learning and being strategic in terms of working hard and spending extra time reading and absorbing the knowledge (Pedersen, 1991). As one student commented:

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I have to work extra hard because in some of the subjects I have more to learn as I am a foreigner. I did not grow up here but in a poor country, so I have to learn about the University as well as the subject.

[Student 6, Zambia]

Students found that learning and writing using an academic language caused some difficulties. This was highlighted when they mentioned the word "plagiarism", which some students had difficulty in understanding. They said the big issue was that tutors talked about plagiarism and referencing at the beginning of the academic year, ignoring the foreign students' language abilities and academic background. One student commented that:

We were in our first week of academic year; there was much going on that week that the significance of plagiarism was not highlighted enough.

[Student 27, Nigeria]

Like any other students, SSA students are compelled to adapt to Western education systems, learning styles, teaching and culture within a short space of time. The evidence in this study shows that SSA students, such as Student 27, were introduced to the issue of plagiarism and referencing prematurely. No preparation or proper explanations were accorded to them during the induction week, and weeks after, which clearly shows the weaknesses in the nature of induction. Turner (2006) argues that generally international students work hard to grasp aspects such as plagiarism and referencing which they have no experience of back home.

Linked to this notion of plagiarism is the problem of English language, which most ISSAS considered to be a major issue.

6.4.4 Communication barrier

As already observed, UK universities expect international students to have achieved what would be described as a "golden ticket" of 6.0 on the IELTS prior to start the course. (See chapter 2 section 2.6.1). Despite this, in terms of their overall language ability, some ISSAS seem to be light years behind, indicating a transitional dilemma caused by limited vocabulary. This affects the way they are treated in and out of class, and viewed by both tutors and home students. The overwhelming majority of ISSAS reported that, when tutors talked to them, it was as though they were patronised due to the use of simple language. It was clear from the findings that many of these students had a high level of understanding, ability to communicate on one to one basis and some had very successful careers behind them, but because of their language abilities they could only communicate effectively in a much more simplistic way than they would if it was their own language.

Given the difference in education systems and pedagogy in the UK University, a large proportion of students reported that the use of the English language, both in and out of class, was a major issue. Most students anticipated encountering difficulties in communication in English, especially those students whose countries were not colonised by the British.

> *During the first weeks of the new academic year, I was depressed because my English was poor and did not have good communication skills in English language. I did not understand what the lecturers were talking about very well and the white students were not giving me any attention. Any time I asked a question in class or whilst working in a group, in class, all they seemed to do is ignore me.* [Student 24, Congo]

> *I find it difficult to switch from one language to another. The most difficult thing for a foreigner like me is to start thinking in English without translating it in your head and it takes time. Even now when I start reading a book, I have to translate everything until I get used to the word.* [Student 49, Angola]

Some students found the accent spoken by tutors and fellow students hard to grasp.

> *The British accent is so difficult to understand, because they talk so fast and for foreign students, it will not be understandable at all.*
>
> [Student 23, Congo]

> *It is hard to communicate because they (British) have a strong accent, but when I ask them (British) to repeat something I did not understand that they just say it again, same speed, same words, they don't realise that they need to slow down. But you just only ask them to repeat so many times and then you give up, because you just feel stupid.*
>
> [Student 16, Ghana]

The implications of inadequate communication from Students 23 and 16 show signs of frustration and anger caused by different accents. There are so many regional and local dialects in England that can be incomprehensible. Clearly, there is the problem of accent and being different which students acknowledged:

> *You have to accept that you are a foreigner and people will look at you, because every time I say something I get asked where I am from. And it gets annoying after a while, so you have to take it as it comes and not take things personally or it can really get you down. Especially when somebody does not understand what you are saying, and you don't understand them either. It does not help one's confidence. You feel absolutely useless and frustrated.*
>
> [Student 29, Nigeria]

Some of the ISSAS go against their fears to communicate in English, which is often their second or third language, but the responses they get are rather derogatory. Student 29 clearly wants to learn, but her experience of the home students is negative. What this student seems to suggest is that ISSAS are putting a lot of effort into listening and understanding the accents to search for ways of improving their English language and to find more effective ways of communication.

> *I had to do something about the language barrier by throwing myself out of my comfort zone and talking to as many students as I could in order to get used to the accent. If I realised that I kept myself away from others because of the language, I would be isolating myself.*
>
> [Student 16, Ghana]

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The language barrier is a common issue among the international students and has been highlighted by many commentators, such as Klineberg & Hull, (1979); Furnham & Trezise, (1983) and Furnham & Bochner, (1986). It is also evidenced in this study as a major concern among ISSAS who have been challenged throughout their transitional stages of studying at Greenside University. Some of these students have made a step to challenge their inability to communicate well in English. Student 16 shows his determination to go against all odds and cultural beliefs in order to get close to people, to listen and understand accents. He realises the consequences of not being able to communicate in English and the impact it has on transition. Linked to poor communication is also the transition challenge of using Information Technology (IT) another theme that emerged in the interviews.

6.4.5   Information Technology

The ability, knowledge and practicality of using information technology (IT) varies among new international students. In Western countries, in particular the UK, computers are used in schools, libraries and local communities. In addition, 75% of UK households have a computer of some sort (Office of National Statistics, 2011). This is in contrast to Third World countries, where this is not the case (Graham 2011). As already observed in the Chapter 5.2.3, some ISSAS in this study had to travel a long distance in order to access the internet. Given that computers are generally a rare product both in schools and homes in Africa, a large proportion of ISSAS enter UK universities with limited knowledge of IT.

> *But when you are from Africa you never had an opportunity to buy or have a computer at home and even when you went to work it was not even a white collar job. Technologically, this has not been easy. I probably had around 5% knowledge of the computer but it was and still is hard to use a computer.*
>
> [Student 23, Congo]

With reference to Greenside University, all students are introduced to the basic use of IT during the induction. Common sessions given to students last for less than an hour and include how to log on, passwords, using the library electronic catalogue and access virtual learning environment (VLE). There is an assumption that all the new students have some IT knowledge and have the ability to learn the basics within a given time. Similarly, in class, tutors make reference to the VLE or Unilearn (formally known as Blackboard), a common site which is used widely by tutors to post all the necessary information about modules such as, Announcements, Assignments, Module documents and PowerPoint slides. Teaching methods are mainly through the use of the VLE. Occasionally, tutors ask students to check information and to print the slides for each session. What was identified in this study is most ISSAS found the use of IT, and in particular the VLE, a challenge.

> *It took me a while to get my head round it (blackboard). But I like the library systems, it is so convenient.*
>
> [Student 28, Nigeria]

> *Black board was mentioned in lessons all the time. So I just thought I'll have to get into it, but I really struggled with it at first.*
>
> [Student 20, Ghana]

> *They expect us to use computers, how... they don't understand that some of us have not used a computer prior to joining the University. They need to ask us first before they tell us to go and download the slides from Blackboard.*
>
> [Student 13, Sudan]

> *I am still confused about Blackboard. I have to ask the tutor again what he meant by Blackboard.*
>
> [Student 50, Cameroon]

Clearly, ISSAS join the University with no or limited IT skills and as a result they undergo a transitional challenge. With such limited knowledge and inadequate training, they struggle to gain access to VLE and download the slides for particular

modules which affects their preparation before lectures. For some ISSAS the lack of knowledge of IT is still prevalent to the extent that they struggle to find the necessary resources and learning tools.

> *I go to the library but I still can't get my way around accessing latest journals, E-books and the rest using the computer.*
>
> [Student 25, Uganda]

All students at Greenside University are expected to generate assignments and coursework using IT. In this respect, students have not only to learn to use a computer to research the library catalogue and the internet, but also have to learn to word process their work, a skill they have to develop in the shortest period of time. For most ISSAS, this is part of the transition process which they do not take lightly.

> *We were not told that we have to have to type our course-work. However, a friend told me about it and I was scared to death because my typing skills are near to zero.*
>
> [Student 13, Sudan]

> *During the induction, the librarian talked about word processing and use of PowerPoint as essential software we have to get used to, but that did not register at the beginning.*
>
> [Student 35, Nigeria]

> *I cannot imagine myself typing my assignments. I had a secretary and her role was to type my work. I wish they could teach us the basic IT skills.*
>
> [Student 7, Gambia]

Another student vented her frustration about the situation back home with regard to resources (Student 45), while the other was not pleased about the whole operational system in Greenside University (Student 19).

> *In terms of books, back home truly speaking, there would be only one textbook and there may be 8 to 20 of you who have to share the only text book. Sometimes some students they may want page 90, so they can write everything or tear out the page and when you get the book some pages are missing.*
>
> [Student 45, Zimbabwe]

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I am very disappointed with what I am doing now, the course. I am not happy with the lecturers sometimes. I know the methods of teaching are different, but I am not satisfied with the programme and the university.

[Student 19, Ghana]

At this stage of their transition to the educational systems, some ISSAS, such as Student 19, begin to experience new pressures placed on them by education and through adapting to new ways of learning- the transition stage (Van Gennep, 1960) which includes a move into a new culture. Other ISSAS begin to come to terms with the fact that what they thought were high levels of communication and good language skills are not as good as what is needed to help them achieve their academic goals or to communicate in such a way as to enable them to integrate in the way they would like to. This is very tough as it impacts on their transitional academic process and if not handled with care by either the University or tutors can lead to student drop out (Tinto, 1987).

Despite the hardships and academic challenges ISSAS experience in their studies, they remain focused, motivated and willing to learn new skills such as IT. Within six weeks of their courses, ISSAS have some ideas that studying in a UK university will require a basic knowledge of IT. They are made to believe that they can only succeed if they work hard but that will require the conscientious use of a computer for assignments, and searching information on the internet. This concept of being industrious is instilled in the young Africans from an early age; parents send their children to school and if they do not achieve good grades, there is a repercussion for poor achievement. When they come to study in the UK, that same working spirit is still embedded in them. As is noted above, the aspiration of doing well seems to be

the ultimate driver for ISSAS. A major issue is the use of technology, which for most

of the ISSAS is not a novelty.

> *I want to do well and that is why I have to work harder, learn how to use a computer... I know they don't expect much from the international students, so I do feel the need to excel sometimes, just to show them.*
>
> [Student 31, Nigeria]

> *I want to work very hard to fulfil my dream and getting a first class degree is my ultimate goal.   But my major worry is how I can learn to use IT in the shortest time possible. I am not a practical person at all.*
>
> [Student 19, Ghana]

> *I have always been a hard worker and my father was a good role model. He didn't get an education like me but went to a night School in order to bring himself up to more or less the same level as my mum who was a qualified teacher. Hence, I feel I owe him a good education and that is why I am spending most of my time working hard. I guess I have to know how to use a computer –not so easy to learn – it'll take time,*
>
> [Student 25, Uganda]

> *I am a very determined person. I made a lot of mistakes when I was younger, so I won't repeat them. As I am a mature student it is my last chance. If I mess up I will not get another chance. You have to make the most of opportunities you are given.*
>
> [Student 9, Gambia]

With such expectations from family members and the determination to succeed in

the UK University, ISSAS have to sacrifice their social life to study hard. They do

not want to let themselves and sponsors down. They face challenges, work hard and

show determination. Wenger (1998), in relation to Communities of Practice (CoP),

speaks about the past and the present being important in understanding learning. It

seems that ISSAS are prepared to put up with quite a lot in their educational

transition because they know they are paying a lot of money and possibly getting a

"better education". This makes them more motivated and at one level separates them

from other international students. They are a distinct a group because of a number of

issues they encounter before and after arriving at the University such as the family demands, political, social, academic and culture of learning.

6.6   Summary

The transition stages of ISSAS both in the UK and in Greenside University are not straightforward. The transitional challenges, as discussed in this chapter, commence right from the time they land at the port of entry and continue through their time at the University. The ISSAS in this study experienced both planned and unplanned transitional challenges during the stages of being in the UK and studying. References made to such transitional challenges are generally negative and call for a review by both UK government and the University. Some ISSAS felt criminalised and denied their identity, neglected by the University, discriminated and racially abused by the systems and patronised by the tutors in the first six weeks at the University. The immediate comfort in their social and educational experiences came from fellow Africans, their "collective identity".

As discussed, a significant number of students in this study felt ill-prepared and poorly-oriented. This was due to lack of information and knowledge about what was expected of them. Consequently, this made their transition to their UK University slow and complex. Despite the problems encountered, they were firm and determined to carry on studying at Greenside University.

The next chapter is the conclusion and recommendations of the overall study of the transition of ISSAS in the UK university system.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Introduction.

In contrast to the wider range of research on international students, the studying of ISSAS has not been given much attention. It may be assumed that the transition of ISSAS contains less challenging problems or that these students can simply overcome them without University pastoral interventions or that they do not form a distinct group among the international students already studied. This research has challenged these assumptions and has provided evidence about the issues and challenges ISSAS experience in their transition to successful study in a UK University. While the study has benefitted from the available literature on transition, this research has demonstrated that there are under-researched issues behind this transition, especially for ISSAS. The fundamental issues that emerge from the findings are quite complex and have implications for the students and Greenside University. These issues create unique constraints and sometimes discontent in the whole process of joining a UK university.

The various aspects of transition that have been given significant consideration by other researchers (Schlossberg, 1989; Senyshyn et al., 2000; Bridges, 2003; Sidoryn & Slade, 2008; Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zammit, 2009) provide fertile ground for understanding the key issues at stake. Contributions made by these researchers also add value to the perceived challenges faced by students during their transition phases. The data collected showed that ISSAS face issues that are painful and can have adverse effects on transition. They can neither be dismissed nor ignored.

Ignoring the transition issues that have been identified through this research can result in limiting the number of students from Third World countries wishing to study in Greenside University. This research does not establish that transition is a simple process that happens automatically, but it has found that in every transition there are stages which ISSAS must bridge. These need addressing. This study has identified the pertinent transition issues ISSAS encounter before and after embarking on their educational journey.

In this study, the evidence indicates that the transitional experience to UK life and study can be a devastating and challenging process for ISSAS. The systems governments and universities use to enable students to come to the UK, are where the issues of transition lie. This research has noted that the process and trouble ISSAS go through to gather all the necessary requirements for a student visa is long and there seems to be inadequate pastoral care on the part of the government and University respectively. Throughout the process, ISSAS are faced with stages of transitions within and beyond their home countries.

This chapter provides an overall summary drawn from the data analysis and the discussion contained in the previous chapters. Included in this chapter are: a recapitulation of the sample, a summary of the achievements of the research aims; the theoretical framework for transition process and its phenomenon; the recommendations; a review of the limitations; and a plan for further research.

7.2   The sample

This research was carried out at Greenside University with 50 ISSAS who had recently arrived in the UK to study. It is a small sample of ISSAS that the researcher interviewed at a particular time in their transition. The sample of 50 respondents does not represent the whole of ISSAS at Greenside University, or the whole of ISSAS who come to study in the UK. The researcher is aware of the limitations of this research and the extent to which he has met each of the research objectives. Therefore, the summary below includes the key findings for each objective and some of the researcher's overview.

7.3   Achievement of research questions

The research followed through three major themes; the background, decision-making and transition of ISSAS. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to analyse the achievement of the research aims. Oliver (2004, p.152) points out that a study provides an adequate picture for the reader only if it serves as "a check on whether the student has attempted to address the aims".

Taking into account this view and in order to put the thesis into perspective this section points out the extent to which the researcher met the aim of this study.

To what extent does the background of the International Sub-Saharan African students' impact on their transition to studying in a UK University?

This has been partially answered because the researcher has interviewed a number of ISSAS about this at a particular university in the UK. The researcher does not claim he identified the background of all ISSAS in UKHEIs but a small sample of ISSAS

who come to study in Greenside University. The respondents came from: Angola, Gambia, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Cameroon and DRC.

Most of the ISSAS in this study had some common background features; they were brought up in a traditional country village that has no resemblance at all to the standard of living in so many Western countries; their social attitudes and cultural upbringing are quite different from those of the rest of the Western society; the perception of authority, power, hierarchy and respect are deeply embedded in them; their perception of wealth is in the form of livestock; their educational reform is based on Western models. A background where collectivism as opposed to individualism (Hofstede, 1980, 1991) was also valued as a common factor. Therefore, coming to Greenside University represents a significance culture shock and represents a significant transition negotiation. In this respect the understanding of where the ISSAS come from was so important for this objective. It makes these students a separate and distinct group from other international students.

What are the main factors that influence the decisions for International Sub-Saharan African students to study in the UK?

This research question was covered extensively. The decisions made by ISSAS provided an overview of why the UK is chosen as a main academic destination. A combination of pull and push factors was identified. Factors associated with political, economical, social and educational were among the drivers that influenced the respondents to study in the UK. For most ISSAS, the main pull factors were: the education system, the novelty of UK qualification and religiosity; whilst the push

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factors included: the economy and political instability as well as the limited places in the local universities.

The majority of the respondents held the view that a British qualification was potentially a panacea for their future prospects back home. This supported the theory that ISSAS and their sponsors are prepared to sacrifice all they have for a UK-based education. All ISSAS in this study took seriously their decision to enrol at Greenside University. Some followed advice from friends or families to come and study in the UK. Others pointed out that the UK was not their first choice, but because Greenside responded to their application promptly, they opted for this University.

The process ISSAS had to go through was complex. This meant negotiating bureaucracy to enter the UK and Greenside University. On one level this might illustrate some resilience that they had to overcome a lot of problems to get to study and on another level, it is difficult and takes a lot of energy. But this was a significant part of the transition process for ISSAS.

What problems may International Sub-Saharan African students encounter during the transition of studying/living in the UK?

This research question was partially answered. The analysis has shown that the transitional experience of ISSAS is complex and results in mixed feelings. At every stage of the process the students need to have tangible proof of status to show to the authorities, both at home and in the UK. Most of the respondents had difficult

experiences which left them scarred and wishing they had not embarked on the long and daunting process.

Evidence drawn from interviews showed ISSAS had high expectations before they came to the UK and this compelled them to search all avenues back home in order to make their dreams a reality. This meant facing the effects of the unprecedented challenges. Some students accepted these challenges as a normal transitional process while others felt discriminated against and ill-treated because of physical features such as their "skin colour". This confirms the notion that people of different skin colours are ridiculed and treated slightly different by the society in which they are a minority.

While the ISSAS are proud of who they are, why they come to live/study in the UK and what defines them, the evidence from their personal experiences has shown that the border control systems, living conditions, social and academic dilemmas are some of the major challenges they encountered in their transitional process. Despite, the difficulties, ISSAS persevered and continued to face the transitional challenges in the name of the "UK Education".

To identify the factors that may enhance the effective transition of International African students coming to the UK universities

This research has shown that the transitional process of ISSAS to the UK University contains obstacles and dilemmas at every stage. Furthermore, the systems in the students' countries of origin and the UK did not support smooth transition. In this respect, the issues raised in this study have helped the researcher to identify

recommendations for enhancing the transition process of future ISSAS. The finding is represented in the recommendations below.

7.4   The Theoretical framework of transition process

Hofstede's (1980) theories of collectivism versus individualism in relation to the well-being of a society have contributed to understanding the background and transition experiences of the respondents under investigation. Of significance in the study is the collective deportment in Africa and individualism in the UK, and the issues it raised for ISSAS during the transition process. Demonstrated in the findings is the importance of ensuring that this collectivism is maintained, reinforced and even passed onto the next generation. In terms of transition the respondents made several references to 'back home' or 'back at home' which suggests their notion of collectivism, village or the place of origin. The findings showed that most ISSAS in this study were brought up in a village and this indicates commonality in terms of culture, language and community ethos, which may not be part of their life during the transition process. The concept of a village is also different from that of the west. A village from an African point of view can be considered as the soul of life, which is alive and not just an establishment that functions by legislation as it is in the west. At the core of the village is collectivism that bonds residents together to a place where hierarchy is very much emphasised and highly respected. While this is more evident in the village, it is also evident as most of ISSAS in this research were from rural areas and this had implications for transition in terms of adjustment to UKHEIs social, culture and academic life. The ISSAS found it difficult adjusting to the cultural differences and this reduced their chances of mixing and interacting with the home students.

A collective society in the context of Africa has got the following features as noted from the responses: hierarchy which involves respect of the elders and members who are less likely to challenge the system, speak back or criticise the elders or those in authority for fear of repercussions. To appreciate the ISSAS transition it is necessary to understand this hierarchy and perception of hierarchy as expressed by the respondents in this research, because it is part of the platform for understanding their experiences when they come to the UK to study. This is noted in the findings by respondents with regard to the power and authority teachers have "back home", and the academic decisions they make. They cannot be challenged by the students. This contrasts with what they experience in the UK, where tutors seem friendly, approachable and experienced. The respondents indicated that their beliefs about the positions of tutors in Africa and UKHEIS were not only challenged but had an impact during their transition to studying at Greenside University. Herein, transitional issues were caused by informality of home students calling those in authority by first names, instead of using terms such as "Sir" "Madam" "Doctor" and "Professor". While this may be a common way of addressing the tutors in the UKHEIs, the respondents found it difficult to adapt to this kind of society where students challenged decisions and tutors were not regarded as significant hierarchical academic figures.

Communities of practice that involve working together and learning from each other emerge as another feature of a collective society. These are embedded in Africans and tend to draw them together as one big family. Indicated in the finding is that ISSAS established their own informal community of practice to meet their own

needs. The respondents pointed out that meeting other ISSAS transformed their lives and they were able to talk freely about their transition problems. The benefits of being a part of this default group were evident, such help with problems of accommodation, or wider social, culture and academic issues. Hence, the theories of collectivism and race consciousness shed light on how ISSAS potentially perceive and acknowledge each other in a new study environment. Hofstede's (1980) international study on culture has thrown light on the impact that collectivism can have on an ISSAS who comes to a society that is fundamentally individualistic.

Altbach et al.'s (1985) pull and push factors have been used in this study and have been applied to assess what influenced the ISSAS to make their decision to study in the UK. All the respondents asserted that there were pull and push factors involved, such as academic, economic and political factors when they made their choice of "whether to go" or "where to go". These two factors seemed to reflect a link with collectivism because the decision to study in the UK cannot be made independent of the immediate or the extended family. The final decision to come to study in the UK is confirmed by the nuclei and extended family, not the respondent. The elders have absolute powers over the community, village and family, and their decisions are respected and followed without question. Without their consent, one stands to lose the benefits of belonging to a community. However, such decisions made by the elders do not make the ISSAS transition process less problematic, but endorse a separation and move out from the familiar (Schlossberg, 1989).

In terms of "where to go", this depended on family and the immediate relations' decision or purely on the first response from the Western University. ISSAS were

compelled to wait for an admission letter from university irrespective whether it was their first choice or not before processing the visa. Most ISSAS relied on western university's quick response. Another driver for ISSAS decision of where to study was determined by the tuition fees and course-related costs. Parents and family relations had to decide if it was feasible for their son or daughter to go a particular University in the UK.

Van Gennep's (1960) theory of the rites of passage refers to Separation, Transition and Incorporation. The findings show that because of bureaucratic and university admission procedures, some respondents left home without saying "goodbye" to their friends and colleagues, whilst other respondents failed to do so for fear of being bewitched. Bridges (2003) argues that failing to get ready for endings can lead to crises and confusion. The implication of this is that poor endings can make the separation process difficult and lead to poor beginnings for university students in the UK. In contrast, in the African traditions, an end is marked by events through rites of passage stages in life which Van Gennep (1960) refers to as the initiation into a special society. Van Gennep (1960), Tinto (1987) and Rasing (1996), all agree that the process of separation from the familiar to the unfamiliar is not straight forward and that one should not underestimate the problems individuals experience in transition. Rasing (1996) argues that it takes a while before one can exit the transition stage, so support and preparation is needed. She emphasises that by the time the individual arrives at the end of the transition - what Van Gennep (1960) calls incorporation, he/she would be stable enough and would be expected to behave according to the norms of the new community. The findings from the respondents show this is not the case. The ISSAS in this study had not completed the transition

process. Six weeks into UK living and studying they were still in "no man's land", the neutral zone, unplugging from their past. They were still facing prevalent challenges as a result of language and cultural barriers, homesickness, alienation, loneliness and different methods of learning.

The reference by the ISSAS to "back home" and "back at home" was evidence that suggested that they had not been incorporated into the new system; they still identified themselves with their people; unable to let go of the past lived experiences that are deeply embedded in them. This indicates the ISSAS had not unplugged or moved out from the familiar – they seemed to be still caught up in between the separating and transitioning stages (Van Gennep, 1960). This has implications for ISSAS and their setting to study in Greenside University. At this stage, ISSAS find themselves in a state of confusion and crisis of whether to embrace the new phase or retreat to familiar situations.

The findings from this study show that ISSAS are assumed merely to be stable and able to incorporate easily in the new society by the University, when they are not. The assumption by the University about students having transitioned is more of a physical perception, whereas for the ISSAS the process is more complex, subtle and extended. This research demonstrates that there is a missing link that it is not all that simple for ISSAS to reach the incorporation without a number of them remaining in transition until they return "back home".

Lewin's (1952) change theory of unfreezing, changing and refreezing has been fundamentally useful in exploring the changes and transition issues ISSAS encounter

in at Greenside University. Although the unfreezing stage involves preparation and thrusting aside the old behaviour, the findings suggest that the respondents were not ready to let go the values practices, relationships and expectations embedded in their culture. They insisted on the values of their culture by making reference to "back home", which indicated attachment to their tradition and fear of the unknown or moving into a "melting point". Change, as noted by Lewin (1952), involves moving away from the comfort zone and adopting new attitudes and culture. Although the evidence in this research has shown that Greenside University implements support mechanisms for new students, such as induction and fresher's week, to help them in their transitional journey to university life, the findings also suggest that ISSAS find the support given to be less than comprehensive to meet their needs. The evidence from findings suggests that some ISSAS find the support given to them inadequate. The respondents indicated that there was not enough time given to absorb all the information, acclimatise physically, unlearn some of their social norms and learn new behaviours and to adjust to the new study/living environment. While it may be assumed from the University's point of view that new ISSAS have "settled in" after induction week, the evidence from the interviews has shown that they did not fully understand the content included in the mainstream induction programme and were not conversant with the University's operating systems. Some respondents indicated that they had to find their own solutions to assist in adjusting to the changes. The search for their solutions could be perceived as a failure on the part of the University. Seeking to find fellow Africans shows again a sense of wanting a community and belonging.

Subsequently, culture shock during transition process was also identified by the ISSAS in this research. Oberg's (1960) notion of culture shock was perceived as a

personal disorientation. This has been noted as devastating and unsettling for a number of ISSAS in this study and if left unchecked by the University systems, it could lead to failure in transition, students dropping out, giving bad reports to other ISSAS or poor results in the National Student Survey (NSS). The notion of culture shock as evidenced by the respondents also highlights the importance of aspects such as hierarchy and collectivism. Furthermore, their experience at the port of entry unsettled the trust and confidence the ISSAS had in the British nationals. Hence, faced with culture shock, the ISSAS tended to remain silent, withholding information or making regular phone calls back home. Some also spoke with students from the same cultural backgrounds and skin colour as a way of breaking their silence and acknowledging their experience of race consciousness and culture shock.

Schlossberg's (1984) key factors of "moving in", "moving through" and "moving out" were very important in exploration of the ISSAS transition process. The findings showed that most of the ISSAS in this study were still in the first stage of moving in, attached to their routines and this had implications in terms of settling and getting used to the University's demands. Other Schlossberg's (1984) factors, such as anticipation, un-anticipation and non-event, also provided insights into the ISSAS transition process. Like any new students, ISSAS anticipated a transition process which marked the beginning of a new life that would be unique as compared to that in their countries. She points out that the complications during the stages of transitions are very difficult to predict. Similarly, some ISSAS in this study experienced some transitional challenges-the unanticipated transitions at the port of entry (immigration, customs and excise) and in the University (accommodation,

learning styles). She argues that the third alternative- a non-event transition, one where things all go smoothly is always expected but rarely experienced. In terms of ISSAS, the process for any move from one stage of transition to another is slow and progressive.

Bridges (2003) examines transition in terms of "unplugging", "neutral zone", "plugging into" and "endings" are paramount in understanding of ISSAS transition. Although Bridges' (2003) theory refers to three phases, it is clear from the findings that ISSAS were still stuck in the first; unable to "let go" of their previous encounters in life. They were still unplugging from life in their home countries.

According to Sidoryn and Slade (2008), the theories all involve the view that transition is a critical issue which new students experience in higher education. Although this observation fits in with some of the findings in this study, which have identified specific features of transition, the transition process for ISSAS is unique in comparison to other international students in terms of their social, cultural and academic background. Some of the unique features for ISSAS are: rural life, race consciousness, IT usage, dietary restrictions, personal lives at home and perception of hierarchy. From the interviews, this research has shown that there are stumbling blocks which ISSAS experience in the transition to a UK university that do not seem evident for other international students. Visa requirements such as birth certificates, bank account statements, and security problems were identified by the respondents as some of the peculiarly African impediments to transition. Some narratives about experiences of obtaining a student visa showed how traumatic the whole process can be. Some respondents experienced a double financial loss, namely paying bribes to

recruitment agents and losing deposits at the British Embassy once a visa had been denied. The evidence in this study indicates that a number of respondents had significant challenges which made it difficult for some to move in, unfreeze, separate and unplug from the familiar world, as noted by Lewin, (1952), Schlossberg (1984) and Bridges, (2003).

7.5   The Transitional phenomenon

As indicated, transition is often perceived as a three phase process that every person encounters in any new environment (Van Gennep, 1960; Schlossberg, 1989; Warfield-Coppock, 1992; Bridges, 2003). At every stage there are barriers which can prevent the individual from moving to another phase, so the shift from one stage to another is perceived as slow and not progressive. Identified in this research are a number of factors that impinge on the transition processes of ISSAS that the UK universities should not underestimate. These include the negative feelings about Universities' operating systems, induction, home students' attitudes and behaviour, categorisation of ISSAS as displayed by students and staff. Such feelings were exhibited by ISSAS 'stuck' in the transition process.

Feelings of disillusionments emerged as one of the transitional impacts that affected the ISSAS. They were disappointed at their reception in the UK, which was in contrast with what they had read or heard about. This commenced right at the port of entry, where some ISSAS had their belongings checked and rechecked, documents scrutinized and others were delayed for hours to establish their reasons for entry to the UK. In addition, joining a University and classroom where the teaching and learning culture is totally different to their own caused some disillusionment. Age

and roles were also noted in this research as a significant factor affecting transition. Some ISSAS in this study were important people in their professional lives at home and when they "became students" it was significant in terms of their entitlements or treatment from others, and their self expectations. Evidence in this study indicated that age also deterred ISSAS from mixing with young UK students.

Language has been noted as one of the issues that impacts on the transition process (McNamara & Harris, 1997). Some of the ISSAS were from countries which were colonised by the British, so English had remained the main mode of communication, both in and out of the classroom. Nevertheless, some of the respondents still identified understanding and communicating in English as one of the major difficulties they experienced during transition. Though the respondents in this research cited a number of difficult factors such as lack of integration with the home students and culture, lack of socialisation, inability to contribute in class and group activities and a preference for congregating and speaking with fellow Africans, the major transition barrier that was frequently raised by the ISSAS was accent when speaking English. This produced humiliation and intimidation for them from tutors and host students. There is evidence from the respondents of their perception of being labelled as ignorant and primitive. Evidence in the findings show that some respondents approached some home students to help them break through the language barrier, however some ISSAS investments and efforts made to mix with host students were in vain. Such negative responses forced the ISSAS to rely on their fellow Africans, irrespective of their country of origin. This indicates that ISSAS moved forward and backward in the first and second stages of transition and when

they tried to make efforts to be incorporated, they did not usually receive a positive response from the home students.

Culture and race consciousness define the identity of ISSAS and distinguishes them from other international students. *"I am an African and black"* was emphasised strongly by the respondents. While the ISSAS were proud of who they are, where they came from and how much they tried to maintain their identity, evidence from the interviews shows some experience of racism and prejudice from both the locals and host students; e.g. name calling, segregation and rejection. Furthermore, social, economic and psychological consequences of this are some of the factors noted in this study that ISSAS continue to experience in the cause of gaining a UK education. The transition and incorporation of ISSAS in a new environment is a key issue of the thesis.

While religion may seem out of place in this stage of the thesis, evidence drawn together from the interviews show that religion for an ISSAS is an obligation and central to his or her life. It emphasises aspects of communalism, interrelatedness and a sense of unity that are instilled in their culture, which brings them together as a part of a bigger family. The difficulty in accessing and practicing their religious beliefs in a familiar way caused difficulties in ISSAS moving through transition. Religiosity in the life of the ISSAS is very important. Evidence in this research showed that ISSAS had to go through the traditional religious rituals such as blessings from the family and rite of passage. Although Greenside University perhaps could not be expected to be aware of religious obligations and expectations, they should also not ignore them. Providing new ISSAS with a guide to churches in the town or city would be a

starting point and aid the students to locate a religious sector that has similar religious beliefs and practices.

This research has demonstrated that while the processes of separation, transition and incorporation are important to the ISSAS, the current practices of Greenside University indicate that there are gaps in their provision which may mean that ISSAS stay in "no man's land" or continue "moving through" transition longer than is desirable. The lack of necessary provisions leaves the new ISSAS disillusioned. While cultural shock and loneliness might be expected by any student from a different continent with a different cultural background (collectivist society), it could be argued that Greenside University needs to recognise the culture shock experiences of ISSAS and put in place strategies to reduce their impact, especially where they negatively affect their transition. The social, cultural and psychological elements of an individual are important and cannot be separated from the reality of their experiences in a new study/living environment. The issue of disillusionment cannot be undervalued here because of the effects it has on the students study and success with academia in the University. Universities have a holistic obligation to ensure that the education they advertise and promise aspiring students is offered in totality. Hence, the issues raised here should be considered in order to ensure the university meets the needs of ISSAS.

7.6   The Recommendations

The attraction of international students is very much emphasised in Greenside University's literature; therefore, the University needs to take into consideration the transitional challenges new ISSAS experience in order to ensure that they enjoy a smooth transition to successful incorporation into studying and living in the UK. With this in mind, the following recommendations will consolidate the University's existing transitional procedures and enable them to put proper systems in the place to aid students during their process of "moving in", "moving through" and "moving out" (Schlossberg, 1989).

Universities have a pastoral obligation as well as a responsibility to support students during all phases in their transition. Facilitating a smooth transition for ISSAS is at the centre of this research. Although the researcher acknowledges that some of the recommendations may require a longer term plan of action - strategically driven; the medium – tactically driven and short-term - administratively driven recommendations could be planned and implemented before the next intake of ISSAS.

The researcher separated the recommendations into two; the aspirational recommendations which the university sector in the UK work together to pressurise government and the home office to be more welcoming to international students as a whole and what the society could aspire to and the other is a set of recommendations specific to Greenside University to implement.

7.6.1 Aspirational recommendations

1.   The whole visa process was very important for ISSAS and very troublesome. In view of recent immigration changes, for example tuition fees, tier points and limits of family members' visits to the UK, this research recommends a review of the Universities' recruitment processes in order to ensure ISSAS are fully informed of visa requirements. Students from SSA may not get the necessary documents on time and this can delay the processing of their visas. To counteract this, the universities should work hand in hand with the British Embassies in Africa to ease the delay and unnecessary stress which the visa "chase" creates.

2.   The researcher believes that the Duty of Care starts right at the moment that potential students start thinking of applying to the University through its agents. These students are vulnerable because they do not know what is happening, so they take their chances. These are people who have massive aspirations, dreams and hopes but not a lot of understanding of the harsh reality of some business people because most of them are rural people. If the agents are corrupt, universities must not use them; they have to find another way of assisting the students. The universities should recruit other representatives who should be monitored regularly.

Having University representatives in Africa is also a good idea but the evidence from this research indicates that it has created more issues. Universities need to survey prospective candidates about their experiences. The recruitment agencies take people's money and it is unclear if universities, or the International Office, understand the level of corruption

that the representatives might be engaging in. If they do not, why not and how can they find out, and how can that be communicated to potential students. The majority of the respondents are from Nigeria, Ghana and Zimbabwe and that is where corruption is very common. The universities have a duty of care, so they need to find out and check exactly what is happening to the potential students. It is important that the University checks because it might make ISSAS question the ethics of the universities, or it may result in a loss of potential students. The agents take a lot of money from people and one of the things this research has shown is that ISSAS are not rich. Some of ISSAS in this study got money from relations and savings to process the documents and to study/live in the UK. This could be implemented in the medium-term, as it may require putting systems in place such as vetting the agents.

3. The point of entry and finding their way from the airport to Greenside University was very troublesome for some ISSAS in this study. To ease the immigration process for ISSAS in the UK, universities in the UK need to work together to pressurise government and the Home Office to be more welcoming to ISSAS as they bring significant amounts of money to this country. The universities must exert immense leverage on government to insist that students who are paying relatively significant fees are treated as a separate case with respect and dignity. This must be auctioned in the long-term as UKHEIs have to get together to draw up a strategic plan which will inform the decision-making.

4.   Managing ISSAS entry at the airport was difficult. It requires collaboration with other local universities. Universities in the North of England could work together to meet students at airports. A representative of one university could meet all those students who come at different times. In collaboration, the local universities could have a joint welcome desk, or sponsor someone to man a welcome desk, that is there all the time the students are arriving. This is applicable in the long-term as it requires all the local Universities to work jointly on this issues, put aside resources aside and arrange ways of manning the welcome desk.

5.   Meeting other students as they arrived at the airport and finding their way from the airport to the University were problematic for most ISSAS in the study. This research recommends the use of student volunteers who are from African countries to aid ISSAS at the airport. As a short term measure the University should establish a temporary welcome office at the airport, where students can have their first point of contact as many ISSAS in this study encountered difficulties after the checks at the airport. A 'welcome officer' could brief them about the next stage of their transition. This could be like a drop-in office opened from 8am until 8pm, 7 days a week for 3 or 4 weeks during the welcome programme.

To further aid the ISSAS transition process, welcome office/officer should be provided within the Universities for this period where students could be given practical information about all the services whilst settling in before the orientation   programme;   e.g.   Students'   Union,   International   Office,

Chaplaincy, identifying 'buddies' and advising on safety. It could be staffed by student volunteers and they could be home or overseas students. It could be coordinated by both the International Office and Students' Union. African student volunteers should be empowered to contact ISSAS either by letter or word of mouth before the ISSAS leave their country of origin to know their arrival days and times and their travel details. Generally, fellow students are more familiar with the challenges and issues ISSAS are facing and based on their previous experiences they can guide them through the transition process. This is a medium-term recommendation that could aid students' transition experiences.

7.6.2   Greenside University recommendations

1.   The issues encountered by ISSAS with regard to accommodation require stringent measures to ease the transition of ISSAS. While other UK universities have their own students accommodation, Greenside University does not own any halls of residence or student accommodation. To support the ISSAS to establish a community, it is recommended that a residential accommodation is established specifically for new ISSAS who are used to a traditional communal ambiance and prefer mixing with a diverse group of people. In terms of acclimatising, moving though and unplugging into the new phase, there must be a way by which international students, especially those from Africa or less privileged areas, could get help during the process of transition and incorporation The University needs to be more flexible with its approach regarding accommodation. As one student commented the University should have a "vertical accommodation development"; for

example, halls of residence for ISSAS who have just arrived where they could stay for a year or a few weeks while they are negotiating their incorporation into their new community. After they have familiarised themselves with university life they could move out to other places, to make room for those who have just arrived. This would support peace of mind and a smooth transition. If the university welcomed new ISSAS into a communal accommodation, they would be more able to integrate well and excel. It could ease their negative feelings of being away from home. This is applicable in both the medium and long-term.

In addition, the unprofessional behaviours of landlords were an issue and require further attention. This should be an avenue for a dialogue between university, landlords and students. It would also be advisable for the University to work with the private suppliers of houses to provide information so that students are fully informed. ISSAS in particular who have just come to the University are vulnerable in all aspects. The University should have a mechanism where the Students' Union, in collaboration with the International Office, helps ISSAS view flats or privately-owned property, meet the landlords and verify the landlord's identity and ownership of the rented private property prior to entering into any contracts. They could do this as a monitoring process before information is passed to ISSAS. As noted, ISSAS sometimes find themselves unaware of the customs and practices about contracts in the UK. It is important that the University provides the relevant information without fail. This should be executed urgently as requires immediate attention.

2.	In line with the transitional issues ISSAS encounter, it is clear that the University does not pay them special attention. One student suggested that students coming from outside the country need some special attention and a lot more help than people who live in the UK. The potential students who live in the UK have opportunities to visit the university during open weeks, to speak to tutors and to visit accommodation before making decisions. Because it is a different environment coming from Africa, ISSAS need help to settle in and know places, to be made aware of the social and cultural patterns of living; where to go or who to contact with problems in the "neutral zone" (Bridges, 2003).

ISSAS, like other international students, are in a foreign culture when they leave their countries and their experiences impact on them in a variety of ways that often become apparent once they step out of that culture. They leave a community where they have a sense of belonging and join the University campus where they are surrounded mostly by those with whom they have no shared experience. University support services need to understand the ISSAS transitional experiences and set up a recreational service that caters specifically for ISSAS. International students' tutors need to be made aware of what their backgrounds are and where they are coming from and their discontinuities. There needs to be more dialogue to enable staff and students to work together. This needs to be implemented in a short term.

3.   The induction process was very important for ISSAS but created transitional problems. There is a presumption in Greenside University that once induction is done, the students are already incorporated within the system. There are also certain assumptions that once the ISSAS have transitioned physically into the University then that is it, they are already in the system and that they can undertake changes. The University must be made aware that, after the induction, it is where ISSAS transition processes begin in terms of academic and living experiences. With this in mind the researcher recommends a review of all the University's transitional processes, particularly the orientation done by the International office and the induction as part of the course processes in the schools. Instead of having a one-week induction, it should be on-going - for at least six weeks. This should be applied in the short and medium-term.

4.   The findings indicate that, during the orientation week, Greenside University introduces the ISSAS to the subsequent services for example, registration with a General Practitioner (GP) and the support of the Chaplaincy. This research recommends that during the students' orientation week, representatives from all the students' services including the Police, Pastors from the different churches in Greenside, and the students' travel agents are available for the international students to meet. By knowing and meeting the people responsible for various services the students are able to put names to faces, networking which would in return help them temporarily in their transition. This can be an ice-breaker for ISSAS who have a high regard for hierarchy and order in society. This is more applicable in the medium-term as

ISSAS need time to go through the transition process with maximum support available.

5.   In this study, ISSAS found mixing with other home students both inside and outside class challenging, and those who tried to introduce themselves to the home students did not get a positive response. The importance of rites of passage of ISSAS in particular is very important and highly respected. It officially initiates them into a group or a community. Greenside University needs to be aware of the ISSAS initiation rites. The researcher recommends that Greenside University should organise formal transitional "ceremonies" or "support services" to mark and guide the passage of ISSAS into their new community. These could be in the form of asking an African elderly person/staff to initiate the ISSAS to the University's academic, social and cultural challenges at the start of the first term.

In addition, what came out of the findings is the issue of collectivism and these ISSAS are used to the collectivism community. But, in academic terms, they are not used to working in groups. So, it turned around the opposites that the home students are very individual in their lifestyle and people in the Western culture are individualistic. On the contrary, there is a lot of group work in UKHEIs which is again another issue. For the transition, the University need to devise a method that work quickly right from the start of academic year that would enable students much more to work in groups.

6.   What emerged from the findings is that, when ISSAS arrive at the university in the UK, they exhibit significant levels of optimism and are excited due to the venture into a new environment (Hofstede, 1991). Within a short space of time students discover things are not the same as at home, or as they had anticipated. They may not understand the language (accent) and the different methods of learning, so they become psychologically deflated and their mood lowered. They may even get to the level where they become depressed. This can depend on a huge number of factors such as finance, relationships, misunderstandings or language barriers. This research recommends a buddy system whereby the new ISSAS are matched up with experienced students who are from the same country/continent to offer assistance before and after students have arrived at University, even after the six weeks as the students' transition process is on-going. This should be implemented in the short and medium-term.

In addition to supporting strategies for a smooth transition and incorporation, when new ISSAS arrive at the University they should get a blue folder with a welcome programme. The idea of a folder is so that the new ISSAS can take it with them during the first week and when other students or members of staff at the university see the blue folder, they would know they are a new student and would help them in embracing the new phase of transition, the moving through as described by Schlossberg, 1989). The effectiveness of this idea will depend on the students and staff being briefed and interested in the whole transitional exercise. This research recommends that it would be a good idea to send blue luggage labels to ISSAS prior to coming to the UK. If

that is the case, then there would be a chance for ISSAS to recognise the blue label on the luggage in the baggage claim area. This could also assist the students to identify fellow students and begin to establish an ISSAS community. The University needs to be ingenious about the ways it aids the ISSAS transition in the UK. This is applicable in both the medium and long-term.

7. The University has systems in place to help all international students but to what extent does it accept responsibility for the social and pastoral care of ISSAS. Because the University has a pastoral responsibility, it is imperative that it provides adequate pastoral care for them, particularly during their transitional stages. These students are more than customers. They are in the care of the University and therefore they need to feel accepted. It is the University's responsibility to ensure that ISSAS are looked after and their needs are taken into account otherwise it might lead to them questioning whether they are part of things and belong (Phillips, 2007) to the Greenside University. This research recommends that pastoral care procedures should be detailed in each school's policies and ISSAS must be made aware of their rights prior to arrival at the University. This should be actioned in the long-term.

8. From the findings, Greenside University has a drop-in service available where all students who want to make use of the service are free to go. No advance booking system is necessary. However, because students such as the ones from Africa are quiet and do not generally use the service, it does not

mean that they have no issues. African cultural patterns, beliefs and norms embedded in ISSAS prevent them from utilising the available service. A student in this study commented that the university does not care about the ISSAS. He/she said, "They expect us to go to them or use this service". A drop-in session for students may be fine for some, but a drop-in of this nature would not work for ISSAS in this study because that is not how it works in their countries. The University needs to have an on-going dialogue with ISSAS to find out their needs. The University must have a liaison officer, a person like a personal tutor on their programmes who should be liaising with relevant services to solve them and passing on significant issues that cannot be readily available. Such person should have an experience of Africa who can follow them through their study and living time in Greenside and regularly meet with them.

The findings from this study have shown that ISSAS have profound needs and transition issues that can only be resolved by recognition and specific support. Ignoring the cultural, social and academic changes required prior to their incorporation into study and living in the UK, and choosing to focus on the revenue students bring in, will not help the transition of ISSAS. In light of the issues uncovered, further research is needed to find out about the longer term transitional journey and the wider impact of transitional issues on the academic, social and living experiences of ISSAS in UK universities.

7.7   Review of the limitations and further research

The data used in this research is sample driven. The effects and impact of transition apart from the feelings is difficult to assess in the sample that analysed the responses of ISSAS within the first six weeks of arriving to study/live in the UK. The students were literally in what would be described in the transition process as a "no man's land" or a "neutral zone". The ISSAS were still in the first phase of their transition. The transition will be on-going and, because it impacts on them for an extended period into their academic studies, it requires more research.

In addition, this research looks at the process of transition, and not the outcome of transition. How they experience getting to the UK, how they are feeling, and how they are integrating are the focuses of this research. Another piece of research to explore the outcomes of that process is required.

This research is about the subjective experiences of a sample of ISSAS and it was within the objectives of the research. The researcher wanted to evaluate their early experiences. The researcher believes that the six week period for transition is very important and problematic because it makes them cogitate about their decisions of living and studying in the UK. But the transition continues, so what the researcher has found represents the first step. Future research is needed to follow ISSAS through in a longitudinal way in order to identify more factors that influence their transition.

The researcher would like to do a further research to investigate the transition experiences of ISSAS at other UKHEIs in order to do comparisons. It might be a different package in different universities. The researcher also noted that Black

Africans are an ethnic minority in the local community of Greenside University which would discourage more Africans from studying in the area. A further research into why so many ISSAS do not apply to come to the North of England is needed.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Email sent to students

Study Title: The Transition of International Sub-Saharan African Students into the UK University system

Dear Student

My name is Denis Hyams-Ssekasi. I am a lecturer in the Business School as well as a doctoral student in the School of Education and Professional Development at the University of Greenside. I am conducting a research as part of the requirement for my doctorate in Education, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am researching the transition of Overseas African Students in the UK University. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for a formal interview. In this interview you will be asked questions about the "effective transition of African students in the UK Higher Education Institution. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed time and place and should last about 45 minutes.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number listed below or e-mail to discuss participating. Alternatively, I will e-mail you within the week to see whether you are willing to participate.

Your co-operation is very much appreciated.

With kind regards,

Denis Hyams-Ssekasi

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Mob.07749482993
 email: d.hyams-ssekasi@hud.ac.uk

Appendix 2

International Sub-Saharan African Student Interview Schedule

Good Morning/Afternoon!

This research is about the transition of African students joining a UK University. Today, I would like to talk to you and find out what your experiences are.

This interview is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to do so.. You may also ask me to clarify any questions if you do not understand them. Your identity will remain anonymous and any answers/information you give will be treated confidentially.

I will be recording the interview with a digital recorder to concentrate on what you are saying and save time in trying to write everything down. Is that ok with you?

Theme one:
Student Background

1- Can you tell me a bit about yourself - Where you were born, where you lived before coming to the UK and where you studied
2- How would you describe the place where you were born, was it rural or urban
3- How would you describe the general type of society within your country that you were born in?
4- How would describe your family status? Would you regard yourself as wealthy, average, poor? Why
5- What kind of school (s)/college did you go to? Private, Public
    a. Tell me about your school experiences? Likes/Dislikes at School/College etc
    b. How many languages do you speak:
6- What did you do before you came to the UK? Were you in education or working?
7- How did you hear/know about this University?

Theme two
Motivation/Decision to Study in the UK

8- Why did you decide to undertake the course in the UK University/College rather than in your home country?
9- What influenced your decision to study in the UK Higher Institution?
10- What obstacles did you encounter prior to coming to the UK?
11- What were your experiences when applying for a visa?
12- What preparation did you have before coming to the UK?
13- What pre-arrival information did you receive? How and when did you get this information?
14- How were you received/treated at the UK Airport? Immigration, customs and excise etc
15- What was your first impression of the UK?

16- How did travel from the airport to the University?

Theme three

Transition Experiences

17- What are some of the difficulties/challenges you have experienced since you arrived at the University/UK i.e. accommodation, social, academic, financial, culture etc:

18- Induction Process: what things were done and how important were they?

19- Type of preparation/support before the course, how adequate was it?

20- What kind of support have you received since you arrived at this University?

21- How much did/do you know about the student's services?

22- How would you describe Greenside University and its services?

23- What do you think are the problems encountered by African students?

24- What would you have like the University to do for African students before and after arriving at this University?

25- How would you describe your transition from your home country to the UK University?

SOME INTERVIEW RESULTS

Q	Question	Some of the Respondents Answers	
		Angola	
	Can you tell me a bit about yourself - Where you were born, where you lived before coming to the UK and where you studied	Nigeria	
		Zimbabwe	
		South Africa	
		Cameroon	
		Gambia:	
		Congo	
		Kenya	
		Uganda	
	How would you describe the place where you were born, was it rural or urban	Rural/	
		Rural	
		Rural	
		Rural	
		Rural	
		Rural	
		Urban	
		Rural	
	How would you describe the general type of society within your country that you were born in	Community orientated	
		Family	
		Community where sharing is very important	
		Poor	
		Politically unstable	
		War zone	
		Communal	
		Helpful and friendly society	
	How would describe your family status? Would you regard yourself as wealthy, average, poor? Why	Poor	Before I came to the UK, I thought my parents were rich, but now I have come to realise that my parents are not as wealthy as compared to what I have seen so

	What kind of School /college did you attend?		far here in England. For example, I could not believe when one of the English students told me that he had his own car parked outside the halls of residence. In my country, possessing a car and living in a corrugated iron house are considered to be signs of richness.
		Poor	
		Poor	
		Poor	
		Average	
		I pursued all my primary and secondary education in the school located in my village. In other words, I did not have the opportunity of leaving the village until my late twenties. Village life evokes unforgettable memories Public Private School but managed by Missionaries Public School but in a rural place I went to a Primary and Secondary School in my village I attended a public Primary and Secondary School	
	How many languages do you speak?	There are more than over twenty langugages but we have three major ones which are Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba. I speak all these 3 and English In my country we have more than 400 ethnic languages besides 3 main ones Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo but the most common national language is English. These three languages dominate the North Eastern and Western part of the country.] I speak English, Italian, Teso, Luo, Karamajong and Swahili. I speak Swahili, Lingala and French. I speak 3 languages, 2 of my native languages and English. I speak 2 languages, Shona and English. I speak Nyanja and Bemba,English I speak 3 languages, Swahili, Kikuyu and English I speak 3 languages: Ndebele, Shona and English I speak very well "Frananglais" which is a mixture of French, English, and Creole. I am very fluent in Portuguese language and speak very little English Just one, the language of my country	
	What did you do before you came to the UK.	Before I came, I worked with a European Union Program as an Assistant Accountant and then I was attached to many programs for two years. Then I left shortly before the project ended because I could not stand the pressure of work.	

		I just came straight from the College I was working as a salesman Just doing nothing- going out with friends
	How did you hear about/now about the University/	Friends Relatives Friends Friends My dad studied here in the UK Just the internet Teachers
	Why did you decide to undertake the course in the UK rather than in your home country	I think UK is a dream place for every African. To come to the UK is considered to be a blessing from God because many people want to come here but they face so many stumbling blocks in the process. I did say a prayer, asking God to give this opportunity to come to this country, and He (God) heard my prayers . My brother suggested that I come to the UK to study because of the economical problems in my country. He paid some of my fees but he is expecting me to do some work and send something (money) to him so that he can look after the business.
	What influenced your decision to study in the UK HE?	Quality of Education UK degree is recognised in the whole world
	What obstacles did you encounter prior to coming to the UK	Visa was a major issue Visa Process Parents did want me to come as I am the only person to leave the country The whole process was very difficult I did the information on time and could not apply for a visa Going to the embassy Interviews at the Embassy Getting the evidence at the embassy ie. Birth certificate, bank statement etc Money to bribe the recruitment agents Permission from my parents, family
	What pre-arrival information did you receive?	University Prospectus Paper work from International Office Did not adequate information except what I read online I got a pack from the University with all the necessary information. It seems the documents which were sent to me got lost I did not get the additional information on time
	How were treated at the UK Airport	Very bad Not as a VIP Did not like the experience I dreaded it Never again I was lucky because I came on Sunday, no problem Detained for some hours Bad experience

		I felt more foreign and unwanted
	How did you travel from the airport to the University	Used the University's organise transport Public transport (Train) Taxi
	Difficulties encountered since arrival in the UK	Accommodation Lack of local food No friends Felt lonely, Homesickness The whole culture was different No one wanted to talk to me
	Induction	I missed it because I came late Boring Did not understand anything Not for African students like us- nobody understands us
		Information overload I liked some of the people who spoke though I can't remember their faces I was new and therefore missed most of the things that happened
	Type of preparation before the course	I think it was inadequate Could not find the place It took me awhile to get to the place Nothing- because I arrived late Inadequate
	Support received	None Only from my fellow Africans Not even from the International office From some tutors
	Students services	Very little Only what we were told during the induction I can't remember
	Description of University's services	Non-existent for African Students Not used any of them I don't what's available
	Problems encountered by African students	Loneliness, stress, financial issues, dietary, lack of academic language, homesickness, social life, Language barrier
	Transition from home to University	Very difficult Challenging Unusual Nothing as such I have ever experiences in my entire life Food for thought Hard Difficult to imagine