

**Crossing the bridge: Nigerian students' independent
learning experience in English sixth form college**

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Abbreviations and terms used

'Ayo Explains IL All'	Vlog channel - Ayo
'Being and Becoming Independent'	Vlog channel - Kamsi
EU	European Union
Euro-Western	Perspective centred on the worldviews and lifestyles of Europe and the West
FE	Further Education
'Gee in Progress'	Vlog channel- Grace
HE	Higher Education
House parent	A member of the boarding team who delivers pastoral care for the students in college accommodation
'Ife's Independent Life'	Vlog channel - Ife
IFP	International Foundation Programme
Independent learning experience	A complex cycle of perceptions, connections and understandings involving college students' personal epistemology, transformation and identity shift.
'Independently Me'	Vlog channel - Bolu
International students	Students originating from outside the EU who have come to the UK for the purpose of study
in vivo codes	Categories named during coding using words and phrases used by Nigerian IFP students
'Life with Independent Learning'	Vlog channel - Simi
Post-16	Post-16 education, including skills- and academic- based learning, taking place after compulsory schooling in school sixth forms, academies, sixth form colleges, further education and higher education institutions.
'Newbies Guide to College Life'	Vlog channel - Dele
SSCE	Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
UK	United Kingdom
UK education system	Education system in the UK comprising primary education, secondary education, further education and higher education
WASSCE	West African Secondary School Certificate Examination
'10 Things IFP taught me'	Vlog channel - Zayda

Abstract

This thesis considers the experience of independent learning of a small group of international students studying in three sixth-form colleges in England. It is an empirical account of independent learning experience at college level and the resulting understanding of this experience. It follows a multimethod approach to develop the vlog-interview method involving data collection from eight international students in one academic programme, the university preparatory International Foundation Programme (IFP), across three different independent sixth-form colleges in England. I follow an emergent approach to code and analyse the data collected. Independent learning emerged as a phenomenon with three dimensions rooted in transformational experience: affective, behaviour and cognitive experiences.

The thesis offers an account of independent learning-as-experience through three distinct domains, which encompass the students' college world. Conceptually, the study - as framed by an experience perspective of independent learning - rejects the linear processual model of independent learning. Instead, I conclude that *Challenging preconceptions*, *Extending engagement* and *Crossing the bridge* are key components of the three dimensions outlined above and illustrated in the shifts in students' independent learning, which contributes to a more nuanced understanding of independent learning and of the student as an independent learning 'experiencer'. This distinguishes this conceptualisation from a process and development view of independent learning identified in the literature.

The thesis thus furthers understanding of what independent learning might be in the (international) student experience. First, it enriches understanding of students' independent learning in the sixth-form college context. Second, it further conceptualises independent learning. Third, it provides a perspective of 'experience' in relation to the impact of students' beliefs on their independent learning ability. Fourth, by working with the concept 'independent learning-as-experience', it offers an example of using an African-centred approach to guide the increasingly complex knowledge systems of the present times. Fifth, the study contributes to qualitative educational research methodology by developing the vlog-interview method to reveal students' (re)conceptions of independent learning as not limited to processes, practices and approaches to learning. Last, the study addresses some deficit notions underpinning much of the discussion about international students, particularly in Western countries, regarding learning experiences in post-16 settings, and suggests an experientially progressive awareness of independent learning in an increasingly changing environment for learning and development.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated, with all my love, to my family.

To Tony for being my companion and cheerleader, for loving me unconditionally, for comforting and encouraging me these past 24 years.

To Lorri's angels: Adanna, Kenechukwu, Chiamaka and Onaedo for being my inspiration. Your unconditional love for me and your pride in me make me so blessed to be your Maama.

To Mummy, who remains the wind beneath my wings.

I love you all very much!

The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which [s]he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world himself [and herself] ...

(James Baldwin, 'A Talk to Teachers', 1963)

Chapter 1: INTRODUCING THE THESIS IN CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the concept of independent learning, a term commonly used in further education, but which can mean different things to different people, can be conceptualised differently in different disciplines, and can be described in different ways in different learning contexts. The intention of this thesis is to develop understanding of the essence of independent learning through the voices and perspectives of students.

The term ‘independent learning’ is widely used in educational literature and in system-wide education reforms, policy and guidelines supporting teaching and practices of international students within the post-16 educational environment of colleges and universities. The concept of the ‘independent scholar’, which implies learning ‘on your own’, ‘unaided’, and ‘free from teacher control or influence’, often relies on theoretical evidence. However, what is lacking is a deeper empirical consideration of this concept, in spite of the implications of independent learning on student experience in an *internationalised* education landscape. Furthermore, previous literature, which explores the degree to which post-16 students adopt independent learning (either as autonomous learning, or independent study, or self-regulation) as part of their *approach* to learning, conceptually fails to address students’ *experience* of independent learning, and their *understanding* of independent learning as a result of the experience. Crucially, experience and understanding of independent learning, remains underexplored from the perspective of international students in post-16 settings other than higher education.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how international students in independent sixth form colleges in England experience and understand independent learning, from the student’s perspective, in order to develop a conceptual understanding of independent learning. The study aims to offer a unifying perspective on

independent learning in the context of its application to the international student experience.

This thesis also aims to shift the focus away from dominant thinking of independent learning as an approach to learning, and as a continuum of processes and practices, to an experience model of independent learning, in order to illustrate that independent learning involves and is mediated by experience. In interrogating the issue, international students were positioned as key stakeholders in the ‘international’ independent learning experience. Thereby facilitating a methodological surfacing of how international students perceive, connect with and understand independent learning in independent sixth form college, using an inductive approach to qualitative educational research. Within this thinking, I address the dominant categorisation of international students as a homogenous group and the normalising conceptions of international students’ academic adjustments in post-16 education life, which neglect to highlight the complexity and uniqueness of their learning experience. In so doing, I arrive at an alternative conceptualisation of ‘international student experience’, which is a shift from a *deficit* model that focuses on transition, language and academic difficulty, and culture shock of international students in the UK and other overseas contexts (Kingston and Forland, 2008; Sawir, 2013; Vasilopoulos, 2016).

Although there are many published accounts of independent learning evident in school (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000; Bullock and Muschamp, 2006), in college (Mistrano, 2008; Stoten, 2014) and higher education (Thomas et al., 2015) settings, the majority focus on the teachers’ understandings and practice rather than those of the learners. Independent learning is an important educational aim, and current trends in UK higher education, have encouraged a more student-directed approach to learning. However, conceptualisations of independent learning are intensely complex, and independent learning constructs are multifaceted and can be contradictory (Kesten, 1987; Williamson, 1995; Souto and Turner, 2000). Independent learning is often broadly categorised in mostly junior and higher

education in terms of induction strategies developed and implemented by the school or university. Often in relation to introducing a series of specific learning processes, learning approaches, or developmental processes related to individual student's personal learning traits and attributes. This categorisation, it is argued focuses on linear processes or procedures that are bound in time and space. Furthermore, it raises important questions about the links (or what links there might be) between students' independent learning 'practices' and specific student 'beliefs' guiding these practices. Reflecting the 'experience' agenda will help to provide a wholistic explication of independent learning. Additionally, viewing independent learning as a linear induction process of learning, places significant responsibility for the college student's academic development on institutional approaches to student support. In terms of it being a developmental process, the suggestion is that students' development of independent learning is a procedure largely dependent on learners' ability to advance from a point of dependence to one of independence. However, there is little consideration for the experience of this advancement or the student's understanding of this experience.

Although student perspectives of independent learning appear in UK higher education research (Thomas et al., 2015), there are limited (published) studies related to independent learning learners in the immediate pre-university (sixth form college) context. Stoten's (2014, 2015) studies, quantitatively foreground A-Level students' learning approaches as self-regulation in a sixth form context in the UK. However, there is a need for more qualitative studies addressing the particular issue of independent learning with a different group of students. A study that focuses on identifying the experiential dimension of international students' independent learning, and on what understandings that are produced through such students' encounters with independent learning is thus important. By intentionally focusing on the international students as 'experiencers' (a term I explain in Section 1.3) of their learning, and by developing a framework to uncover the essence of, and the students' understanding of, this experience I hope to contribute to the body of international education research and the growing field of research in post-16

education. Therefore, the two concepts of experience and understanding are central to my research questions:

- *What happens when international students experience independent learning in college?*
- *What understandings of independent learning emerge for these students as they engage in this experience?*
- *How might their insights inform my knowledge about independent learning?*

This thesis is presented in eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides background context to this thesis, and explains the motivation for empirical investigation into the phenomenon. In this chapter, I introduce the institutional context of my study: independent Sixth Form College and the academically rigorous international education setting of the International Foundation Programme (IFP) in England (Section 1.2). I then present Nigerian students in the context of the ‘international scholar’ and *experiencers* of independent learning within the IFP context (Section 1.3). In relation to students, there are arguably few direct studies that explore the concept of independent learning in post-16 education, or research that explores international (Nigerian) IFP students’ experience and understanding of independent learning within the overall international student experience. By developing the concept of IFP students as ‘key independent learning experiencers’ in my study, I explore how it might provide a useful lens for understanding independent learning. Through this approach, I identify a key concept that emerged from my data, ‘independent learning-as-experience’– as the essence of an (international) independent learning experience. Following this, I introduce myself in context (Section 1.4). I draw on my own educational experience to provide an overview of the Nigerian educational context, a context not too dissimilar to that of the IFP students that are the subject of this study, and to complement the data, which I present later in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I discuss myself in context in order to acknowledge my voice as the producer of the knowledge presented in this thesis,

knowledge which also came about as a result of my relationship with the research participants.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature I have engaged with, which I deemed relevant to the conceptualisation of my study, in order to establish the central theories and perspectives that frame the study, and arrive at a unifying framework for identifying the essence of the international student independent learning experience. Furthermore, this chapter identified understanding of independent learning through the lens of ‘experience’, and the multiplicity of understanding independent learning from a variety of sources, while establishing my own tentative understanding of independent learning.

Chapter 3 details the study design and implementation of a multimethod research, providing an in-depth description of how this qualitative study was underpinned by the inductive approach.

Chapter 4 identifies and outlines the inductive process and procedure of data analysis and outlines briefly the emergent thematic data from this analysis.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 each present and discuss three themes that emerged through the analytical processes detailed in Chapter 4, explicating the construction of challenging preconceptions, extending engagement and crossing the bridge; and the development of these themes into a substantive concept of affect-behaviour-cognition-mediated independent learning, in relation to international students’ experience and understanding of independent learning.

Chapter 8 builds upon the analyses developed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to reflect on the study, to explicitly state the empirical, conceptual and methodological contribution to knowledge produced within the thesis, as well as set out directions for future research.

1.2 The institutional context: Independent sixth form colleges and the IFP

The provision of increasingly internationalised educational programmes has made it possible for students to be internationally mobile. This is in line with global trends in higher education (HE) and further education (FE) (Allen, 2010; Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009; BIS, 2013; King, 2011) which has made these sectors competitive enterprises for recruiting and delivering their programmes to overseas students. This growth compels examination of learning experience in the FE sector, a key provider to HE, particularly as they relate to international students. Additionally, it is important to examine what exactly ‘independent learning’ means to and for international students. Equally vital, is examination of the extent to which independent students’ understandings align with dominant conceptions of independent learning.

FE in England broadly refers to all learning arrangements delivered in the 16-18 (also referred to as post-16) education sector (DfE, 2017). Post-16 is made up of diverse learners undertaking a range of academic or vocational FE courses in general FE and tertiary colleges, school sixth-forms, sixth form colleges, specialist colleges, and higher education in further education institutions (or HE in FE) (BIS, 2016). Students normally leave with academic- or skills- based qualifications. Post-16 institutions account for 5% of all FE learners in the UK (Hodgson, 2015; Snelson and Deyes, 2016). School sixth forms and sixth forms colleges are composed of the 16-18 age group and offer A-levels and/or academic qualification at Level 3 (the IFP similarly offers qualifications which are comparable to the A-level). See diagram illustrating this context in Figure 1 below.

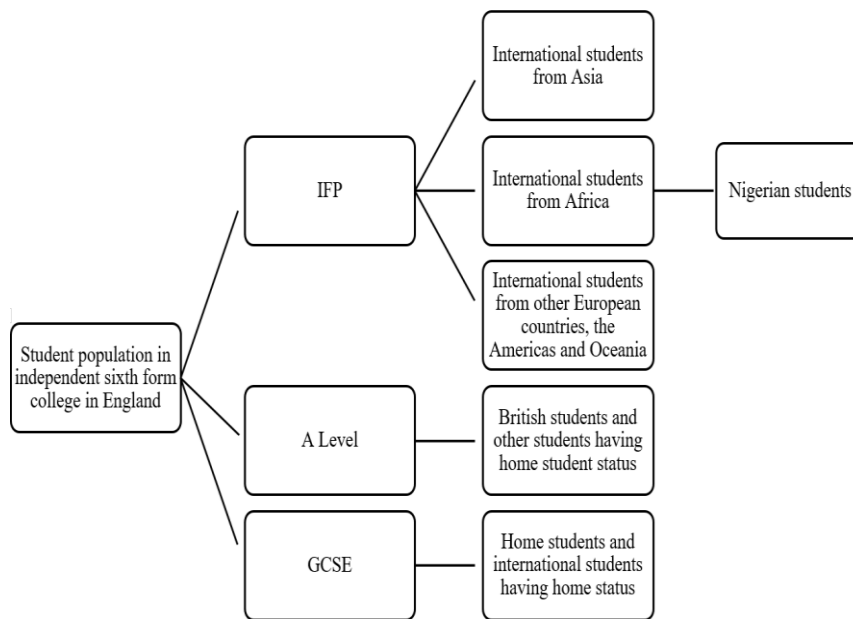


Figure 1. Graphic representation of the student population in three independent Sixth form colleges in England

Students within institutions such as these, acting either individually or collaboratively with others, are guided to interact with and respond to curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment and feedback, following guidance and support from academic staff and a learning environment that can foster or inhibit their independent learning (Thomas et al., 2015). With this in mind, I developed a framework to guide, the exploration of the experience of independent sixth form college students in particular. Within this framework, I conceived independent learning as experience and Nigerian IFP students as experiencers of independent learning in English independent sixth form colleges.

The IFP an academically rigorous access programme to most UK universities, and is one of the main entry qualifications to university in the UK for international students as an alternative to A-level qualifications. The emergence of foundation programmes in the UK is linked to the existence of a growing international market

of post-16 students who wish to (or whose parents wish for them to) study at UK universities but who are not eligible for direct entry to an undergraduate course. (Christie, Barron and D'Annunzio-Green, 2011). Awards cover a range of discipline pathways such as Science, Accounting and Business, Engineering, Medicine, Arts and Humanities for direct progression or conditional undergraduate entry to a variety of degree courses in many UK universities (SI-UK, 2019). Most IFP students study the programme for only one year, usually starting in September with students expected to graduate in time for a September start at university the following year. Others follow the 18-month programme starting in January to finish in June-July the following year, also in time for a September undergraduate degree programme start (Sqore, online, 2018).

The IFP is mostly for international students who have finished their high school examinations and are looking to progress to an undergraduate degree course in the UK. The IFP is advertised as academically rigorous study which stimulates and promotes self-regulation of learning activities. Initially offered in a few independent sixth form colleges in the UK which have gained recognition by British universities, increasingly, many UK universities offer a foundation programme consisting of a two or three-year intensive study as a path to undergraduate degree study usually at the same university (SI-UK, 2019). The IFP is also considered useful for international students wishing to study for a degree in the UK to improve their academic English, for university preparation, to acquire specific subject qualifications required for their proposed degree study, and as a means to experience and adjust to UK education before university (University of Reading, 2020).

Assessment in the IFP is characterised by a mixture of traditional methods of extended essays and formal examinations, continuous coursework and end of term/module assessments, and presentations. It can be argued that the traditional and progressive make-up of the IFP is reflected in the traditional approach to

teaching and learning that some teachers may take, and so begs the question of whether any features of the IFP encourages independent learning, or provides opportunities for independent learning to take place within each of the subject pathways.

Information available on the websites of several English school sixth forms and independent sixth form colleges offering the IFP indicates that being an independent learner is one of the acceptable ‘graduate attributes’ of the FE sector, and developing independent learning skills is desirable. Independent learning is mentioned in various college statements and various government agency policies as an important skill for post-16 learners. Mission statements on the websites of many English school sixth forms and independent sixth form colleges outline expectations for independent learning outcomes. Some of these outcomes include learner autonomy, showing initiative and taking responsibility for own learning, investment in one’s learning, self-directedness for personal study, developing an ability to make choices and decisions about what, how and when one learns, and actively seeking opportunities for independent learning. Although discussions of learner autonomy and self-directed learning in UK educational systems may be commonplace, it is however of concern that significant numbers of school leavers in the UK are noted to have ‘unrealistic expectations’ of HE (Cook and Leckey, 1999, Davis, 2015; Green, 2014; Hassel and Ridout, 2018; Money et al., 2017). Furthermore, post-16 learners are thought to be increasingly ill- equipped for on-going academic experiences (Cort, 2017; Hulme and De Wilde, 2015). Equally important is that UK independent sixth form colleges are attracting more and more international students at the post-16 level for university access programmes. Researching independent learning experience has the potential for far-reaching implications for policy, learning cultures and practices in this sector in the UK and elsewhere.

1.3 Understanding the Nigerian as an ‘international’ scholar.

The number of international students is increasing among the growing migration population globally, particularly in the post-16 sector. Since the 1970s, there has been evidence of international student mobility led by the emerging global growth and success of international education (Carbonnier, Carton and King, 2014). This has key implications for educational development in relation to institutional change, conceptions of spaces, experiences and outcomes of educational practice, in the global skills race. In relation to teaching-learning spaces, the independent education sector is positioned to lead international education initiatives and to impact on wider discourse in the field of international education and international student experience (Macpherson, Robertson and Walford, 2014).

Among the most popular global destinations for and major receiving countries of international students, such as the US, UK, Australia, the UK is ranked second only to the US (OECD, 2014), with a steady increase in numbers from the early 1990s (ONS, 2016). Between 2016 and 2017 there were 442,000 international students (29% of the total student population) studying various degree and research programmes in the UK, of which more than 300,000 were from outside the EU. Since the early 2000s, the five top-sending non-EU countries for international students to the UK have been China, India, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Nigeria (HESA, 2017). Numerically, international students from Nigeria, represent an important and growing component of international students in the UK further education (FE) and higher education (HE) sectors (UKCISA, 2018). This can be directly linked to evidence that learners from countries that were once colonies are likely to study in the coloniser countries they share a history with in terms of cultural capital and language (Maringe and Carter, 2007). Beyond this, is the perceived international reputation of a UK education, and the recognition of, and prestige attached to a UK qualification by employers in the students’ home countries (Hyams-Ssekasi, Mushibwe & Caldwell, 2014; ICEF Monitor, 2012).

An emerging class of wealthy, independent school-educated Nigerian students have begun to make up the numbers of entrants looking to be part of the international education body. Nigerian parents are sending their children to study foundation programmes in independent school sixth-forms. Reasons for this could be the widely perceived falling standards in federal and state universities in Nigeria and the lack of university spaces for an increasing post-16 demographic. Although the emergence of independent Nigerian universities would appear to address this, some parents are sceptical about the quality of education provided within these institutions (Iruonagbe, Imhonopi and Egharevba, 2015). Also, the disproportionate number of university places to applicants means that many Nigerian school leavers are not guaranteed a place at university even upon attaining the minimum entry requirement (Aluede, Idogho and Imonikhe, 2012; Ojerinde, 2011). Between 1990 and 1995, the admission ratio was one in ten. Between 2010 and 2015 that figure was one in four (Figure 2). That is approximately 75% of university applicants missing out on a place at a Nigerian university. Presently, there are still more qualified students than places at tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In 2018, there were over two million applications for about 750,000 federal and state university, polytechnic and college of education places (Parr, 2018). For such students (and the parents who can afford to) pursuing overseas studies becomes a viable option for continuing their studies (WENR, 2017).

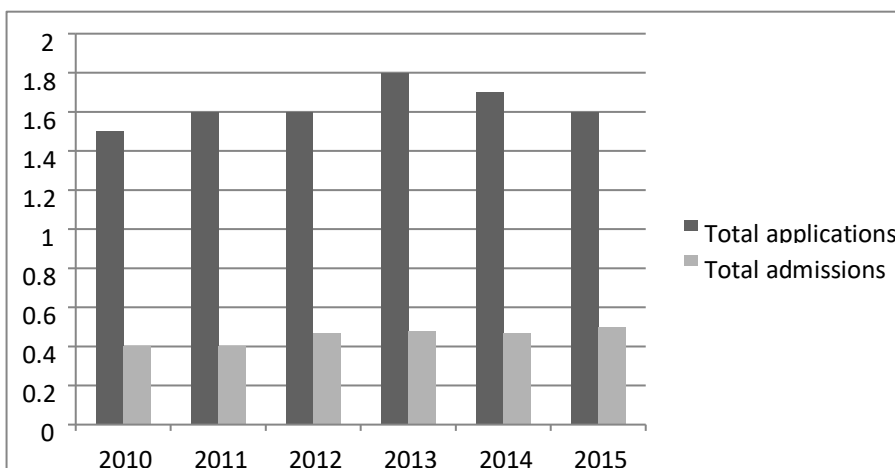


Figure 2. Total applications versus total admissions to Nigerian universities in the period 2010-2015

Furthermore, such parents are attracted by what they perceive to be an academically rigorous traditional English education and consider UK colleges as useful preparation for UK university study (Espinoza, 2015).

1.4 Re-imagining the notion of ‘international student independent learning experience’

The international student population is heterogeneous, in much the same way as is the domestic student population, however, studies about international students tend to over-generalise the experiences of international students by focusing on the commonalities of international students (Jones, 2017). This deficit conceptualisation, typically from an Anglo-Western perspective, frames the international student as homogenous, problematic, lacking in cultural capital needed to ‘fit in’, lacking in critical and independent thinking, suffering from culture shock and struggling with academic transition (Hanassab, 2006). I argue that international students are heterogeneous. Nigerian students, in particular, have different perspectives of socio-cultural issues, which influence their conceptions of learning. This is because they are likely to have been exposed from an early age to multicultural environments, and the diversity, that is the Nigerian context (Sunal et al, 2001). Such encounters are thought to suggest the practical, experience-oriented approach to learning that Nigerian students take (Iyamu & Ukadike, 2007; Sunal et al, 2001). Not dissimilar to an independent learning approach to learning.

1.5 Myself in the context of the research

I am a native of Delta state in South South Nigeria. My socialisation and primary to undergraduate education were in ‘international’ schools in Lagos, (South West) and Abuja, (North Central) Nigeria. I consider myself a member of the ‘postcolonial elite’, in the sense that I have had access to ‘prestigious’ (international) primary and

secondary schools in Nigeria (a former colony of Great Britain), and international postgraduate experiences in the UK. So, I would describe myself as someone who has been exposed to a variety of social, cultural and educational influences.

An autobiographical account of the researcher is considered an important element of the research design, helping to ‘resituate the writer in [her] work’ (Anderson, 2011, p.7). Roberts (2005) argues that ‘the retelling of life experience is not only a retrospective process but it is also implicated in the shaping of our current identity’ (p.119). I present this autobiographical account to aid understanding of the wider Nigerian students’ educational experiences for a number of reasons. Firstly, to provide a further contextual overview of the Nigerian educational system, in relation to the internationalisation and independent learning issues presented in the previous sections. Secondly, to offer a reflection of, and draw links between, my educational experiences and those of the students in this study, through real-life examples of some experiences consistent with those arising in this research. Thirdly, to underscore the personal values and beliefs shaping and guiding my endeavour as an educator and a researcher, which were impossible to ignore in the course of acknowledging my role as researcher in this study: self-respect and care and respect for others, the multiplicity and interconnectedness of knowledge, and learning as expansive experience undertaken in relational terms. Lastly, to explain my philosophical stance in this research which has been informed by contextual factors from my background.

My observations and experiences as an educator in Nigeria, and as an international postgraduate student in England have inspired me to undertake research on the perceptions of, connections to, and understandings of international students. Reflecting upon these experiences led to deeper consideration of how completely different an academic career is from a professional and a learner standpoint. There were obvious differences to me between the needs and expectations of one and the other. My ten-year school teaching and five-year school headship experience in Nigeria presented opportunities in relation to my practice and student development,

and studying at postgraduate level posed considerable opportunities. These related to seeking opportunities for developing scholarship –how, as an international postgraduate student, I experienced a UK HE system that was in some ways different from the Nigerian educational system that I experienced as a learner, and how I understood my experiences. The experiences resonated with me for three reasons, (a) the expectation that students, having successfully graduated from one learning context, are likely to be successful in others; (b) the reality that many school leavers are unprepared for the school-college-university transition in relation to academic study; (c) the opportunities for scholarship that school leavers might begin to experience in post-16 education settings.

The inspiration for this study is rooted in a professional career which began more than 10 years ago at an elite independent international secondary for 11-to-16 year olds in Abuja, Nigeria. During this time I became increasingly motivated to discover how best to enhance student experience. Independent reading/research and professional development workshops introduced me to many issues related to, (a) students' learning and development; (b) what is involved in students' organisation of personal and co-constructed understandings of self in learning spaces; (c) learning experiences within the social context of school; (d) what learning experiences the students have after they leave high school; (e) my understanding and role in students' experiences.

While studying for my MA degree in England, I often reflected on the experiences of my past students in light of my own new experiences with learning within a 'high-stakes' and academically rigorous Nigerian secondary school. Conducting primary research during my MA gave me an opportunity to explore what teaching and learning entailed in such an environment. While writing my dissertation on Nigerian teachers' experiences of their classroom practice, I became aware that the narrative was incomplete without Nigerian students' experiences of their learning within the same context.

As a doctoral student, I found myself questioning how students experience learning in (un)familiar, but academically rigorous international education settings? Ultimately, though, my focus on the topic of independent learning experience within English colleges, particularly for international students studying at independent sixth form colleges in England, emerged during a pilot study I carried out in the second year of my doctoral studies. The pilot study gave me the opportunity to explore learning in a post-16 setting of which I had only a peripheral understanding. The key findings from the pilot study (Appendix A) laid the groundwork for developing the conceptual framework of the main study, and offered insights into learning experiences in relation to Nigerian students who have transitioned from high schools in Nigeria to independent sixth form college in the UK. As this was a broad field, I drew on my own experiences as an educator in Nigeria, my own experience as an international postgraduate student in England, and the key issues in relation to international students' academic performance particularly in post-16 education in the UK, to narrow my focus down to *independent learning*, as a key concept worthy of deeper investigation. My own experience of independent learning at an international postgraduate study led me to seek a better understanding of independent learning as it affects international students.

Therefore, my positioning in this research stems from my understanding of the literature regarding international students, independent learning and my reflection on my own professional and academic experience as a teacher and a head teacher, and as an international postgraduate student/researcher.

In this study I have adopted multiple roles which define my researcher identity: first as a Nigerian student educated in the Nigerian educational system, then as an educator in (international) schools in Nigeria, and finally as an international postgraduate student and doctoral researcher in England.

1.5.1 Myself as an ‘international’ scholar?

My early years and primary education lasted eight years at an independent preparatory school in Lagos. At the time the school was ranked among the top 10 performing nursery/primary schools in the country; pupils who studied there came from mostly upper/middle-class backgrounds and went on to study at some of the best faith and independent secondary schools in the country. The teachers were a diverse group of Nigerian, Irish, Ghanaian, Indian and Sri Lankan teachers. The medium of instruction was English, and still is in all independent, and most state schools and HE institutions in Nigeria.

Primary to secondary school transition was an important aspect of my academic experience. At the time, independent secondary schools were not as common or popular as they are now. I had three options for secondary school: one, the local state day school in the catchment area where I lived; two, a selective government boarding school located in any of the then 21 states of the federation; and three, a faith day school. Attending the local state school was not really a serious option for a child from an ‘aspirational’ home such as mine, nor was attending boarding school at what my mother considered the young age of 11 years. So, I went to a day (Catholic) high school. I remember feeling a sense of loss that I was missing out on the boarding adventures that were described so vividly in *The Nicest Girl in the School*, *Malory Towers* and *What Katy Did* - books I read in primary school. However, the stories my cousins and friends told about the reality of boarding school, differed greatly from the ‘romanticised’ perceptions my classmates and I had, shaped largely by the descriptions in those books.

But, the popular view then was that boarding schools played a major role in students’ independence and outcomes, over and above those of students in day state or faith schools. The thinking then, which was often supported by the disparity in secondary school leaving examination results, was that boarding students outperformed day students in terms of academic and non-academic attributes. Furthermore, it was assumed then (as it often still is) that the boarding experience

establishes for students residing at school away from family, a unique set of independent attributes that influence their academic and social activities. Government boarding schools still exist in Nigeria, but present-day incarnations of the elite boarding school model are privately owned independent fee-paying boarding schools. The preferred model of teaching and learning at my high school was the traditional model, consisting of teacher-centred, exam-focused curriculum. Some teachers however favoured a mixture of traditional and ‘progressive’ teaching and learning that included innovative and interesting ways to teach, aid my understanding of a topic, while also keeping in mind end of year exams. Thus, high school was an occasional introduction to independent learning; though with infrequent opportunities to develop learner autonomy, because teachers often played a central role in learning that was designed to be examined at the end of the year with traditional examinations.

I was a ‘non-traditional’ undergraduate student. I was 23 years old and married with a daughter when I enrolled at a Nigerian university as a distance learner, and this was a unique life and educational experience. Very early on, I realised I had unique advantages and challenges, that meant that I needed to make a number of personal and academic adjustments. Some of these were institutional- and individual- related opportunities and challenges. There were few opportunities for teacher and peer interaction, poorly designed distance learning materials, underdeveloped learning technologies, inadequate academic and administrative support, delayed/inadequate instructor feedback, and on a personal level, there was insufficient time for self-study. Much of the teaching and learning was done by correspondence, apart from a few contact hours at the beginning of each module and a plenary before the end of year assignments/examinations, and work and family commitments impacted on my presence at a few of these contact hours. However, I saw these as opportunities to develop. I learned to become more intrinsically motivated and developed persistence. I became more learning-goal oriented, and agential in selecting learning strategies that were meaningful to me.

The four years I have spent as an international student at university in England, one as a Masters student and three as a PhD student, have presented opportunities for experiences that have led me to (re)conceptualise learning as involving agential experience, of which developing and sustaining personal meaning-making from knowledge and transformation of self is a vital part of. Crucial to my personal transformation in the study is my questioning and reflecting on my role as researcher, and my interactions with the ‘researched’ and the degree to which my study empowered them to own a description of themselves and their experiences. This philosophical location acknowledges the role of the researcher as “transformative healer with responsibilities to heal self and then reflect, question, and take action on...deficit discourses, theories, or literature that construct the researched as the problem” (Chilisa, 2009, p.419-423).

1.6 College students as ‘independent learning experiencers’

Some 685,000 16-18-year-olds are currently studying in colleges in the UK. Of this number, 59% are on foundation programmes (AOC, 2019). It is suggested that many of these students have trouble making the transition to the more independent learning required at university compared to college (Crabtree, Roberts and Tyler, 2007; Whitaker, 2008). Therefore, it is important to address students’ conceptions of independent learning. In addition, this thesis contends that independent learning establishes a unique set of affective, behaviour and cognitive experience dimensions, and college students are thought of as central agents of this experience as independent learning experiencers. The affective dimension centres on student’s perceptions, beliefs, the nature of emotions and feelings, regarding independent learning. The behaviour dimension includes the potential for learning behaviours and actions for independent learning. The cognitive dimension is a critical approach with a particular emphasis on cognitive experiences that might encourage reflection on the part of students about how their views about knowledge might intersect with their views about learning. Added to this thinking, is an emphasis on the potential

of these interrelated dimensions to add to the knowledge and understanding of independent learning.

This experience view of independent learning is different from a process approach which often consists of unfolding processes of induction and development similar to which a number of authors refer. Chickering (1964) suggests that the independent student engages in processes whereby their academic-related knowledge, understanding and/or comprehension or competence may be seen to be developed. Applying these cognitive tools to every aspect of their independent learning enables them, I suggest, to experience their independent learning lives and contexts.

Based on literature in the field of educational theory, this experience can be interpreted in both personal and intellectual terms. The personal includes epistemological, behaviour and social processes related to learner autonomy, increased responsibility for one's own learning, goal setting, decision-making, the learner-teacher-content-environment interaction and so on (Kesten, 1987; Moore, 1972). The intellectual has its roots in notions about the cognitive processes involved in monitoring one's own progress, developing inquiry and critical evaluation skills and competencies, self-evaluation of and self-reflection on learning and transformation among other things (Boekaerts, 2011; Kolb, 2015; Mezirow, 1991).

Within the independent learning literature, personal and intellectual affordances cited include transformative learning and the ability to respond to this transformation, increased academic achievement, and making learning meaningful for students (Hockings *et al.*, 2018). Independent learning (in its various forms) presents opportunities and spaces for students to experience transformation and make sense of this transformation, thus making them independent learning 'experiencers'.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a background of the study in context. It considered briefly the issues that play into both the conceptualisation and surfacing of independent learning experience and outlined briefly the structure of the thesis. The next chapter provides a review of the literature regarding concepts addressed in the study, illustrating how concepts of independent learning currently fit within the existing literature regarding international students.

Chapter 2: CONCEPTUALISING MY STUDY

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the literature review is to establish central theories and perspectives that frame this study of Nigerian students' independent learning experience as international students in sixth form college in England. The review briefly considers the contextual issues that influence the present experience of international college students of independent learning. This review offers a range of conceptualisations and definitions of independent learning along with the implications of the application of these terms of reference, and independent learning principles. It was of particular importance for me that this study be contextualised within sixth form colleges and the IFP, in a way that is a departure from more common narratives of the school to university transitional experiences of international students, in particular, yet sharing similarities in the consideration of broader educational aims of post-16 education. Thus, I present an overview of the literature relevant to the present study and develop my tentative understanding of the concept of 'experience' which I utilise as a central lens in the study.

Based on this contextual outline, there is a discussion of the main theories and concepts relevant to independent learning experience to better understand what may be occurring as the sixth form college experience of independent learning. These concepts include self-determination, social cognitive, community of practice and experiential learning, which are rooted in psychology, social, and social psychological studies.

These lenses are unified in relation to the study findings and the concepts and theories that make up the framework. The framework, having been utilised from the pilot study phase to the data collection phase, is then refined and updated to surface the essence of independent learning experience of Nigerian college students in England. The resultant model is intended to describe, explain and understand these experiences. The review was approached inductively, although the study

started with some preconceptions about the study. By this, I mean that the review started with the topic of independent learning and the various processes of independent learning, but little was known about the specific experiences of students who undergo these processes – or even whether the students were of the same ilk. As a result, data collection for this study intentionally began with pre-formed establishment of concepts and theories. The review was consequently informed by the detailed empirical data resulting from the study and was fully written-up during and after the data analysis stage. As a result, a model of independent learning experience only emerged after the fieldwork had been completed. Therefore, while this overarching model was based on the initial literature, it was expected that the model would evolve as the study progressed and based on the study findings.

The chapter concludes with a suggestion for framing the international student learning experience in ways which can contribute to the improvement of deeper understanding of learning and development, and the experience of it in further education in particular. Due to conceptual ambiguity of the term ‘independent learning’ and the lack of consensus as to the meaning of independent learning, the review identified studies that provide empirical accounts of independent learning processes and how its various components impact students’ experience. The review then addresses how the related concepts combine to present a conceptual model of independent learning experience.

2.2 A changing environment for learning

In recent years, interest has grown in ‘progressive’ rather than ‘traditional’ instruction and learning within educational discourse as a means of raising academic performance. By ‘progressive’ I mean student-led education, employing autonomous learning processes such as independent study, problem- or project-based learning which is different from a more formal, controlled and teacher-driven ‘traditional’ format with the teacher at the centre of all teaching and learning activity. The global change in information and society calls for creating 21st

Century learning environments suited to these changes (Ananiadou and Claro, 2009; Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major, 2014; Delany et al., 2016; Fernandes, Mesquita, Flores and Lima, 2014). Furthermore, beliefs about teaching and learning and the idea of student involvement in all aspects of learning practices are evolving (Berezki and Kárpáti, 2017; Heritage, 2018; Houston and Osborne, 2013; Kotecha, 2012; Nokes, 2014; Sheldrake, Mujtaba and Reiss, 2017; Stevenson, Hartmeyer and Bentsen, 2017; Webb et al., 2017). The ability of individuals to function autonomously and independently is increasingly desirable and education is expected to position them to do so (Bolhuis and Voeten, 2001; Tan and Chua, 2015).

In a broader sense, independent learning can refer to the level of development an individual reaches whereby they are autonomous in thought and action toward completing various kinds of learning activities. In post-16 contexts, this places significant responsibility for learning on students. However, this notion provides a limited explication of students' understanding and experience of the nature and extent of this responsibility. Therefore, it is useful to frame some readings of independent learning that are relevant to this starting point to capture applicable principles.

The meta-concept of independent learning emanates mostly from Western philosophical traditions and is often associated with discourse relating to fossilised stereotypes about international students (As-Saber, Crosling and Rahman, 2006). There is a belief that the systems such students have been educated in do little or nothing to promote learner independence (Anyanwu and Iwuamadi, 2015; Gbadamosi, 2018; Warring, 2010). The education sector is witnessing reform in response to globalisation, internalisation of the curriculum, and 'massification' of higher education. Independent learning is considered an important outcome at further and higher education levels of this reform. It is argued that as independent learning is needed, new pedagogy develops (Stoten, 2014; Thomas et al., 2015). The rapidly changing HE landscape in the UK means that new entrants are having

to prepare for and engage with new learning experiences (Lomer, 2017). However, it is suggested that although many new entrants have challenges with independent/self-directed learning (Wilde et al., 2006), universities are equally facing challenges to provide these students with independent learning opportunities and skills (Chanphirun, Vutha, Onn & Phearak, 2012; Nalatambi, Shahudin & Zaludin, 2015). Equally problematic is the notion of independent learning as an activity that learners are expected to carry out alone or unaided, rather than as part of a community (Kidane, Roebertsen & van der Vleuten, 2020).

Thus, independent learning has been viewed as a psychological, social and cognitive construct. As a psychological construct, in terms of independence, autonomy and experience (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Kolb, 2015). As a social construct of learning characterised by identity and practice within a community (Wenger, 1998). As a social cognitive construction of learning occurring with the relationality of the individual, environment, and behaviour (Bandura, 1986, 1999).

Conceptualisations of independent learning also tend to assume a hierarchical process/step/stage linear model with learners expected to move from one to another, along a straight and narrow continuum of learning from dependence to independence, acquiring the necessary skills, abilities and dispositions which distinguish one end of the continuum from the other. This model of independent learning is common in studies of learners in higher or adult education (Blount and McNeill, 2011; Christie, Barron and D'Annunzio-Green, 2011; Knobbs and Grayson, 2012). A model for teaching independent learning skills to 1st year undergraduate students has been suggested in order to facilitate their capacity to learn and thrive successfully at tertiary education level (Field, Duffy and Higgins, 2015).

There is evidence that a learner's ability to think, act and function autonomously has significant implications for achievement, lifelong learning, future careers and economies in future years (Deci and Ryan, 2013; McCombs, 2004a, 2004b). Whilst

highlighting the relevance of self-directed/self-regulated learning to reported measurable outcomes (Broadbent and Poon, 2015; Dent and Koenka, 2015), the literature also illustrates the inadequate levels of such self-direction in young people (Bonk and Lee, 2017; Marin and Halpern, 2011; Mutwarasibo, 2013; Mariano and Batchelor, 2018; Saks and Leijen, 2014; Storer, 2018). A number of reasons have been offered for this including lack of independent learning-supportive environments, few opportunities for promoting independent learning processes, inadequate access to technology or improper use of information technology, where available, for promoting facilitating independent learning, little engagement in more project-based or problem-based learning, and few opportunities for group-working. However, is it really the case that student independent learning levels are inadequate, or is it that because independent learning is ambiguously understood, the students are not clear about opportunities independent learning offers? This suggests that beliefs and practices in education are vital for, and do affect understandings and experiences of independent learning. Both instructors and students experience a shift to a progressive pedagogical model that puts experience at the core of student learning. Arguably, as curricula and pedagogies evolve globally to fit an increasingly internationalised (and commercialised) education system, what has not changed is the desirability of a UK education.

Among sixth-formers, there is considerable misperception about the contact time at university. Students have significantly more contact time with teaching staff at college, than they experience after entry to university (HEPI/Unite Students, 2017). Findings from the 2017 HEA UK Engagement Survey reported strong links between the number of hours spent on independent study, overall skills development and undergraduate student engagement (Neves, 2017). A similar report about how different groups of students study independently found that for some UK undergraduate students, fewer contact hours, spending more time studying independently, and perceived lack of guidance and support in directed independent learning impacted negatively on their student experience (Neves and Hillman, 2017). As the latter study highlights, it is crucial that students are

supported through independent study as they inevitably encounter challenging points, with little awareness of opportunities as they cross a learning point to become independent learners. However, there is a danger in over-theorising the ability or otherwise of young people to develop resilience in light of intellectual challenges. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) described this as “therapy culture” (p. 123) pervading universities and the “endless monitoring and self-surveillance techniques in FE” (p. 71-72) which validate the positioning of a new generation of students as ‘vulnerable’ individuals incapable of coping and performing at the highest possible academic levels within the university. So, can this positioning be altered?

Post-16 institutions continue to host an increasingly diverse population of students. There has been a growing diversity in learner demographics in post-16 education since the 1990s (UKCISA, 2018). Therefore there is greater need to acknowledge and respond to the variety of cultural, socio-economic and academic backgrounds such students bring into these settings and how their diverse needs and expectations might impact what, how and when they learn (Kotecha, 2012). After all, there is evidence that students’ taking ownership of their own learning stimulates ‘learning to learn’ competencies, that is the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that promote learner control and foster young people’s development of their identities as learners and ultimately lifelong learning (Amalathas, 2010).

There is a misconception of non-English speaking international students as ‘isolated’ and ‘quiet’ non-participants in classrooms, adjusting to new learning settings, challenged by language barriers, and experiencing culture shock when they arrive for study in educational institutions in English-speaking countries (UKCISA, 2018). Bankowski (2001) argues that learner independence is strongly determined by students’ capacity for “tasks requiring an independent and creative approach” (p. 175) which is presumed to be limited for international students because of presumed low levels of English. Does this then mean that international students proficient in English are more independent than their non-English speaking

counterparts? Additionally, international students are perceived to have difficulties adjusting to the Western educational traditions that promote independent learning and critical thinking (Shaheen, 2016). However, this framing, Palfreyman (2005) refers to this as the ‘othering’, of international students, of their ways of thinking and behaving in new learning cultures highlights dominant misconceptions and stereotypes of international students in Western countries (Arenas, 2009; Traoré, 2004, 2006).

Framed in that way, international students’ success or failure is tied to their success or failure at undergoing a process of independent learning. Thus, learners seen as not pre-disposed to independent learning because of their academic backgrounds and their language, such as international students, may be seen to struggle in UK institutions because they lack the language and independent learning skills to be successful at the highest educational level. Yet, in reality, there is evidence that they leverage their backgrounds to reconstruct social and cultural capital to carry out learning. Contrary to the *implicit perception* of the international student as *isolated* and *disadvantaged* or needing to develop subject specific knowledge and skills necessary to thrive within UK HE, these groups of students have been found to use their active participation in an ‘international’ community of practice to achieve a positive experience of university (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009).

International students are often perceived as a homogeneous group existing in a defined time and within a defined space (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). The behaviours and actions of international students are often explained through a narrow cultural lens which does not allow for consideration of the variations within and between national cultures and the continuum of cultural attributes such students possess (Rear, 2017). There is a common view of international students, particularly from non-western cultures and countries, that they face many challenges as new ‘immigrants’ (Chao, 2016; Evivie, 2009; Lee and Rice, 2007). These include encountering many difficulties related to cultural identity, language and communication competencies, and academic standards and their inability to

effectively interact with peers and home students (Baklashova and Kazakov, 2016; Cruickshank et al., 2012; Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014; Inyama, Williams and McCauley, 2016; Osikomaiya, 2014). International students are often not positioned in the internationalisation discourse as assets with valuable intercultural knowledge; rather they are defined in terms of being rote and passive learners, lacking analytical and critical thinking-related skills expected from British and Australian teachers (Ryan, 2011; Shaheen, 2016; Tran, 2013). Thus, it becomes a convenient way of accepting and fossilising the perception that international students' cultures and prior learning experience might be detrimental to their adjustment in Western learning cultures (Sawir, 2005). However, there is evidence in the literature that shows that these academic challenges are not exclusive to international students but also common amongst home students who are undergoing a similar academic transition (Ramsey et al., 1999; Rear, 2017).

Biggs (2003) argues that curricula which “facilitate deep learning outcomes and are supportive of the needs of individual students” addresses educational concerns of the impact of “cultural diversity in the classroom” (2003, pp. 120-139). Critics however argue that this practice pays lip-service to the notion of internationalisation of the curricula (Sawir, 2013; Vasilopoulos, 2016). Most of these views, however, do little to offer a comprehensive conceptualisation of international students ‘independent learning challenges’ as useful experiences incorporating individual and group characteristics with the situation; or, the ways in which such experiences necessitate positive opportunities and outcomes, such as the students’ development of resilience and the transformation of their learner identities.

2.3 Defining independent learning

Independent learning is a familiar, if ambiguous, term of which consensus on its meaning is yet to be reached (Kesten, 1987). One reason for this is independent learning means different things, to different individuals, in different contexts. While a number of terms has been offered, independent learning is mostly understood and defined by interrelated terms. These include: autonomy, competency, relatedness,

transformation, motivation, engagement, efficacy, ownership, independence, self-regulation, and self-direction.

At various times independent learning has been described as:

- a concept of learning related to student-centred learning and ownership of learning (Race, 2014; Meyer et al, 2008; Meyer 2010)
- a process of development whereby an individual develops learning-related skill sets along a continuum (Rickabaugh, 2012)
- a concept of learning associated with personalised learning (Rickabaugh, 2016)
- a skill (Gow and Kember, 1990)
- a programme and approach to developing thinking skills (EPPI-Centre, 2004; 2005; Taggart et al., 2005)
- an approach to developing learner autonomy (Moore, 1972)
- self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975)
- self-regulated learning (Zimmermann, 2002).

The variety of terms and interpretations appear in psychological, social and cognitive theories in relation to a variety of independent learning processes (Sections 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8).

Literature also highlights the contrast between the characteristics of the dependent learner and independent learner (Goode, 2007; Dillon and Greene, 2003; Payne and Whittaker, 2006) as a way of conceptualising independent learning. In their explanation, Meyer et al (2008, p. 15) highlight this contrast by suggesting that independent learning is a developmental continuum ‘stretching from the dependent to the independent learner’ (see also Bereiter, 2002; Field, Duffy and Huggins, 2014). Chickering (1964) describes the independent student as one who reflects one or more of the following qualities: ‘interdependent, venturing, resourceful, persistent and reflective’ (p.314) which make them more successful at learning than their less successful peers. It is suggested that many international students studying in the UK belong to the latter group.

In its broadest context, independent learning/study is defined as:

“...a process, a method and philosophy of education: in which a student acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation; it includes freedom of choice in determining those objectives...it requires the freedom of process to carry out the objectives; it places increased educational responsibility on the student for achieving of objectives and for the value of goals” (Forster, 1972, p.ii, cited in Candy, 1991).

In his study of independent learning in further education, Broad (2006) addressed the difficulty in conceptualising and defining independent learning. He found that students define independent learning as when an individual takes control of their own learning by taking responsibility (p. 139). Such responsibility entails the ability to guide and direct one’s own learning by organising and managing one’s studies and time, monitoring one’s progress, and learning and completing tasks independently, all related with the conceptualisations of independent learning enumerated above.

Thus, whatever responsibility for one’s learning is, there are many ways to describe it, such as ‘self-directed learning’ and ‘self-regulated learning’, terms which some may use interchangeably but others use with established distinctions. In Candy’s (1991) and Brockett and Hiemstra’s (1991) terms, self-direction is the ability to learn autonomously and self-manage one’s education; to not only assume primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process but to have the ‘desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning’ (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991, p. 24). The implication here is that as the learner perceives a need or has a preference, she is able to “choose between dependence and independence” (Nuffield Foundation, 1975, p.ii). Therefore, the extent of an individual’s ability for developing independent competences and capabilities may be mitigated by the self, behaviour and environment (Lou and Noels, 2016; Taylor, Ntoumanis and Smith, 2009) which can both constrain and enable this ability.

The most common descriptor of independent learning is self-regulation (Meyer et al., 2008, p.2; Pintrich, 2000, 2000). Self-regulated learners “have an understanding

of their own approach to learning and how best to maximise their learning in the most efficient ways; learners who are motivated to take responsibility for their learning; and who are able to work with others to enhance the depth and breadth of their learning” (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 308). It is within the enactment of self-regulation that the dependent learner is distinguished from the independent learner. Zimmerman (1990) describes the learner who can self-regulate as being distinguishable from learners who are less successful at being independent

“by their systematic use of metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural strategies; by their responsiveness to feedback regarding the effectiveness of their learning; and by their self-perceptions of academic accomplishment” (p.14).

Rickabaugh (2012) in his representation of independent learning helps us to think in terms of a process whereby the student moves from dependent (teacher-led) to independent (student-led) learning; highlighting a shift in responsibility between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘progressive’, from the teacher to the learner. As Figure 3 shows, students’ movement along the continuum in steps or stages leading to independence is determined by the development of particular skills along the continuum. However, to get a picture of student experience of independent learning it may be more useful to expand on the processual and/or procedural elements of this conceptualisation to include experiential affective, behavioural and cognitive elements. This then moves the discussion onto examining independent learning as experience and this involves student experience, understanding and description.



Figure 3. The Learning Independence Continuum

This processual model of independent learning is problematic for a number of reasons. As highlighted earlier, independent learning processes are not always simple and straightforward to discharge, because there is ambiguity about independent learning. If we are to understand independent learning, we must understand beyond processes associated with independent learning. Furthermore, while there is value in illustrating how independent learning occurs, such processual thinking does little to deepen conceptualisation of independent learning as an experience. In Rickabaugh's (2012) model, it is unclear how such experience is interpreted. Furthermore, the model fails to deepen our understanding of the essence of the experience. The five core features identified in the model tell us what aspects of teacher-led and student-led activities lead to independent learning development, but the basis of independent learning remains unexamined. Furthermore, are we to accept motivation, engagement, efficacy, ownership and independence as the mediating processes for what I consider to be and present forthcoming as independent learning-as-experience?

Simply identifying 'isolated' processes as a means of explaining independent learning is limited in furthering theoretical exploration of the phenomenon. How do people experience these processes? What are the complexities associated with these

processes? A processual model of independent learning falls short of a meaningful elucidation of independent learning for those who actually engage in it because it over-simplifies what independent learning involves. Accordingly, what I argue for is going further to uncover the nature and essence of independent learning, to complete the picture, for me, of independent learning-as-experience.

In the following sections, I draw on multiple conceptual and theoretical perspectives (see summary in table 1 below) through which I explore independent learning, and which may help me to a conceptualisation of independent learning. They provide a starting point for considering the possible conceptualisation of independent learning as experience. The perspectives outlined in the following sections are not to be considered as the totality of concepts and theories related to independent learning. Rather, along with perspectives of independent learning highlighted above, I deem these to be central to framing the present study: *Experiential learning theory, Self-determination theory, Socio-cognitive theory, and Community of practice.*

Table 1. Theories and perspectives relevant to independent learning

Overview of theories and concepts for independent learning and experience	Description
Perspectives of independent learning (Candy, 1991; Gow & Kember, 1990; Knowles, 1975; Meyer et al., 2008; Moore, 1972; Race, 2014; Rickabaugh, 2012)	Responsibility for own learning
	Choice and goal-setting
	Decision making (what, how, when to learn)
	Self-monitoring own progress
	Inquiry and critical evaluation
	Reflection on learning
Experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2015)	Motivation; engagement; efficacy; ownership; independence
	Concrete experience; reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation; active experimentation
	Deriving meaning from experiences
	Developing self-awareness of sentiments and value associated with learning; responsible action; intuition; risk-taking; short-range intentional acts toward goals; responsible action toward achieving goals
	Solving meaningful problems
Self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012)	Transformation of goals and strategies in light of results of experimentation
	Motivation towards certain actions or behaviours
Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1989,	Autonomy; Relatedness; Competence
	Self-efficacy – personal beliefs in one’s own abilities; self-perceptions and physiological factors; direct and vicarious experiences; social persuasion

1997, 1999, 2001, 2006, 2010) Self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 1990, 2002)	Basic capabilities – symbolising; vicarious; forethought; self-regulation; self-reflective
	Active participation in own learning experience
	Self-evaluation
	Goal-setting
	Self-monitoring and review
Community of practice Lave (Wenger, 1998)	Supportive learning environment
	Shared interest that defines its members’ identity; requests for information (instructors, peers, online resources, books, etc.); focus on value
	Shared community as mutual interaction in joint activities and learning by engaging in active discussions
	Shared practice as defined by a shared repertoire of resources; growing confidence; coordination and strategy
	Discussing developments; documenting problems/challenges to learning
	Group-working; problem-solving; collaborative learning
	Using and reusing cultural assets, prior experience
	Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps

2.4 Experiential learning theory

Experiential learning has long been a topic of interest for twentieth-century scholars. Dewey, Lewin, Piaget, Vygotsky, James, Jung, Freire, Rogers, and Parker Follet examined the role of experience in human learning and development. David Kolb, in particular, brought an “intellectual perspective on human learning and development” and “epistemological foundation” to discuss education-based experience (Kolb, 2015, p. xiii, p. xviii). Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is a holistic systematic framework of the learning process and multilinear framework of human development whereby the subjective conscious intentional experience in learning is centred to emphasise the nature of experience and the understanding of learning, growing and developing from this experience.

An experiential learning perspective attempts to counter the perceived deficit model of learning from experience that is the hallmark of common definitions and usage of the term experiential learning in the social sciences, arts and communication, sciences, information and research, technology, organisations and business. This can set ELT apart from both cognitive and behaviour learning theories (Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis, 2001; Olson and Hergenbahn, 2014), and integrate the common themes derived from inquiry about experiential learning from earlier

works of authors whom Kolb (2015, p. xvii) refers to as Foundational Scholars of Experiential Learning. The experiential learning framework considers experience worth emphasising, the learner as an active agent in their own learning, the role of experience in the learning process, and prioritises the transformational potential of experience to become learning and reliable knowledge (Kolb, 2015, p. xxi). The ELT approach also acknowledges that while learners might face learning challenges; these are normal aspects of everyday life. The goal of ELT is also to create a theory that helps explicate learning on the basis of transformational experience, critical reflection and active doing (Kolb, 2015; Moon, 2013). The ELT framework identifies the importance of the individual differences in experience and multilinear development as manifested within and across time and space. It thus provides the opportunity to investigate the influence and application of experience in context-specific settings such as post-16 education. Crucially, it can provide understanding of the role experience may play in notions of reflection and transformation in relation to independent learning. Among the many circumstances examined by ELT, epistemological and ontological dimensions of development (Malinen, 2000; Su, 2011), and reflective and transformative aspects of learning (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor and Cranton, 2012) are often emphasised. Evidence of the effects of critical reflection and transformative learning theoretical models similarly apply and have often been illustrated by various scholars in educational research and practice (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2013; Maudsley and Strivens, 2000; Moon, 2013; Ng'ambi, 2008; Sapos, Battisti and Grimm, 2008).

In many ways, ELT fits within debate around the move toward independent learning, particularly in post-16 educational settings. Many college students may not have been exposed to rigorously academic and independent ways of learning but their distinctive approach to learning has been honed by years of developing grit and resilience skills and should legitimately be seen as opportunities even in new learning environments. Their enactment of this resilience is even more demonstrable in the course of students' school to college to university transition (Hernandez-Martinez and Williams, 2013). For such students, independent learning

can be an empowering experience that allows them to harness the skills they possess to learn and develop in college. Furthermore, ELT helps us to consider more deeply the epistemological dimensions of learning and development that can be applied to independent learning experience in college.

As a theory of learning, ELT incorporates many ways of approaching and thinking about knowledge and learning to explain what is understood as experiential learning. Kolb (2015), citing Kolb and Kolb (2013), describes ELT as “a dynamic view of learning based on a learning cycle driven by the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction” (pp. 50-51). It becomes difficult to understand an international student’s development and sustainment of independent learning if we do not consider the context within which such development and sustenance occurs. Kolb’s Learning Spiral, updated from the original (experiential) learning cycle refers to the ‘continuous recursive spiral’ of learning (Kolb, 2015, p. 61). The grasping-transforming-experience aspects of this model as adapted in the present study (see Figure 4) have relevance to independent learning experience because both notions are based around the multidimensional and inextricably linked intellectual, emotional, social, political, spiritual and physical experience in which learners are engaged.

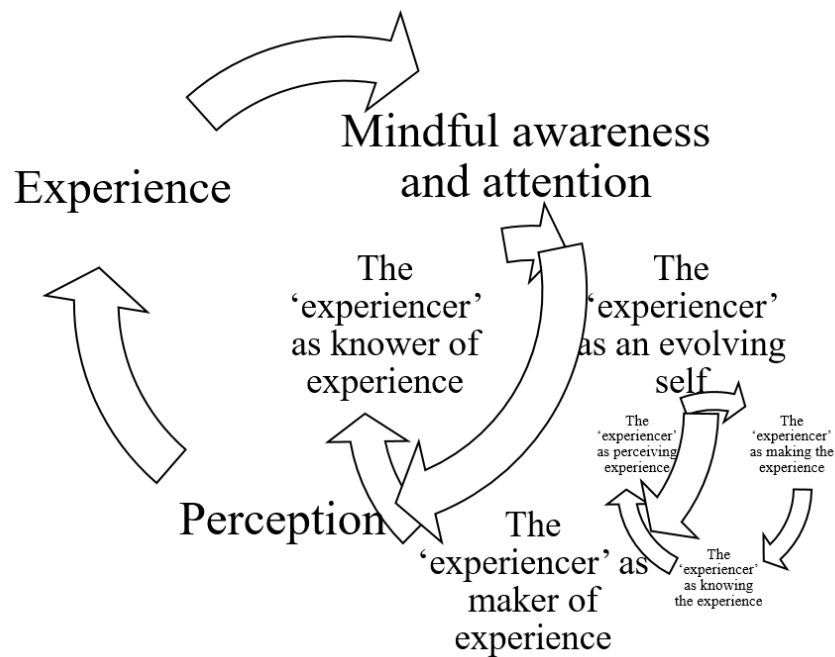


Figure 4. The independent learning experience spiral

The concept of the learning spiral describes learning as knowledge creation, which follows a “process, whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (in Kolb, 2015, p.49). There are no restrictive or opposing combinations. Rather there is a complex interplay of experiences whereby learners create knowledge by taking in information, analysing this information and acting on the resultant outcome to achieve learning. What Kolb (2015, p. 51) describes as “grasp and transform experiences” bring a renewed emphasis on human agency to learning and development theory. A learner’s dispositions to a new learning culture may be intermittently ‘disruptive’, inviting negative emotional responses leading to difficulty in developing certain learning strategies, or ‘recursive’, inviting positive responses to new experiences in the future, potentially leading to sustainment of tendencies in the learner for learning and learning anew.

2.4.1 Learning as grasping experience- Apprehension versus comprehension

Regarding learning as perceived and actualised knowledge, one of the central principles of the process and structure of experiential learning is that learning

occurs through grasp experiences. Kolb refers to these important experiences as comprehension: “a reliance on conceptual interpretation and symbolic representation” and apprehension: “a reliance on the tangible, felt qualities of immediate experience” (p. 67). These interpretations and representations of experience, it is thought, are perceptions that must be experienced figuratively, momentarily and statically in order for learning to occur. However, as Kolb points out “perception of experience is not sufficient for learning” (2015, p. 68). The infinite nature and scope of grasping experience affecting learning and development may vary as a joint function of the apparent or demonstrable perceptual and communicable sensations of the individual and in their environment. These sensations may be considered as timeless and transcending space, in terms of where such experiences are occurring, and the nature of the learning outcomes as a result of such experiences. Thus, Kolb’s (2015) suggestion of distinct, dialectically opposed modes of grasping experience to some extent resolves, perhaps reconceptualises, the debate about the ways people come to *know*. In learning, for instance, the learner has not only the ability to take-in information but also use their sense of recognition to control that which makes them able to recognise, appreciate and remember this information. Likewise, associated concepts of understanding of one’s learning can then be communicated verbally and non-verbally.

I would suggest in a sense, these dual ways of recognising and describing is representative of what Kolb (2015, p.76) describes as ‘dual-knowledge epistemology’ and this can be considered in relation to independent learning and the extent to which the student’s experience of it actualises unique dispositions for independent learning. Furthermore, effective ‘grasping experience’ I would argue is neither linear nor unidirectional, in contrast to the processual model of independent learning. In the case of learner interaction with and response to independent learning, this means that considerations about how best to develop and sustain independent learning ought to be made on the basis that learner behaviour demonstrated by perception and understanding, and formed as a result of abstract conceptualisation, might be equally as important as cognitive actions based on

concrete experiences. This means that through comprehension, the learner introduces an elevated sense of intuitive or perceptive knowing of their world whereby they demonstrate dialectically opposed ways of understanding that learning experience.

2.4.2 Learning as a transforming experience

As stated earlier, experience is multidimensional and made up of integrated mutually supportive experiences. This means that regarding transforming experience, experience is not viewed as a separate entity within learning structure and process but a continuum of experience. The dialectically opposing concepts of reflective observation and active experimentation from Kolb's perspective help to explicate the dynamic nature of experience. In the Learning Spiral, the individual is seen as an active agent who encounters new experience or situation, reflects upon this by themselves or in interaction with others, uses available tools to make sense of the experience or situation, tests the new meaning in future experiences or situations and creates new understandings, behaviours and experiences thus transforming. Thus transforming through affective, behavioural and cognitive experience. That is, an individual develops an intention to understand learning material for themselves, engages in vigorous and critical interaction with knowledge content, makes useful links between and integrates their previous knowledge, ideas and experience, arrives at logical conclusions on the basis of evidence, and reflects on the logic of arguments (Marton and Säljö, 1976). So, in relation to independent learning, can a student be an independent learner without experiencing transformation?

Kolb's continuum of experience makes it reasonable to argue that the process which transforms experience into learning, what Kolb (2015) refers to as reflective observation and active experimentation, or "intention and extension" (p.77), is necessary for redefining the student role in independent learning. In relation to independent learning, unlike Kolb, I suggest that the learner can 'enact' thinking about and doing independent learning simultaneously and does so as an individual

and as an active participant in a larger social group. Furthermore, I argue that independent learning is experience and so need not begin at the experience stage of the spiral. At any point of interaction with independent learning, the learner explores their own experiences, thereby extending and grounding their ideas and understandings of independent learning. Experiences are not bound in the moment; they inform the future and are constantly revisited through memory and reflection. Thus, while independent learning may happen at a particular time and within a particular space, I suggest that it is not bound within this time or space.

This suggestion necessitates an investigation into how intention and extension conceptions of transformation are supportive of independent learning. College students are presented with dynamic experiences and situations, creating opportunities for reflection and experimentation. Conceptualising how students transform through experience can be applied to their *knowledge* of the world. As Kolb (2015) suggests, internal reflection of the impact of perception on a person's feelings and acting upon actual experience encourages meaning-making. Similarly, students *feel, act* and *think* academically through interacting with their experience. As the learner transforms through experience they are more likely to move from a dependent stage to an independent disposition. The intentional and extensional transformation of experience into learning seems to be underpinned by rational and empirical aspects of epistemology (Greene and Yu, 2016), that is, that knowledge is at once a priori and a posteriori. I would add that perception can shape experience as much as experience shapes understanding.

However, there is a suggestion that distinct perceptual experiences can destroy whatever knowledge is acquired (Kolb, 2015). This could be because a particular concept through which meaning is made is diluted by a pre/ non-conceptual engagement with reality. Or, simply perceiving what is seen and how it is seen, and engaging with different aspects of that experience without judgement about what is perceived or how to order the representational properties of that which has been

experienced. It is rather, reflective observation that moves the transformation of experience from simple to complex comprehensive knowledge.

Consider the learner. They self-identify, or are identified as a learner because they have experienced learning over time and in multiple contexts. In approaching a new learning culture, they encounter new teaching, new learning structures and process, expectations, the style of learning, how learning outcomes are measured, and other relevant factors. They may consider these factors but without critical thought and evaluation, often because they are focused on survival strategies (for instance, how to keep up with the pace of the teacher because they are dictating notes). A transformation of thought, requires the learner to consider the totality of their learning in which the learner, the teacher, the teaching-learning structure and processes, teacher-learner expectations, learning styles, and learning outcomes are experienced holistically.

2.4.3 Independent learning in the IFP as spiral of experience?

While Kolb's ELT model conceptualises how experiential learning occurs, this represents only part of the picture. It does not address the role of non-reflective experience in the learning process, how experiential learning occurs within and among larger heterogeneous groups, the shifts in observational and reflective learning that transcend time and space, or a broader focus on transformational experience. Education that follows an experiential philosophy contributes to the various perspectives that may inform understanding of the role of experience in independent learning endeavour. Thus, independent learning can offer a unique combination of learning independently (independent learning) and learning independently experientially (independent learning experience). This conceptualisation centres the individual as the subject of that experience. Thus presenting a perspective of 'independent learning experience' whereby a specific group of students may perceive, connect with and understand independent learning through a range of experiences (affectively, behaviourally and cognitively), in an internationalised community of learners, and in a manner that potentially creates

opportunities for new learning unbounded by time and space. Crucial to the present study then, is the extent to which their encounter with independent learning exposes international students to each of these experiences – serving to foster an experience of learning and academic development.

IFP students may be seen to be engaging and interacting with independent learning, their peers, and teachers through this experience. This would suggest that immersion in the independent learning experience could surface learner issues related to values, relationship and community. Included in this experience, is the potential for student involvement, alienation or engagement within the student experience (Krause, 2005; Mann, 2001); and how the experience might compel a transformation in their academic lives. Key to students' transformation is the value of concrete and immediate experiences, and reflection and feedback experiences resulting in the creation of meaning, and ultimately, learning (Kolb, 2015: 66-69).

The independent learning experience is complex and multi-layered; it incorporates a range of affective, behaviour and cognitive domains of experience at both individual and group level (student-peer-teacher-environment interactions) - discussed in detail in the sections following (2.6, 2.7 and 2.8). The extent to which independent learning exposes IFP students to these experiences – and hence fosters a development and potential sustainment of independent learning is therefore of central focus of the present study.

2.5 Self-determination Theory

Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory emphasises motivation and personality as crucial aspects of human growth and psychological change. This theory suggests that individuals are able to demonstrate self-determined dispositions, based on the fulfilment of their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, which may allow them to feel that they have control over key psychological needs in respect of their learning (Deci and Ryan, 1985a).

Given the distinct nature of independent learning, this theory is helpful in understanding particular processes, or rather, particular experiences, which may determine international students' independent learning. In so doing, self-determination theory addresses an individual's control of behaviours and goals which can result in real change, the importance of an individual's mastery and skill to their success, and an individual's experience of a sense of belonging and attachment to a significant community (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory postulates that these needs refer to *experience* of behaviour emanating from and enacted by students themselves through which they learn and develop. Thus, maintaining intrinsic motivation can only be achieved in relation to both autonomy- and competence- need satisfaction of learning behaviours. In this, Deci and Ryan (1985a) differ from Bandura's (2010) summation that autonomy is less significant for maintaining intrinsic motivation for learning. The primary focus of Deci and Ryan's model offers motivation as a continuum of basic psychological needs travelling from the 'extrinsic' (controlled) to the 'intrinsic' (autonomous). This perspective prioritises the role in human development of psychological characteristics of the individual and of the learning conditions in which they learn. This work sheds light on a number of intrinsic processes (or experiences) relevant to independent learning: that of the influence of individual perceptions, connections and understanding.

Relating self-determination models to learning, some studies take into account the experiences dictating an individual's learning related to a *macro-theory* of human motivation (Jeno, Danielsen and Raaheim, 2018; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009).

2.5.1 Self-determination elements relevant to independent learning

Self-determination theory emphasises the promotion of intrinsically and extrinsically motivated values by three basic psychological needs, as being a major determinant of learning-indicative behaviours. Applying self-determination theory to educational practice, Niemiec and Ryan (2009) determined that there is a link between students' motivation and "academic engagement and better academic

outcomes” (p. 134). Autonomy-supportive teachers and students’ perception of the presence or absence of this is central to students’ intrinsic motivation. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) are of the view that educational systems and classroom climate can facilitate (or inhibit) this process in educational contexts. More recently, Deci, Ryan and Guay (2013) questioned the narrow approach to school achievement, prompted by global economic competition, which has resulted in increased high-stakes testing and evaluative pressures, which may disrupt students’ motivation. They argue that such an approach undermines optimal autonomous, relatedness and competency behaviours. Ultimately doing little or nothing to foster intrinsic motivation in students which had previously been determined to be at the core of behaviour, cognitive and social regulation (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Central to self-determination theory is the notion that an individual is likely to engage in learning when the three basic psychological needs are satisfied within a supportive environment. In the context of this study, it is thought that these basic needs can be generally met, if the IFP is experienced as a supportive environment where these specific aspects of student experience are engaged with (Figure 5). Thus, what appears to be a lack of independent learning on the part of students may be attributed to the absence these basic needs.

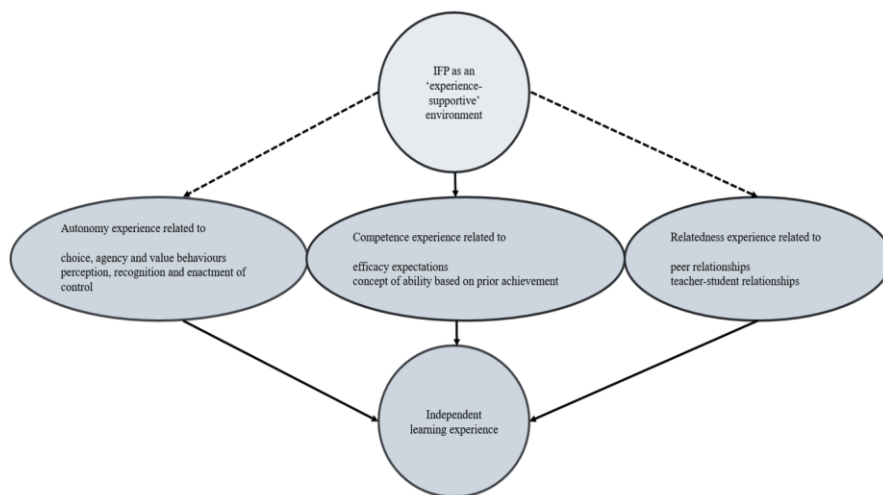


Figure 5. Adaptation of Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory to incorporate IFP students’ independent learning experience

Thus, self-determination theory is useful to understanding independent learning and the 'growth-centred' approach to understanding motivation in students as influenced by varying experiences of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Jeno, Danielsen and Raaheim, 2018).

2.5.1.1 Autonomy

Students can have the psychological need to experience independent learning as a behaviour “emanating from and as endorsed by self” (Reeve, 2002, p.196). That is, the choice, degree of agency and the value the learner experiences in relation to activity. Such behaviour outcomes have been linked to persistence and academic achievement. In its broadest, everyday context, the term autonomy denotes “a state of freedom, of independence, and perhaps of self-sufficiency” (Candy, 1991, p.102). Holec (1979) defines autonomy as “the capacity or ability to take charge of one’s learning” (p.3). The ability of individuals to develop into autonomous and responsible learners in general aspects of their academic lives (beliefs and behaviours) is an important indicator of academic well-being (Boud, 2012; Huang and Benson, 2013). Shifts in student relatedness and shifts in independent learning experience can be congruent. Additionally, shifts in autonomy can produce relational shifts in student’s epistemic agency, which enable them to take charge of their knowledge-building journey (Aditomo, 2018). Fazey and Fazey (2001) have also employed the construct of perceived control and agency to suggest that autonomy may be influenced by the individual’s perception, recognition, and enactment of control in certain situations. Thereby placing self-responsibility of defining learning objectives, determining learning content, managing the learning pace, plotting the learning sequence, deciding what, how and where to use the learning resources, and evaluating the learning, to a greater or lesser extent, in the hands of the learner. Some learners can be psychologically driven to learn or highly motivated to learn (with or without opportunities to choose how they learn) which initiates a pre-disposition to independent learning. Such learners can choose what, how and where to learn and/ or when to hand over this control.

Following from this, it is suggested that consideration of students' autonomy as it relates to independent learning can also be based within the nexus of their cultural realities (mediated through experiences). Furthermore, it is submitted that autonomy may not be practiced without the learner's attempt and ability to shift and challenge their way of knowing or understanding learning. For some students, this may involve questioning previous understandings about independence and its role in learning. Students are then likely to reconstruct an epistemology or expectation of pedagogy engendered within their experience (Greene & Yu, 2016). However, for international students, this experience is likely to be played out or experienced within 'adopted', internationalised learning contexts. Leading to mutual transformation in identities of self and the transformation of learning practices.

Independent learning, for many students, has a similar effect. Supporting the notion of the learner experiencing active involvement in determining which learning strategies and tactics are relevant to particular tasks and being in a position to determine why, when and how to use them (Oxford, 2015).

2.5.1.2 Competence

Competence within this research is seen to be the psychological need to be effective in one's connectedness with learning experience. As a *self*-attribute of basic need, this is often reflected in the student's inherent desire to increase skills and competences and, in doing so, seek out and overcome academic challenges in order to attain valued outcomes (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Students can have 'competential experience' to pursue and interact with (engage) independent learning. Crucially, it is suggested that competence experience emanates from and equally informs constructs of (self-) efficacy (as related to expectations of future *experience* of academic performance) and (self-) concept (as it relates to past *experience* of academic performance) as critical determinants of intrinsic motivational behaviours for enhancing independent learning. While students are experiencing learning activity in specific contexts, their confidence to participate in the learning activity, overcome perceived learning activity-related 'barriers', and manage their time and

responsibilities around learning activity remain crucial. Similar to autonomy, competence is both context- and domain- specific, particularly in relation to achievement of immediate and long-term academic goals (Jeno, Grytnes and Vandvik, 2017). Competence need-supportive contexts are thus in congruence with those that support autonomous motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2013).

This would mean in practice for IFP in relation to independent learning, that IFPs can foster or hinder perceived competence in different ways. That is, in terms of teachers as facilitators of independent learning, enacting autonomy-supportive teaching in their classrooms, and providing the learner with active situations for problem solving that would enable them visualise how the skills and knowledge they are acquiring in learning situations presently are transferable future ones.

2.5.1.3 Relatedness

Relatedness, similar to autonomy and competence, is the need for individuals to initiate, maintain and gain relational satisfaction from perceiving a sense of belonging and connections with significant others (e.g. teachers and peers in the classroom) (Reeve, 2002). In terms of conceptualising relatedness as an experience of independent learning, the self-determination theory perspective is useful in understanding that relatedness can mediate and explicate the relationship between student motivation and student independent learning experience.

Within this research, relatedness is conceptualised as a non-instructional construct of self-determination theory. When students perceive positive relationships with teachers and peers, there will be a relational experience with the learning activities within a specific context such as the IFP. As a result, the IFP becomes a supportive site for students to experience self-determined “motivation (for), engagement (in), and positive classroom functioning (in)” independent learning (Reeve, 2002, p. 149). Independent learning is a dynamic, complex and nuanced learning experience. The influence of relatedness becomes a way in which they can better understand

that experience. Furthermore, students' satisfaction with relationships influences their enactment of autonomy.

In summary, self-determination theory contributes to the overarching independent learning experience in three important ways. First self-determination theory identifies the source of students' three basic psychological needs. In this way, self-determination theory surfaces and conceptualises the satisfaction of psychological need as necessary for thriving psychologically, physically and socially in complex learning contexts. Second, self-determination theory explicates the on-going shifts in self-efficacy that is reflected in some students enacting independent learning in some situations and little in others, or in differences in the stages and extent of these shifts among different students. Third, self-determination theory provides the basis for determining the extent to which learning contexts are independent learning-supportive in relation to students' perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness as dimensions of needs experience in these contexts.

My focus, therefore, is micro-level independent learning in individuals exemplified by autonomous, competential and relatedness experience of, a 'better' way of learning, learning-related 'opportunities', intrinsic motivation to engage further with a 'better' way of learning, experimenting with and adopting this perceived 'better' way, evaluating and refining the 'better' way of learning, and recognition and acknowledgement of competence in 'better' learning as transformation.

2.6 Social cognitive learning theory

Bandura (1997) has used social cognitive theory (SCT) to examine the continuous reciprocal interactions between behaviour factors, the individual (cognitive) and the environment in the learning process. In this study, Bandura's SCT is important to understand how behaviour can affect cognition, how individual cognitive activities can affect experience of the environment, and the influences of those experiences on individual thought processes of college students. The cognitive is incomplete without experience. The behaviour-cognitive experience involves the bi-directional

influences of the individual's thoughts, emotions and characteristics and their actions. Cognition modifies students' behaviour and students' behaviour can be modified by cognition. With the result that their independent learning experience may be considered to be transformed (Figure 6). The emphasis in this model is on micro-independent learning experiences.

A student's expectations, beliefs, perceptions, goals and objectives shape the cognitive experience of learning (Hofer and Stern, 2016; Greene and Yu, 2016). Similarly, the environment-cognitive experience involves the development and modification of individual expectations, beliefs and competencies related to independent learning by social and physical influencers within the environment. Likewise, behaviour-environment experience occurs when an individual's preferences and competencies shape their interaction with others within a learning environment and their engagement with learning processes within the environment. Thus, a student's development and sustainment of independent learning is influenced by their experience of an independent learning-supportive environment and in turn, an independent learning-supportive environment determines the student's experience of independent learning.

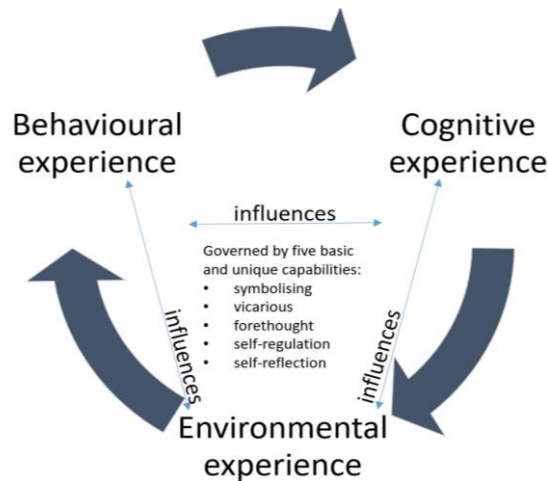


Figure 6. Adaptation of Bandura's social cognitive model to independent learning experience.

Since students are key actors in their learning, their ‘strategies for survival’ in independent learning contexts depends largely on cognitive experiences for adaptation. These arise in the students in their transformation through thinking and reflection. Their experiences allow them to be ‘better’ independent learners not only in the context of the IFP, and but as users of knowledge in future learning situations.

Environmental experiences have a significant impact on the development of generic self-learning capabilities (Kember and Leung, 2005). Environments that foster strong teacher-student-peer relationships can nurture and reinforce independent learning. Experiences that occur within these spaces are characterised by emphasis on efforts to learn to understand rather than on learning to pass, engagement of students in learning, and assessment that incorporates building skills and independent learning capabilities into assessing understanding.

Central to the environment is attention to the behaviour that students may enact in terms of their cognitive experiences in the environment. Behaviour in which they use self-control and reflection in the learning they do. Behaviour experience thus relates to independent learning experiences students in the IFP, for instance, might apply to their independent learning, the totality of their thinking and doing independent learning, and the perceived skills and competences they achieve.

Inherent in the notion of behaviour, cognition and environment as interacting reciprocal determinants of experience within my SCT perspective, are the concepts of symbolising capability, vicarious capability, forethought capability, self-regulation and self-reflection (Bandura, 1989).

2.6.1 Elements of social cognitive learning

2.6.1.1 Symbolising capability

Symbolising capability refers to the human ability to use symbols such as images or words to understand and manage unique experience. This capacity serves as a meaning-making mechanism for cognitive processes that shape behaviour. Through

the formation of images or words, an individual can process and transform perception and experience in order to make sense of and engage with on-going experiences. In addition, the capability to ‘meaning-make’ in learning enables individuals to draw from this experience to guide future experience. This experience is very important for observational learning. Thus, making sense of an experience such as independent learning allows the student to manipulate pre-conceptual knowledge about learning to gain understanding of present purposes of learning. The student’s ability to expand their knowledge and thinking skills through symbolisation becomes invaluable for cognitive problem-solving, which in turn enables them to “transcend their sensory experiences” (Bandura, 1989, p. 9). For example, an international student experiencing new learning for the first time can perceive themselves as being an independent learner.

2.6.1.2 Vicarious capability

Vicarious capability is the human capacity for observational learning. That is, acquiring new behaviour from modelled behaviour as a process of cognitive and social development (Bandura, 1986). It involves an individual’s ability to acquire knowledge and skills from by observation of others. The process of learning begins with the development of an idea of how a new behaviour is formed (Bandura, 1989). The learner then uses this information to create symbols to execute future actions. Crucial to this process is using observation as a result of extended exploration of and engagement with new situations and activities to create a pattern of on-going behaviours for new knowledge. However, not all observation results in a change in behaviour. I am of the view that learning is only a partial product of observation. This thought may be expanded to include awareness and understanding of that which is observed. Observed behaviour can also be influenced by beliefs, individual capabilities and experience. For example, a student’s prior experience of learning and perhaps academic performance can determine their ability to choose which actions and behaviours to observe in any given environment, and which aspects of these actions and behaviours they deem important for their learning (Bandura, 1986,

1989). Furthermore, the perceived difficulty or ease of the modelled activity can determine their level of engagement with or alienation from that activity (Mann, 2001). If the student can make a positive connection to that observed behaviour or activity because they perceive the experience as one they are familiar with, then they are more likely to persist in, retain and model the behaviour as an aspect of the experience. Conversely, failure to meet that need for connection could result in alienation. Ultimately, and in relation to independent learning, the connections the student makes between behaviour toward independent learning and expectations of academic success because of persistence and satisfaction with independent learning, can mean that they are motivated and likely to adopt independent learning.

2.6.1.3 Forethought capability

Forethought capability is governed by an individual's personal agency, their previous experience which creates expectations of outcome, and the individual's self-motivation which guides future behaviour (Bandura, 1989). Forethought involves the individual setting goals for themselves for their learning, identifying anticipatory outcomes of their learning behaviours, and developing and performing targeted behaviours which they perceive are likely to prevent undesired outcomes and produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1999). Thus the student is motivated to engage in anticipatory self-guidance in order to regulate their behaviour. Their projected goals and expectancies for performance and achievement consequently direct their present behaviour (Bandura, 1986). Students may also construct outcome expectations through their observation and experience of and connection with the social world, in this case the college learning environment, if they are able to recognise the link between anticipated outcomes and current experience as independent learning. In so doing, forethought enables the student to consider a desired behaviour beyond their present behaviour. An important means by which they do this is by self-regulation to "augment or override the influence of external outcomes" (Bandura, 2001, p.8).

2.6.1.4 Self-regulatory capability

According to SCT, *self-regulatory* systems mediate external influences and provide a basis for behaviour, allowing individuals to have control over the thoughts, feelings and actions which influence this behaviour (Bandura, 1989). Self-regulation, metacognition and self-efficacy are considered to be interrelated and important contributors to academic development (Bandura, 2010; Boekaerts, 2011; Dent and Koenka, 2015; Quigley, Muijs and Stringer, 2018; Yusuf, 2011; van Blankenstein et al., 2018; Zimmerman, 2013). Flavell (1985) defined metacognition as “any knowledge or cognitive activity that takes as its object, or regulates, any aspect of any cognitive enterprise” (p.104). Metacognition and self-regulation, although similar constructs related to thought, action and emotion, are distinct psychological traits. Both metacognition and self-regulation are comprised of an individual’s knowledge (including their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, the strategies they use to learn and enhance their learning and their ability/willingness to motivate themselves to seek opportunities for ‘better’ learning) as well as their experiences within educational contexts (Borkowski et al., 2000; Hofer and Stern, 2016; Pintrich 2004).

Self-regulatory capability can be considered as a form of cultural capital grounded in mediated learning processes and experiences to promote learning goals (Panadero, 2017). One of the regulatory processes at the core of successful learning is the student’s “ability to direct own learning” (Pintrich, 2000, p. 449), such that they are able to develop, employ, modify, extend and transfer knowledge and skills across a variety of learning situations. Deficit narratives (see p. 17 of this thesis) about international college students in the UK, suggest that the reason international students are less successful at independent learning than home students is that they are unable to develop or use metacognitive skills and consequently require personalised learning support. However, this perceived inability is similarly evident in home students (Langman, 2012).

As a result, school-leavers who relied and thrived academically on external regulation experience may experience a decline in achievement when they enter an environment which promotes self-directed learning. In contrast, students who are able to intrinsically identify and employ learning or problem-solving strategies with little or no external support from teachers rely more on their own metacognitive skills than students who rely on teachers' presence and the teachers' skill and guidance (Weinert, Schrader and Helmke, 1990). Jakešová and Kalenda (2015) argue that beyond this, the way successful learners monitor their own learning and complete learning tasks is situationally constructed and as such examination of self-regulated learning should be grounded in what they refer to as "real, actual and empirical domains of reality" (p. 188), similar to experience. Zimmerman's (2002, p.66) describes a self-regulated learner in this way:

"These learners are proactive in their efforts to learn because they are aware of their strengths and limitations and because they are guided by personally-set goals and task-related strategies, such as using an arithmetic addition strategy to check the accuracy of solutions to subtraction problems. These learners monitor their behaviour in terms of their goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness. This enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning."

What this demonstrates is an important link between academic affect and student's self-regulation, which can be related to cognitive processes and academic performance (Pekrun *et al.*, 2002). Thus, self-regulated students are able to engage in the mental process associated with such cognitive strategies as knowing, understanding and learning, giving themselves the opportunity to acquire knowledge that is meaningful for learning and to complete learning tasks. So beyond important attributes for learning such as ability, competence and knowledge of the subject area, is learners' recognition of the connectedness between self-regulatory experiences, learning strategies and learning outcomes/ academic goals.

Metacognition can be positively associated with learning and learner outcomes (Perry, Lundie and Golder, 2018; Zimmerman, 2000) and in particular with young people (Owo and Ikwut, 2015). Similarly, self-regulation is positively associated with easier academic transition (Stoten, 2015). Metacognition can manifest itself both in students' self-awareness and self-reflection of their own learning process, and in students' regulation of (or control over) these processes. Self-regulation and metacognition guide and shape study behaviours, how students select and monitor the learning strategies they use in their own learning process, and how this might affect overall academic experience. However, it is important to include in this account, consideration of how formulated, individual views can affect metacognition and the decisions learners make about how or whether to use, maintain or amend existing learning mechanisms (Richter and Schmid, 2010), and how they might do this within a community of independent learning. For example, during learning, a student can be motivated to develop independent learning for the dual purpose of increasing her learning, performance and success, which Dweck, (2000) describes as implicit metacognitive theories of intelligence.

Closely related to the student's metacognition is their perceived self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). Self-efficacy theory claims that behaviour, performance and persistence are important outcomes of self-efficacy. For this reason, it is suggested that in an independent learning context, self-efficacy can affect academic behaviour, performance and persistence in independent learning experience. That is, academic self-efficacy will be related to specific and situational perceptions of competence in independent learning as opposed to general beliefs about independent learning. Thus, relational (perceived) behaviour could have significant effects on actual behaviour and ultimately, eventual adjustment to a new learning culture. That is, the relationship between academic self-efficacy and self-regulation and the relationship of academic self-efficacy to motivation and persistence in independent learning in the face of perceived challenging learning (Edwards-Joseph

and Baker, 2014). Furthermore, Petersdotter, Niehoff and Freund (2017) suggest a positive association between studying abroad and increased levels of students' perceived self-efficacy. They also found that for students who study abroad, having a high sense of self-efficacy allowed them to easily challenge preconceptions when experiencing new culture. Such that upon reflection, they begin to perceive their encounter with new culture not as threatening but as positive opportunities important for learning. Thus, international students who have high academic self-efficacy are able to overcome negative affect associated with adjusting to independent learning. It is likely that these suggested relationships which may occur across behaviour domains (Khan, 2013; Maeda, 2017; Razek and Coyner, 2014) and among diverse groups of students (Wang et al., 2018) make it reasonable to argue for the importance of academic self-efficacy to the self-regulation, and ultimately the experience of international students with independent learning.

Self-efficacy is a cognitive factor related to self-regulation of motivation and behaviour. This is evident in the interaction between efficacy-activated affects, behaviours and cognitions, and the effects of these interactions on motivation based on internal standards and personal attainment (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2016). In particular, regarding the self-efficacy of learners, it has been shown that self-efficacy influences behaviours on given tasks. Although self-efficacy is task-specific, it can be multi-faceted which is why self-efficacy can influence how students choose and perform tasks, and the nature and extent of their effort in and persistence with tasks, as well as how they determine and use 'effective' learning strategies (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2016). This is different from the concept of competence discussed earlier (see 2.5.2) which focuses more on the effectiveness of such strategies.

In this study, it is thought that the behaviour experience for most learners can come close to what Bandura (2010) conceptualises as self-efficacy, a context-specific concept, relating to a learner's ability to execute particular (learning) tasks or successfully *perform* learning. That is, related to their personal beliefs in their

ability to influence events that affect their lives, and the perception that ability and competence to complete tasks will match the desired outcomes (Bandura, 1986; 2010). For some learners, however, this perception can be related more to an experience of mutually supportive relationships in the learning environment, including feeling confident about the support and trust of their teachers and peers. Furthermore, Bandura (2010) illustrates the positive association between students' high perceptions of self-efficacy, learner control and the likelihood that they are able to consistently discover, use and evaluate effective learning strategies. But, this can also depend on whether they perceived this as being capable of impacting their engagement in independent learning. In particular, international students' self-efficacy can potentially improve or attenuate students' independent learning (Wang et al., 2018; Wirawan and Bandu, 2016; Yusuf, 2011).

There are believed to be three main constituents in an individual's ongoing self-efficacy: self-evaluation of one's attainment, perceived self-efficacy related to aspirational standards, and self-influence regarding adjustment of personal standard in light of self-evaluation of one's attainment (Bandura, 1986). Students can rely on self-evaluative mechanisms of their attainment to exercise personal control over motivation to extend involvement in independent learning. When this involvement results in the fulfilment of valued goals, students are satisfied, and this in turn prompts them to evaluate their experience positively. Students who have high self-efficacy about their capabilities are not deterred by challenging standards. Rather, when they perceive they have performed below their aspirational standards or fail to achieve their goals, they resolve this dilemma by persisting in and intensifying their efforts in recognising opportunities for a better way to learn, until they succeed or are satisfied with their learning. But, motivation and behaviour can also be determined by both proximal and distal aspirational standards. The further into the future an event or attainment standard is projected, the less likely the incentive for present action. Actions that are required to be performed in the present are likely to exert more influence on the individual's self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. In

this way, it is important to consider how self-regulatory influences may be relevant in a study of independent learning.

2.6.1.5 Self-reflective capability

Self-reflective capability is the capability for “reflective self-consciousness” (Bandura, 1989). This aspect of Bandura’s work on social cognition is premised on analyses and reflective experiences of one’s own thought processes. There is evidence to suggest that college students have varied experiences and knowledge, and by engaging with these experiences and knowledge they are able to develop generic knowledge about themselves and their social world (Bandura, 1989). Through reflection, such students are able to gain deeper understanding of social reality which in turn enables them to evaluate and transform their own thinking.

Self-reflectivity entails having judgements of self-efficacy regarding relational thinking and actual thinking based on:

“performance mastery experiences, vicarious experiences for judging capabilities in comparison with performances of others, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities, and physiological states from which people partly judge their capableness, strength and vulnerability” (Bandura, 1989, p.60).

The development of independent learning skills and attributes is an important outcome in a complex learning process in college and elsewhere for the vast majority of students, international and home students alike (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Similar to other student groups, international students can be independent learners. There are a number of factors that might affect this outcome, such as individual student dispositions, self-concept and self-efficacy, which can make some students successful and others less successful as independent learners (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). It is assumed that international students might need more support with setting and meeting goals, motivation and self-regulation to persevere through transitional issues as well as develop confidence (Khan, 2013; Yusuf, 2011).

2.6.2 Social cognitive constructs relevant to independent learning

The figure below (Figure 7) displays an adapted model for discussing the relationship between social cognition and independent learning. Independent learning is discussed in terms of behaviour experience, cognitive experience, and motivational experience. It is believed that self-efficacy mediates independent learning experience and vice versa. Accordingly, the more a student is independent, the higher their self-efficacy.

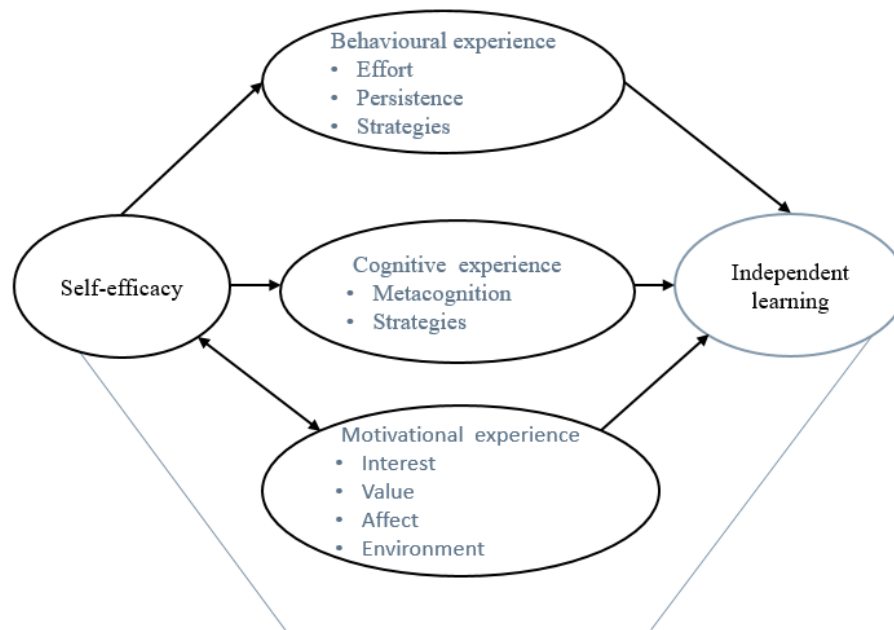


Figure 7. Adapted model of social cognition to incorporate dimensions of self-efficacy in relation to independent learning experience.

Bandura's (1997) and Schunks's (1991) contributions to the study of self-efficacy have focused on explaining how self-efficacy is related to the amount of effort an individual puts into performing a task and the individual's willingness to persist in the task. According to them, a match in the fit between an individual's strong efficacy beliefs and the requisite skills to perform a task is likely to increase their effort and persistence in a task even in the face of perceived difficulty, and ultimately result in high achievement outcomes. Conversely, an individual's weaker perceptions of efficacy, irrespective of their having the knowledge and skills to

perform the task, raises the possibility of negative behaviour changes such as self-doubt, self-defeating attitude, etc. associated with performing the task (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich 2000), and such students are more likely to report low-achievement. Self-efficacy is also associated with strategies for recognising when and where to seek help. The stronger a student's academic self-efficacy, the more likely they are to seek help and vice versa. A few reasons have been advanced for why a student with perceived weak-efficacy may not recognise or indeed ask for help in the classroom, such as perceived negative connotations associated with asking for help and misconceptions about teacher role and presence in independent learning (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003; Meyer et al., 2008).

Self-efficacy mechanisms are central to human agency. That is, an individual's perceived notions of capability to exercise control over events that affect their life (Bandura, 1984, 1986). The judgements individuals make on their self-efficacy, often determine the extent of their effort, persistence, interest in activities and the value they place on activities even in the face of challenges and obstacles. Additionally, judgements of their self-regulatory capability can hinder or enhance individuals' actual and expected experiences.

College functions as the primary setting for cultivating cognitive self-efficacy and acquiring the knowledge and independent learning skills essential for preparing effectively for higher education. However, research reports a decline in self-efficacy and academic motivation in students after the age of 16 in the UK and elsewhere (Fernandez-Rio et al., 2014; Totso et al., 2016). As young people master cognitive skills, they should also develop cognitive efficacy. But, there are a number of social factors that can affect young people's judgement of their cognitive efficacy; social comparison of the performance of peers, motivation, teacher feedback on young people's work, etc. (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2016). For some students, misconceptions or alternative conceptions of independent learning such as that it is too difficult, that teachers leave students to do all the work, and that students are often left to work alone, are not always aligned with independent

learning understanding. Students' strong efficacy beliefs in the correctness of their misconceptions could hinder their cognitive experience in independent learning and limit a conceptual shift in their learning. Accordingly, such students are less likely to adopt cognitive and metacognitive strategies and engage in new learning to deepen their understanding. However, what has also been noted is that when people perceive their cognitive self-reflective capabilities are sufficiently developed, they are more likely to rely on self-efficacy mechanisms of personal agency to determine the quality of effort required for cognitive strategy use in events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1999).

In the college classroom, there may be occasions where the student largely underestimates or overestimates their actual knowledge and skill level (Lee and Zeleke, 2018). Either behaviour could hinder or enhance self-regulation. For example, a student who has high efficacy beliefs in their cognitive ability can overestimate their expertise and therefore be less likely to engage in self-regulatory behaviours to analyse their performance or develop new strategies for performing better. Similarly, a student who underestimates their expertise is more likely to operate at, and be comfortable with, an academic level they feel is within their range of expertise. These experiences can mean the difference between students who regulate their cognition and those who do not.

Accordingly, there has to be a fit between the student's cognition, actions and the result of the student's actions for this cognition to be adaptive. Additionally, vicarious experience, for example the experience of peers, serves to corroborate and validate the student's own thinking in a way that cannot be achieved by personal action. Furthermore, self-reflection can also require a comparison between the student's thoughts and the judgement of teachers and peers in the learning environment, to come to a logical conclusion about what they already know and what knowledge they anticipate require and gain. Thus, self-reflectivity can lead to an agential shift in perspective about one's affect, behaviour and cognition as a consequence of reflecting on one's experience.

Bandura's major contribution to the field of learning and development has been a proposition of core constructs that synthesise key features of social cognition mentioned above. Each of these is incorporated in the present study.

2.7 (International) Community of Practice: Independent learning and experience

Community of practice (CoP) is a social practice theory that emphasises how learning, knowing and identity is mediated by meaning and context (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Imagine taking a walk around a college. The sight of groups of students in the classrooms, library, study areas, and in the cafes engaging with each other about their learning using books, smart devices and good old-fashioned oral discussion, is one that is so readily recognisable and expected that it is easily called into reality and acknowledged as reliable knowledge. What is not immediately known by casual observation is the analysis, discussion, reflections, evaluations, and creation of new knowledge going on within such groups, of students supporting each other through their learning and learning together inside and outside the formal structure of classrooms. Similar networks of learning are identifiable in wider organisations outside the realm of education whereby people with shared interests and a shared sense of community and practice, interact with each other.

This section reviews the role that CoP plays in related aspects of independent learning, such as, aspirational goals, belonging and identity and different levels of student participation and engagement (as mentioned on p.50, international students' are perceived as being quiet, but not contributing to class discussions does not mean non-participation/engagement). However, it has only been since the 1990s that theorists have begun to consider learning as a form of social practice (Wenger, 1998).

The notion of an 'international' CoP suggests that international students are involved in an on-going process of socialisation with independent learning, not as passive participants, but actively questioning and making sense of the norms of their

community in ways that are compatible with the development of an active, independent mindset. Furthermore, this impacts the way they understand independent learning and is integral to the development of students' academic identities as independent learners, through the negotiation of community of learning to which they belong.

The interactions among and between students, their peers and their teacher is central to the creation and sustainability of a thinking and acting community that enables the students to construct knowledge iteratively and interactively and leads them to reconceptualise independent learning through a process of meaning-making (Chilvers, 2014). Students come to regard the many situations of, and specific instances in which they encounter, independent learning. Students may initially appraise independent learning on starting college as IFP students. However, ongoing experiences may lead them to revise or confirm their appraisal, and evaluate their experience in terms of the outcomes of these processes.

In teaching and learning contexts, it appears that interacting with and building and developing networks with peers in and out of the classroom promotes information sharing, study and learning (Wenger, 1998). International student groups and networks present a good opportunity for a learning community. Evidence suggests that members of CoP use interaction to facilitate and support those aspects of academic learning facilitated by group-based academic tasks and aspects of personal learning related to an individual's transformation and identity (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009).

Recently, scholars have moved to reconceptualise cognitive development grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, and there is increasing interest in how social collaboration, interaction and communication may stimulate and contribute to knowledge (Kibler, 2017; Mercer, 2015; Stetsenko, 2016; Wegerif et al., 2017). Vygotsky's well-known concept of learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86; 1987, p. 211; 1998b, p.202) emphasises that "human meaning-making

processes are mediated by dialectically opposed processes associated with qualitative transformation of the individual and their social relations”. This view of learning experience can be examined in a social context within which such experience takes place. Change in learner behaviour is demonstrated by the individual’s transformation within such experience, and as unified but dialectic experiences analysed holistically and inclusive of the social world within which such experience took place. According to Vygotsky (1978), “all higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals”. This assertion centres social interaction in the learning experience.

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) research into apprenticeship and skill development identified the concept of CoP. Wenger (1998) asserts that there is a link between us and the communities of practice we belong to, which enables us to function as members of such communities. Furthermore, he suggests that “learning that involves membership in these communities of practice” (p. 6) can be a transformational experience. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) described CoP as social communities made up of “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). Lave and Wenger’s (1991) study of situated learning across many sectors globally, likens the learning process to a form of “sociocultural practice” (p. 29) whereby learning is a result of active participation in the community by practitioners in the community – learners. Such communities are characterised by identifiable learning goals, strong engagement with learning and interaction with fellow learners, and demonstrable and effective learning. They also identified that learning takes place as a result of a demonstrable shift in learner identity from novice passive member to expert active participant. They refer to this process as legitimate “peripheral participation”, whereby novice members of a community experience a gradual shift from passive dependency on the ‘expert other’ to core participation in independent thought and action (Wenger, 1998). Cultivating a CoP thus involves students mastering the act of balancing their need for personal growth and transformation with their identity

as members of the community. Thus, community, participation and engagement in community, and transformation of identities all influence learning. Crucial to this, is the notion of the dynamic nature of identity and motivation as an important aspect of transformation in members of a community within the learning process. As the learner changes and develops, so does learning. Therefore, for international students embarking on independent learning in a new context, CoP is useful in understanding how learners are peripheral participants, who share with their peers, aspirational goals for academic success based on their perception and understanding of the practice and desirable learning needs. Such learners are able to, and indeed go on to construct and share knowledge through interactions with other learners in a cyclical cultural practice which I would suggest transcends time and space. Thus, participation in the CoP is a strong indicator of the student epistemology of learning, and it influences students' learning levels (Rogoff et al. 2003). Within this practice, independent learning develops as learners experience identity transformation, such that the learners develop and recognise in themselves a sense of mastery of their practice.

The principles of interrelated experiences of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire are applied as evidences of knowledge production, meaning-making of knowledge, and ultimately learning (Wenger, 1998). The interrelatedness of learner identity transformation and development thus becomes the basis of development of the novice practitioner within the CoP. As such, learning and identity are inextricable aspects of the phenomenon of CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Within the college setting this may be seen in the way students define their identity. There is also a suggestion that students proactively support new students by "passing on information and experience which they have gained themselves" (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009, p. 461). This could be through various means such as face-to-face or via interactions on the various social media networks the young people belong to.

Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed three different but interrelated ways that CoP can be conceptualised, (a) as shared interest, (b) as shared identity, (c) as shared practice.

2.7.1 CoP as shared interest

CoP can be defined by a shared domain of interest (Wenger, 1998). That is, its members share a commitment, concern or passion for learning and developing their mastery. Membership of a CoP is characterised by the value its members place on their collective competence and their willingness to learn from each other. For example, international students share a collective competence that distinguishes them from home students with or without conscious awareness. They are likely to develop stronger language competences for navigating learning, develop specific strategies and techniques for adapting to and coping with new learning cultures, develop practitioner mastery or expertise in their learning, and maintain a kind of identity that facilitates their development as learners (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Furthermore, members' shared competence can be unfamiliar to others who are not members of the community.

2.7.2 CoP as shared identity

In developing a shared identity, novice and expert members of a CoP engage in joint activities such as discussions and information gathering and sharing centred on their learning, which can promote a sense of belonging within the community. This process of joint interaction and joint learning enables international students to share a sense of empathy with fellow students and develop strong bonds with each other (a sense of 'we're all in this together'). As active practitioners in the shared practice, members willingly share resources, information and experiences among each other and with new members. The students can also interpret their perceived difficulties with adapting to new learning practice as a valuable experience which helps them transform their future learning experiences. Among international students, it has also been observed that there is a strong sense of personal and group

identity (McMahon, 2018; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009) whereby they build and strengthen supportive relationships with classmates in and out of the classroom which helps to promote learning. Through sustained formal interactions with each other such as in class and study groups or informal interactions in study groups or in conversations outside class, members can be seen to engage in shared practice and discovering ways in which this can be improved and sustained over their academic careers. Because there is sufficient variation in the composition of international student groups, in terms of ethnicity, language, and so on, they are able to suppress the type of group-thinking that might constrain members' individual thought, creativity and growth. International students experience personal growth and also develop a strong sense of self and understanding of classmates based on mutual respect and trust which can become important aspects of their study and learning (Brown, 2009). The relationships between members of a learning community, focused reflection on one and others' progression, and deliberate and sustained practice, are skills that have been established in the literature to be evident in learners long before they enter higher education (Bullock and Muschamp, 2006).

2.7.3 CoP as shared practice

The dimension of shared practice involves members' understanding of its shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Through participation, community members build relationships which bind them together. As this mutual engagement is sustained, members develop a shared understanding of their interconnectivity and partake in a shared repertoire of communal resources. Through sustained participation and engagement, members of the CoP experience learning which is central to the practice. Shared practice promotes the construction of personal identity through membership of the community, participation in communal activity through sustained engagement, and knowledge transformation sustained through the practice of shared identity as contributors to the practice of the community. For the international CoP, it is suggested that to participate is to *know*. Wenger (1998) argues that the concepts of learning and knowledge are strongly linked to unique

personal experience, participation and social competence, with the outcome being learning. Shared practice promotes the notion of learning and development as a multi-dimensional complex system of transformation of experience, based on a specific epistemology of learning whereby the community of learners, novice and expert alike, are conceived as active participants mutually responsible for sustaining shared endeavour (Rogoff, Matusov and White, 1996).

The theory of CoP is important in this study of independent learning experience because it highlights the importance of sustained participation and engagement in academic learning and in learning about oneself and others. Earlier, concepts of independent learning were briefly explicated. Closer consideration of indicators of students' autonomy, self-regulation and self-direction upon their involvement in their community of learning opens up the discussion around the social nature of learning and why it is important for learners to participate fully in such community and develop a sense of belonging.

2.7.4 An (international) community of independent learning?

The theory of CoP offers a useful framework for understanding independent learning (Figure 8). Within this framework, international students' academic transition from secondary school in their former environment to a new learning environment, is better understood in terms of the students' membership of a community, the learning and development that occurs within the community, the students' ability to transform perceived difficulties into successful learning, and the identity change the students undergo as learning develops.

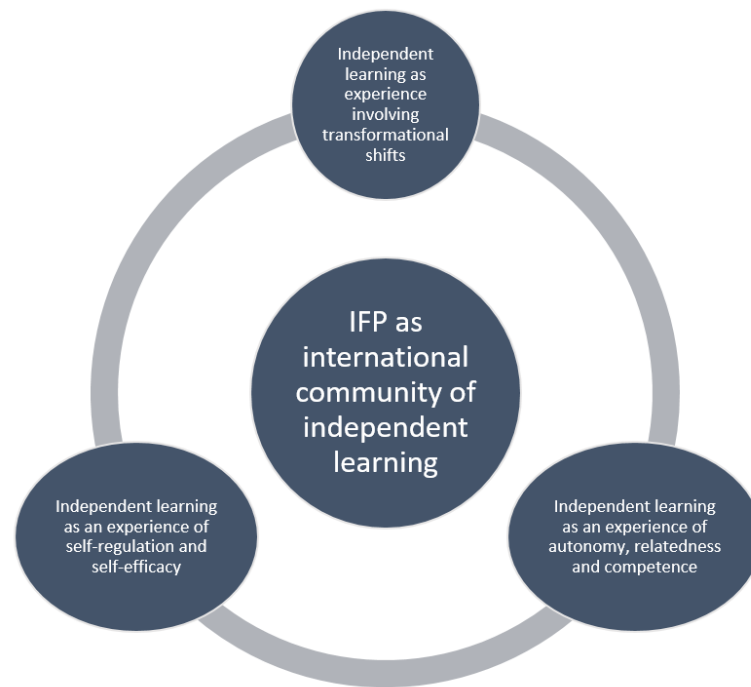


Figure 8. Model of international community of independent learning to incorporate dimensions of self-determination and social cognition in relation to independent learning experience.

Montgomery's (2010) study of international student experiences at a British university directly links the notion of learning as a consequence of supportive social networks with Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of CoP. Groups of international students thus form communities based on shared repertoire of goals, interests and experiences. By building strong and supportive networks, members of the community reconstruct the social capital developed from past experiences of learning in their home countries and replace familiar social resources with new support and learning networks of peers (Montgomery, 2010). Similar links between 'key competences' for independent learning and identity development was explored by authors such as Benson and Voller (2013) who argue that independent language learning development among learners can occur at individual and group level. It is suggested that students attempt to construct for themselves a language identity which is compatible with familiar and new language learning cultures as they

develop this identity. It is also suggested that students' focused reflection highlights what processes they undergo in their experience as language learners. For example, reasons for why such students are learning and the perceived outcomes of their learning help to illustrate the process of the students' identity development as they provide useful links between students' prior sense of self, current awareness of self, and how they see themselves in the future. This thought reflects Lave and Wenger's theory of CoP whereby students' participation in the 'community of language learning' developed alongside their language development.

Farnsworth et al. (2016) have also highlighted the dialectical relationship between participation in community, learning and identity development. They argued for bridging the gap between individual and collective notions of community membership and that peripheral and core participation in community is mutually inclusive. Furthermore, that it is in the meaning students make of their learning that promotes their sense of belonging or perceived sense of belonging in that community. Students can take advantage of their agency in focused reflection about their learning to create multiple and dynamic identities (Gao et al., 2012). According to Wenger: "because learning transforms who we are and what we do, it is an experience of identity" (1998, p. 215). This process of transformation is similar to Kolb's concept of transformational experience in which learning develops as identity transforms and vice versa.

I argue that contrary to the specificity of the environment and social context, in the creation of one's identity in independent learning, understanding of self and relationship with the surrounding environment transcends time and space, as they also relate to aspirational goals and expectations for future (learning) success. As such, the concept of CoP becomes useful to consider how international students access or create international communities of practice.

2.8 An African framing of experience

In the academically rigorous environment of the IFP in England, Nigerian students, like myself, whose home cultural and teaching system is similar to that of their host country, encounter independent learning. I sought to understand what sense they make of independent learning through the lens of ‘experience’, which I explain in this section. In so doing, I offer my thinking, inductively derived, to frame my exploration of students’ understanding with regard to their independent learning experience. The insights surfaced from the literature relevant to the present study have helped me develop my tentative understanding of the concept of ‘experience’. It is what I utilise as a central lens in the study and thus advance as what independent learning-as-experience might be.

Having established the need to examine independent learning as experience through the inductive analysis of data, it is necessary to explicate the philosophical meaning of ‘experience’. In this section, I explain how an African-centred model of experience has informed my research.

2.8.1 An African approach to experience

The concept of experience has been theorised and operationalised in many ways from ancient to contemporary times, from pre-colonised to colonised to post-colonised eras. As a result, there are a number of ways of understanding the term ‘experience’: an encounter of a particular event that facilitates knowledge and skills development, a feeling/emotion, as situated in time and space (Arnould & Price, 1993; Landgrebe, 1973). Further, the concept of experience will be conceptualised and applied differently depending on ‘Global South/North’ context. Crucially, however, remnants of colonial and marginalising hegemonies, particularly, of the Global South, may result in little or no acknowledgement of conceptions of knowing in African contexts (Ngara, 2008), unlike those usually represented by East Asian cultures. This limits a fully informed understanding and development of the concept itself. My approach to conceptualising experience privileges African

experience, interprets experience from an African perspective and postulates a cultural and situated notion of experience. This worldview emphasises collective, spiritual and morally affirming ideas of knowledge production (Asante, 2015). Accordingly, there are ethical and intellectual implications relating to my epistemic and epistemological position whereby my own ethics and knowledge production is guided by African-centred ethics of justice, respect, and honesty (Chilisa, 2009; Metz, 2017; Anthony-Okeke, 2020).

I position and privilege African ways of knowing, multiple sources and ways of knowing experience- whilst affirming their relatedness. In particular, I incorporate African conceptualisations of experience to a working understanding of independent learning experience; draw on the cultural and linguistic diversity that is characteristic of the knowledge-production my African and Nigerian background affords me (Section 1.4); to ensure transparency in the way I develop my working understanding of the concept framing this study, and use my study to resituate the concept of independent learning experience in a way that contributes to the overall knowledge landscape.

My approach to the knowledge-production of experience is to learn about the concept from the culturally and linguistically diverse context that my research participants and the IFP occupy (as discussed previously in Section 1.2 & 1.3). Situating understanding of the concept in an African-centred approach to knowledge-production and maintaining a reflexive approach to conceptualising experience is also in keeping with my background (Section 1.7).

2.8.2 African understandings of experience

Central to African thought on experience is the ontological notion of relatedness, whereby the subject, as the knowledge-producer (or experiencer), and the object, as the experienced phenomenon, exist in the same physical and spiritual world (Jimoh, 2017). Knowledge is seen as mediated by interwoven and connected experiences, and personal dispositions, environmental and social factors play a role in such

experiences (Brown, 2004). In this section, I explain the core African values which are fundamental to the understanding of experience, namely: – “wholism, poly-consciousness, inclusiveness, unity and value” (Asante, 2000, p. 2). I then discuss the key qualities of experience in Afrocentrism.

2.8.2.1 Wholism

‘Wholism’ (sometimes ‘holism’) refers to a belief in the interrelatedness of physical, metaphysical and spiritual entities and systems. Such entities and systems are seen as only being able to be understood in terms of their absolute indivisibility (Asante, 2000) in the larger world. In their diversity there is seen to be unity. Wholism is key to apprehending experience. In other words, it enables one to have thought-forms that are interlinked, interconnected and dynamic (Asante and Mazama, 2010). This aspect also addresses a transformation that transcends time and space. In relation to the concept of experience, the Afrocentric perspective of wholism addresses events and responses to events, a giving and receiving of self within existence for a specific purpose. What connects entities and systems of experience is the interconnection between mind, body and environment within the experience. Wholism thus recognises the interrelationship between human experience and the social and physical environment, at once connecting feelings and thoughts with actions with knowledge and understanding.

2.8.2.2 Poly-consciousness

Afrocentric experience involves poly-consciousness (Asante, 2000). Poly-consciousness is established as central to understanding events or behaviour. For example, the Igbo people of Nigeria believe that they can have several experiences at the same time or can engage several affective, behaviour and cognitive senses to arrive at a simultaneous but wholistic understanding of that experience (Aguwa, 1993). In so doing, they demonstrate an ability for agentive action at different levels, bridging the gap between reality and their personal representation. The person experiencing, thus undertakes a harmonisation between images of the world

and independent will, that allows many different experiences to be present at the same time, yet allowing other experiences to surface. Poly-consciousness allows the experiencer to accept new/unfamiliar experiences, and absorb these through a lens of past, present and future values; this enables them to orientate experience in perspective (Asante, 2000).

2.8.2.3 Inclusiveness

An important tenet of experience from an African perspective is that the experience of a single individual cannot represent the totality of experience of a community. Therefore, inclusiveness offers an opportunity to arrive at the essence of experience not only of the individual, but also through the inclusion of the views of others before a model of experience can be submitted (Asante, 2000).

2.8.2.4 Unity

In Afrocentrism, unity recognises and acknowledges experience in knowledge production. Unity requires that both actual and aspired dimensions of knowledge production inform the experience (Asante, 2000). This notion of unity is key to recognising, maximising and maintaining the effects of the experience. Unity mandates that the experiencer rejects a separation of dimensions of phenomenon because this would not be in keeping with the natural order of experience which encourages a unification of entities and systems involved in experience. While the individual works to maintain or enhance their experience, they are always cognizant of the particularity and individuality of their experience so as to inform and enrich the meaning of such experience (Khupe & Keane, 2017). Therefore, closely integrated with the concept of unity is that of consensus, a canon which emphasises harmonious relatedness between different dimensions. This important aspect also addresses ethical considerations in this study (Section 3.6).

2.8.2.5 Value

The quality of experience in the African context (Jimoh, 2017) is affected by what is valued by the individual, especially in reference to the way various experiences

are undergirded by truth-values (Jimoh and Thomas, 2015). In this way, values and interests of the experiencer are readily accessible through an understanding of what experience means, what experience affords, how experience is symbolised, and how experience is translated in the social world. This philosophical perspective illustrates a strongly relational view of knowledge production –grounded in ethics – to present an important perspective for independent learning, one that has been unaddressed to date.

2.9 My tentative understanding of independent learning

In introducing an African perspective of experience (Sections 2.8-2.10), I emphasise the way in which I acquire, articulate and justify the knowledge claims I make about experience. These knowledge claims rest on the African notion of the indivisibility and inseparability of the experience and the experiencer. Central to this is the experiencer as an affective, behavioural and cognitive agent capable of processing the experience, making predictions about the experience and rendering decisions about the experience. Together with the environmental and social variables, principles of action and the dispositions of the experiencer play a crucial role in knowledge production where the experiencing self is dominant. This approach led me to be attentive to the different physical, spiritual, cultural and social embedding of experience, the different ways of being, doing and knowing, which then informed my working understanding of the concept in this study. Following, I present this understanding through five dimensions. Next, I synthesise these qualities into three main dimensions, from which emerges my conceptualisation of independent learning.

In the Igbo language (the language of the Igbo tribe I belong), the literal translation of experience is *ahụmihe* or *ahụmihụ*. That is, events which one observes/or has observed, behaviours one has performed or performs and of which one is cognizant. In other words, that which is seen, felt, imagined, reasoned, thought, acted upon and understood. These events are characterised by the elements that govern the practicality, prevalence and idea of African ways of experiencing with regard to

knowledge work – wholism, poly-consciousness, inclusiveness, unity, and value. Each of these elements have afforded me a related and unique understanding of the concept of experience.

The African-centred perspective offers an ideological, philosophical and cognitive insight into the concept of experience, and is the basis of ethical African knowledge production. It tells me that to experience is to be in total harmony with all the elements, both physical and spiritual, of that encounter. Following this stance, I privilege the elements of the concept in the African way of perceiving and reacting to the world in order to a) engage with the relatedness and ethics of knowledge and knowledge production, b) deepen my tentative understanding of the concept, and c) draw on my ‘African-ness’ and all that this entails in my experience of doing research.

I do not claim to have arrived at or have a full understanding of experience in terms of the African traditional system. After all, Afrocentricity itself emphasises plurality of philosophical views, which requires shifting from one cultural space to another (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013) in a way that transcends the time and space that a three-year doctoral study permits. In addition, I acknowledge the limit of my African-ness. I have been educated in a post-colonial context and I am now undertaking knowledge production in the country that colonised mine. This is likely to have implications for my claims to adopting an African-centred stance and for the terminologies and methodological decisions adopted which is a mixture of my background, and my research training in a Euro-Western context.

With this in mind, my working understanding of independent learning experience synthesises elements from both traditions. These elements are characterised by the following dimensions:

- framing knowledge production in strong relationally and ethically responsive terms

- grounding knowledge production in both the retrospective and introspective experiences of the experiencer (involving the inseparability of the personal and theoretical)
- subjectivity in how knowledge is structured and used (involving a centring of how knowledge is constructed over and above methodological purity in knowledge production)
- harmonious interrelatedness of the material and spiritual attributes of being, and between groups (whereby knowledge production is justified in terms of what works for the harmonious existence and maintenance of the collective group, agreement and consensus between the knowledge producers, that is, the researcher/participant/community, and through the knowledge production procedure and in its application)
- emphasis on the existence and maintenance of collectivity and communalism (involving general commitment to one's social being, values and interests, morals and attitudes, interconnectedness of the individual and their social group).

Furthermore, my present understanding of independent learning experience resonates with my adoption of the term 'experiencer' (Section 1.6 and above). It is through this that I can explore students' experiences of becoming subjective (affective, behavioural and cognitive) agents, and as both individual and part of communal knowledge producers in the independent learning context. These concepts are linked to my experience-framed understanding of the term 'independent learning' (as discussed in Section 2.9).

2.10 Conceptualising independent learning experience

I conducted this qualitative inquiry inductively, placing the collection and analysis of data procedurally ahead of developing a theoretical framework. I wanted to avoid forcing assumptions on the data collection and analysis process. Therefore, I decided to focus on how best to explore my research problem. In mapping the field I acquainted myself with blueprints from existing theory to focus the study, but developed a conceptual framework on the basis of the literature I have presented to develop my tentative understanding of the concept of experience. I use this understanding as a central lens in the study to illustrate the interrelatedness of the constructs and perspectives of independent learning. This framework illustrates what I have learned from the study and which best explains every aspect of the

phenomenon under study. It relies on the constructs associated with psychological, sociological and social psychological theories previously outlined.

The range of theories, perspectives, and empirical research incorporated in this chapter highlight relevant aspects of independent learning experience in the sixth form context for Nigerian IFP students. An experiential learning perspective suggests that individuals' perception and performance of experience are important for learning. A self-determination perspective highlights the importance of social-contextual conditions that enhance or hinder experiences of self-motivation and development on multiple levels. The social cognitive perspective highlights the potential for experience to be a dynamic and reciprocal behaviour-cognition-environment interaction that emphasises individual cognitive capabilities. Finally, the social practice viewpoint reinforces the importance of negotiation of meaning, practice, community, identity and competence in such experiences and in particular, the reciprocal influence of experience on identity formation to enable the development of practice and competence. Importantly for this study, given its exploratory nature, these theories and perspectives suggest a range of experiences that may need to be considered fully, alongside a continuum of learning processes, to best consider experience in independent learning.

This, independent learning, in this study, is a multidimensional construct involving three distinct, but correlated dimensions (Figure 9).

- **affective** experience: independence-facilitating experience of perceptual, evaluative and motivational experience);
- **behaviour** experience: independence-facilitating experience involving learning behaviours (actions), outcomes and competencies;
- **cognitive** experience: the extent to which shifts in understanding (epistemological and reflective shifts) account for transformative experiences related to independent learning.

Each of these is reflected in the thematic discussion in Chapters 5 to 7 of the thesis.

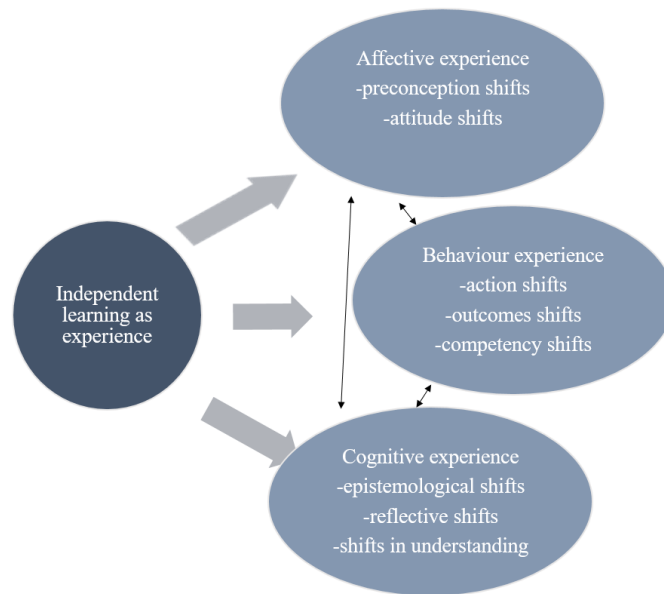


Figure 9. The multidimensional construct of independent learning-as-experience in affective, behaviour and cognitive terms

The affective dimension of independent learning experience is related to shifts in the students' learning-related attitudes in light of experience. These attitudes include perceptual shifts in relation to students' perceptions, viewpoints, beliefs and mindsets; units of values shift in relation to how students feel and react to what they value in terms of their learning; and units of motivational shifts in student's motivation and levels of IL engagement of learning persistence and satisfaction. The behaviour dimension of independent learning experience is related to shifts in the students' learning-related behaviours in light of experience. These behaviours include shifts in actions related to processes and procedures within learning (inside and outside the classroom); shifts in outcomes, that is in what and how much students achieve in light of experience, and units of competency shifts in relation

to independent learning skills and competences. The cognitive dimension of independent learning experience is related to shifts in students' learning-related beliefs, knowledge, understanding and comprehension, in light of experience. This cognition includes units of epistemological shifts in relation to students' knowledge and understanding; units of reflective shifts in relation to the reasoning that students apply to their learning; and units of meaning students give to this knowledge and understanding.

2.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the literature relevant to the present study and developed my tentative understanding of the concept of 'experience' and it is what I utilise as a central lens in the study. Through it, I suggest that independent learning is an ubiquitous, yet ambiguous concept. Furthermore, this ambiguity makes it problematic to uncover and understand Nigerian IFP students' independent learning as a process of learning development. The theories and perspectives elucidated are likely to promote a better understanding of how college students undergo independent learning experience but the complexity of experiences as they do so requires further investigation. Therefore, I have developed a framework in an attempt to address this.

The notion of an 'independent learning experience' thus becomes useful for addressing this gap regarding the totality of complex experiences college students have as they perceive, connect with and understand independent learning, and what the independent learning experience is at college. This chapter is the basis for the methodological approach (Chapter 3) used in the study.

My understanding is strongly related to how I have contextualised my study in an academic UK FE setting (Chapter 1), and in my introduction of the main concepts framing this study, including learning and independent learning as experience in this chapter. I report my iterative use of this lens in Chapter Three (regarding the research design and implementation) and in Chapter Four (regarding analysing the

data). In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I present the insights about the concept in relation to the data, and my reflections on independent learning experience that are inductively informed by the result of the analysis of that data.

Chapter 3: DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction

The research examined the independent learning of Nigerian IFP students in three specific research sites. I engaged with the concept of independent learning in an inductive and cyclical way, inductively exploring students' experiences of independent learning. I engaged in first descriptive, and then interpretive ways to allow deeper understanding of Nigerian IFP students' independent learning experiences. In so doing, I reorient independent learning away from abstract concerns involving processes and procedures toward an emphasis on experience (as understood in Section 2.11). In this chapter, I present how I used the vlog-interview method (VIM) to address my research questions (RQs):

RQ 1. What happens when Nigerian IFP students experience independent learning in college?

RQ 2. What understandings of independent learning emerge for these students as they engage in this experience?

RQ 3. How might students' insights inform my knowledge about independent learning?

The range and exploratory nature of the research questions needed an innovative method that would enable me to answer them.

In this chapter, I begin by describing the ethical considerations that arose in the planning, conduct and reporting of the study (Section 3.2) and introduce my overall research design (Section 3.3). Then I explain my recruitment of participants, including details of the research sites and the participant recruitment and sample (Section 3.4). Next, I describe the data collection strategy (Section 3.5). Finally, I

present my efforts at establishing and maintaining trustworthiness and ethics in this study (Section 3.6).

3.2 Ethics

Ethical considerations in this study are framed in relational terms. That is, the relatedness between the research participants and with my chosen methodology is central. The task of eliciting young people's views or reflections about their educational experiences is potentially sensitive, and being an ethical researcher goes beyond ticking off boxes on an ethical approval form, or highlighting some ethical principles and guidelines in a section of a research study to address those sensitivities. It is about the integrity and self-reflection the researcher brings to the research process and maintains at every stage of the research process. In this research it was important that the study was *with* the young people, rather than on the young people.

Following Chilisa (2009), ethical considerations in this study are grounded in an African ethical framework that is centred on a deep respect for the beliefs and practices of others, and an emphasis on the "importance of agreement and consensus, dialogue and particularity in issues of ethics and consent" (pp. 420-422). This is important not only to connect with my background, but to acknowledge the young people in this study who have also lived and been a part of this shared post-colonial experience. Related to this framing, I reflected on the relevance of cultural and epistemological centredness as the core principle guiding my ethical approach in this study and the moral deliberations that this allows.

3.2.1 My principles of action

There would seem to be an acceptance that the pursuit and reporting of truth and the right to know, is justified for generating knowledge in any research inquiry (Given, 2008). However, being an 'ethical' knowledge producer may well require one to question the underlying assumptions of this, that is, the claims to certainty

of growth of knowledge and understanding as a result of research. Hence, there are some very general rules upon which moral deliberations on these principles rest and which guide my study.

First that I reflected upon and determined the *kinds* of knowledge I sought and the worth of my study. Clarity on this helped me set out clearly for the research participants, general and specific information about my study and its purpose. Furthermore, I have considered in detail whether using the dominant Euro-Western centric research methodologies I was introduced to as a postgraduate student at university in England might make a difference in participants' accounts of their experiences, and whether they and I would recognise ourselves in these accounts. The research design emerged with this in mind.

Second, that I was aware as a doctoral student, I was already assuming the privileged position of 'knowledge producer', which could influence my interaction with the participants, and how such positioning might serve to 'other' them. Therefore, I explained to them that for my study to develop, flourish and reach its objective, it required collaborative efforts on all our parts; and that it was important that they define in their own terms, what independent learning experience means to them.

Third, that the research should provide opportunity for engagement in meaningful dialogue and consensus building as important aspects of seeking informed consent from those participating in the research.

Fourth, that I consider in detail whether the research study would empower the students participating in it or enable their personal development. I am of the view that experience can be transformational. So I was committed to employ strategies in my interaction with the participants that could promote this such as utilising vlogging as a research tool in my study (Section 3.5.1).

3.2.2 My reflexivity of action

The other important dimension of ethical considerations in this research related to defining the role of the research in student development, and my own role and responsibility to the educational research community and scholarship. In addition, occupying a central role in this research is the bearing my values and reflexivity were having on the research process. Key to these were my constant reflection on the values, experiences, and reasoning which informed the research process in keeping with the qualitative methodology employed. In addition, the pursuit of truth, the courage to report without fear or favour and the ability to be agreeable to new evidence and criticism, even when they came from the students, were particularly important at every stage of the research process.

Values, in an African context, informed my relationship with everything and everyone connected to the research. These values are underscored by justice, respect and honesty (Chilisa, 2012) and asks the following questions:

- What do my values mean?
- What are their characteristics?
- Where do they come from?
- What/whose purpose do they serve?
- Can/will they be accepted as valid?
- Will the outcome of the research be accepted as true knowledge?
- How do they influence my research experiences?

Addressing these questions entailed keeping a reflective journal throughout the research process in which I reflected on my role in the research process my overall experience as a researcher. Reflecting on my own experiences made me aware that as my story was individual to me, so were the students' personal to them and should be treated as such. Self-examination of my own thoughts and feelings about the

students was extremely valuable for helping me develop a deep respect for them as international students. Equally reflected upon were those experiences related to shifts in knowing and not-knowing identity between the students and myself, particularly as I became immersed in the data collection process and subsequently as I began to analyse the data. For example, the expertise the students had with manipulating web-based technology used in data collection made me feel uneasy at times because I felt that as researcher I should set the agenda, be in control and be the expert at the data collection stage but instead, students were assuming control over a small aspect of this. This was unexpected so I had to constantly check pre-conceived notions of skill and ability which culturally are assumed to be determined by age, and remain open to what emerged in my interaction with the students.

I also sought words or phrases easily identifiable to the students and incorporated these into the research protocols. Furthermore, because of the similarities in our backgrounds, I was careful to not only observe when I made assumptions about some of the terms, language and experiences students shared but also sense when discussions during the interviews moved away from the research focus and be mindful of when and how I steered this back. Particular examples included when they used terms that I thought I should know and I felt awkward about asking them to explain these because I did not know what they meant. Also, at times, I resisted correcting grammatical errors they made in speaking because I was used to doing this as a teacher.

I considered doing no harm to the research participants, conducting research that would be to their and their communities' benefit, acknowledging and evaluating my own values and beliefs, and maintaining the research integrity as important guidelines. Furthermore, in following the above steps, the main issues to consider were:

- Giving enough information about the research in a reader-friendly Participant Information Sheet. I met with the participants in college where I

briefly explained who I was and what my research was about. I also emailed detailed information about the research to each participant, their parents/house parents, and principals, and answered additional enquiries by email. This helped to address my and their expectations of our role in the research and was important for ensuring inclusiveness and consensus building in the research process.

- Obtaining informed consent in a cyclical process of collective decision making.
- Protecting the interests of participants. My responsibility to participants was to minimise disturbance to them, to their studies and to their colleges.
- Maintaining confidentiality and anonymization of participant identities.

Further details on how I embedded an African-centred approach to ethics throughout this research process are included in each of the subsequent sections.

3.3 A multimethod approach

In this study, I used a multimethod approach (Morse, 2003) to understand eight students' independent learning in college. I adopted an inductive approach in order to make sense of these students' particular experiences, in order to understand their life worlds and how their independent learning is shaped by their experiences. Following this approach also promoted a more systematic approach to analysis (Chapter 4) resulting in, first the surfacing of individual meanings, and ultimately a more interpretive understanding. Thus, my study design was built around the goal of emergence itself and involved a tripartite research strategy: lessons from my pilot study, targeted data collection to generate visual/verbal and textual qualitative data (having both types of data was important in keeping with the wholistic quality of experience), and analysis strategies that moved the research study toward completion and led to a logical conclusion of the research study. The relationship between these components is illustrated in Figure 10.

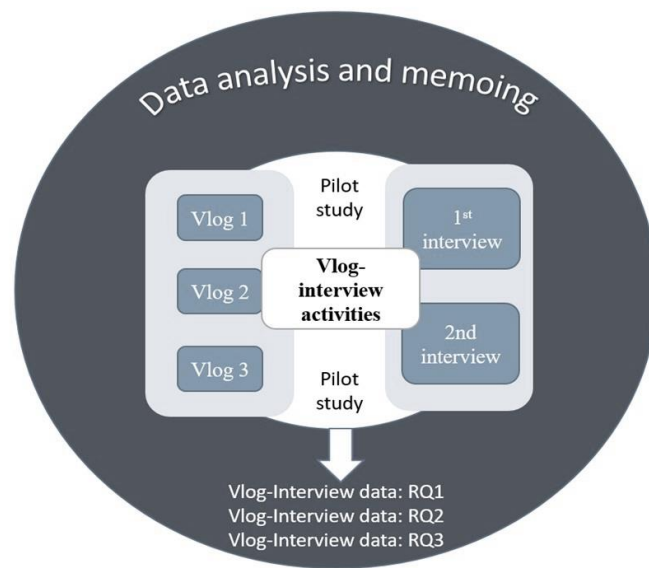


Figure 10. The multimethod approach to this study

Crucially, the research was envisioned as promoting researcher praxis with participants, as ongoing reflection and continuous experience, involving processes of feeling, action, and understanding as part of the evolving and exploratory nature of the research process. The study thus relied on an exploratory methodology, consistent with the different research questions and aims, which guided my decisions about which data sources would be most useful for building on or challenging my tentative understanding of independent learning, and enabled me to determine which strategies could best apply to collecting data from those sources.

I adopted an inductive approach (Hood, 2007; Thomas, 2006) for its potential to provide a means to take a conceptual approach to complex attitudes, behaviours and cognition, and transformations in real life worlds in this study of Nigerian IFP students' independent learning experience in college in the UK.

I developed an approach I term the 'vlog-interview method (VIM) as a multimethod of data collection for its potential to surface these students life-as-experienced in multiple, interrelated periods and spaces. The method is adapted from Harricharan

and Bhopal's (2014) 'blog-interview method' which uses blogs in conjunction with interviews as a tool for qualitative data collection in a study to explore international students' response to their new environment in UK universities. The key methodological contribution of this research is in my adaptation of this method to use vlogs, rather than blogs. Vlog posts are a series of user-generated online videos (or vlog posts) published online (Gao et al., 2010; Snelson, 2015). They are a form of internet communication in which the author ('vlogger) posts video entries as a weekly or monthly series about themselves, their experiences, topical social issues, and their views or representations of that topic. Operationally, vlogging in this study is: international college students' brief and personal online publishing of multiple vlogs, on their academic experiences as they live it in college, accompanied by self-reflection of their development as independent learners.

The VIM was most useful in its ability to position the social actors within the research in a way that facilitated their engagement in deliberate activity and reflection about their multifaceted actions. The VIM aligned with my view that an understanding of phenomenon can be reached through the range of accounts of experiencers of that phenomenon (Section 1.8). This research positioned Nigerian IFP students as capable of producing information about independent learning, as a matter that they are knowledgeable and can provide expert testimony about. The VIM also supported an inductive approach to data analysis in order to address my RQs. My approach to analysing data resulting from the vlog and interview activities (discussed in Chapter Four) provided explicit and implicit insights to address these questions.

3.4 Sampling and recruiting participants

Thus far, I have introduced my multimethod approach to the design of the study. The study was designed to explore and understand college students' complex academic experiences, through a careful investigation of individuals, and their encounter with and response to experiences in several locations. In this section, I describe and discuss the research sites, the research population and sampling

procedures (Section 4.2.1), followed by a profile of each of the research participants in this study (Section 4.2.2).

3.4.1 The Sites

As presented in Section 1.4, independent learning within the UK college framework operates in different locations (independent and state colleges), in different contexts (A-level and IFP), and with different groups of learners (international and home students). However, only the IFP was selected because it is specifically targeted at international students. For this reason, several factors were considered in selecting the research sites (Table 2 below). Careful consideration was also given to examining the ‘situational complexity’ (Stake, 1995) of learning experience. This examination takes into account the specific as well as the broader contexts and background condition characterising independent learning based on my conceptualisation of independent learning experience (Section 2.12).

Table 2. Selecting the research sites

Characteristic	Description
‘International’ education	Independent sixth form college which offers the IFP International student profiles are heterogeneous (male/female; 17years old; ethnically diverse)
Geographical location (England)	North west South London
Diversity in subject pathways	Science Accounting and Business Engineering Medicine Arts and Humanities
Characteristic	Description
Access to colleges	Access to one of the colleges for pilot study Have maintained contact with the colleges approached for pilot study
Potential for in-depth investigation of independent learning experiences	Information-rich subjects Involving international students in the UK who are exposed to independent learning. Students who can express their beliefs and thoughts about their experience

As illustrated in the table above, sites were targeted because they are post-16 education providers of an internationally recognised curricula programme and potential source of international student recruitment for universities in the UK. The IFP was identified as appropriate for the study was selected because it seemed to offer the opportunity for independent learning (a suggestion from the information available on the colleges' websites). The colleges were selected from three regions in England. I chose colleges that have a diverse range of university foundation pathways to identify a group of students that may reflect this diversity of their discipline on this independent learning experience. Business, Creative Arts, Engineering, Humanities, Medicine, and Science pathways are offered to ground students in key concepts and theories relevant to their proposed course of study at undergraduate level.

Findings from the pilot study suggested that subject pathways are likely to determine the extent to which the student may feel independent within their study. This prompted me to incorporate colleges with a range of subject pathways as identified by the college's website. The decision to use only three college sites was due in part to feasibility of the study; the need to conduct research across a smaller number of colleges to enhance an in-depth investigation of the independent learning context, yielding more insightful data of the unique characteristics, strengths and weakness, and facilitate completion within the set timeframe for the research (Appendix B provides a detailed summary). The particular colleges were also chosen on the basis of their offering a broad spectrum of subjects, IFP, A Levels, GCSEs, and IELTS, to international students over the course of a one year (3/4 terms) programme. The IFP leads to qualification that is equivalent to the UK GCE A level and is accepted for direct admission to most top UK universities. State sixth forms and other FE institutions were not included in this research because they do not offer the IFP.

All three colleges have over 70% international student academic success on the IFP and 87% student progression to top 50 UK universities, with some foundation

pathways offering a conditional direct progression to the universities. All students had to have satisfactorily completed secondary or high school education with grades equivalent to seven GCSE A* - B and an IELTS score above 8.5. Given the selective nature and high academic rigour of the colleges, only academically high-achieving international students are accepted on the IFP courses. In addition, all colleges share the following characteristics, all of which potentially shape independent learning:

- 3 terms for September entry or 2 for January entry
- Top secondary school-leaving results (Nigeria- WASSCE, 5 O levels including English and Maths, or at IGCSE)
- Tuition fees ranging from £23,000 - £39,000)
- 18-25 hours of contact time per week (lectures, seminars, lab and workshops) 61%-79% independent study time
- Up to 5 hours of Academic and English Language Skills
- 2 Core modules
- 4 Pathway-specific modules (per term)
- Personalised/independent learning; personal tutor; extended teaching time; ongoing individual assessment; extracurricular activities; research-based; blended/E- learning; Virtual Learning Environment (VLE-web-based, getting and submitting homework, online testing, tracking progress); students ‘taking control of their learning experience; learning new ways of learning.

Table 3 below provides further information about each of the sites attended:

Table 3. The colleges

Site	Location	Profile
1	Sixth form college in North West England	<p>Pseudonym: Wesley Sixth Form College</p> <p>Independent college providing a first class British education</p> <p>Accredited member of the Independent Schools Association (ISA) UK and accredited by the British Council for teaching English in the UK</p> <p>Over 200 students from more than 40 countries</p> <p>Pre-university qualification provision</p> <p>Strong academic ethos and academic success</p> <p>Small class sizes</p> <p>3 academic terms</p> <p>Enrichment and university application guidance</p> <p>Five participants recruited from site: Ayo, Bolu, Ife, Kamsi and Simi</p>

2	Sixth form college in South England	Pseudonym: Bell Sixth Form College Independent college providing a first class British education Accredited member of ISA UK and accredited by the British Council for teaching English in the UK Over 400 students from 35 countries Vibrant and inclusive international environment Small class sizes 5 academic terms Two participants recruited from site: Grace and *‘Participant 7’
3	Sixth form college in London England	Pseudonym: Trinity Sixth Form College Independent college providing a first class British education Accredited member of ISA UK and accredited by the British Council for teaching English in the UK Over 500 students from more than 20 countries Diverse group of students High quality teaching Flexible approach University readiness , and skills and competences for university study Small classes 5 academic terms Focus on most effective ways of and ownership of learning Personal tutor Two participants recruited from site: Dele, Zayda

3.4.2 The Population

Nigerian students at three independent sixth form colleges in the North West and south of England, and London England who could purposefully inform an understanding of independent learning and the experience of independent learning at sixth form college level were the targeted population for this study.

3.4.2.1 Recruiting the participants

The research participants were selected using purposive sampling procedures. I approached potential participants by first going through a list of all independent sixth form colleges in England offering the IFP provision on the ISA website. Ultimately, I identified three colleges that matched all the criteria outlined above. I then sent an email to the principals at these colleges, introducing my research (see Appendix C for Participant Information Sheet (PIS)) and asking their permission to visit their colleges and approach Nigerian IFP students directly to discuss my study

and invite participation. Most principals did not approve for a variety of reasons: timing of the research, data protection concerns and lack of interest from students. On my part, financial and travel logistics made it difficult to include some interested colleges and students who volunteered to participate in this study.

There were 54 Nigerian IFP students in the three colleges, of which 22 initially approached me to volunteer to participate in the study. All the students had A to B grades in WASSCE, self-identified as high achieving, were all fairly privileged in the Nigerian context, involved in independent learning in college, and expressed their interest in participating in the study. All were familiar with vlogging and were comfortable with using vlogs for describing and interpreting lived experiences. Of the 22 participants approached and who initially expressed interest in participating in the study, 13 declined to participate because of study commitments and scheduling conflicts with when I proposed to carry out the vlog or interview activities. One student (*‘Participant 7’) withdrew before the interview phase for personal reasons therefore vlogs they posted earlier have not been included in this study. Thus, I had a final eight participants who decided to participate in this study: five students at Wesley College, one at Bell College and two at Trinity College who started and concluded both vlog and interview activities.

Representativeness of this demography of the broader range of international students in independent sixth form colleges in England was not a criterion for selection. Instead, the reasoning was to gain an in-depth understanding of Nigerian students’ perceptions of, connections with and understandings of independent learning.

Once I was happy that the students understood their rights and my responsibilities toward them in the course of their involvement in this study, in keeping with the importance of relational values in an African-centred approach, I introduced guidelines for vlogging (Appendix D) and a vlog schedule and prompts (Appendix E) before they started the vlog activity. Each student selected three vlogs selected

three vlogs for further investigation during interview so that no student was disproportionately represented in the study. After completion of the vlog activity, I commenced the semi-structured interviews with the aid of an interview schedule including interview prompts (Appendix F).

3.4.2.2 *The Participants ('The students')*

I selected eight participants for the vlog and interview activities. In this section, I present each of their brief pen portraits. Because I had emphasised the importance of protecting and maintaining their privacy and anonymity as a result of participating in the study, all the participants replaced their real names and identifiers with their own chosen pseudonyms for the vlogs and interviews. I chose an alias for each of their college names (see table 4 below for participant information summary):

Table 4. The students

Participant ID Wesley	Gender	Age	Academic programme (September 2016-July 2017)	Subject pathway	University destination and proposed course of study
Ayo	Male	17	IFP	Business	Accounting and Finance (Leeds)
Bolu	Female	17	IFP	Medicine	Medicine (London)
Ife	Female	17	IFP	Engineering	Chemical Engineering (London)
Kamsi	Female	17	IFP	Science	Pharmacy (Liverpool)
Simi	Female	17	IFP	Science	Molecular Biology (Sheffield)
Participant ID Trinity	Age	Gender	Academic programme (January 2017-	Academic pathway	University destination and proposed course of study

			December 2017)		
Dele	Male	17	IFP	Business	Politics and International Business (Liverpool)
Zayda	Female	17	IFP	Science	Geophysical Science (International) (Leeds)
Participant ID Bell	Age	Gender	Academic programme (January 2017-December 2017)	Academic pathway	University destination and proposed course of study
Grace	Female	17+	IFP	Humanities	Law (Leeds)

Students at Wesley posted their vlogs during 3rd term, while students at Bell and Trinity posted during 2nd term because of their different programme start dates. Wesley students updated Vlog 3 after the end of their IFP, while Bell and Trinity students updated theirs during their penultimate term. However, I interviewed all the students during the same points of their study, 2nd and 3rd terms.

The research sample is diverse in the Nigerian context. Although they all spoke English as a first language (having been taught in independent schools across different regions in Nigeria where English was taught and used as a medium of instruction), they had attended a range of schools following diverse curriculums- England and Wales, Nigerian, and International Baccalaureate. Adding to this diversity, the students come from four of six ethnic regions in Nigeria –South West, South East, South South and North Central (see Figure 11 below for a geopolitical map of Nigeria showing these region).

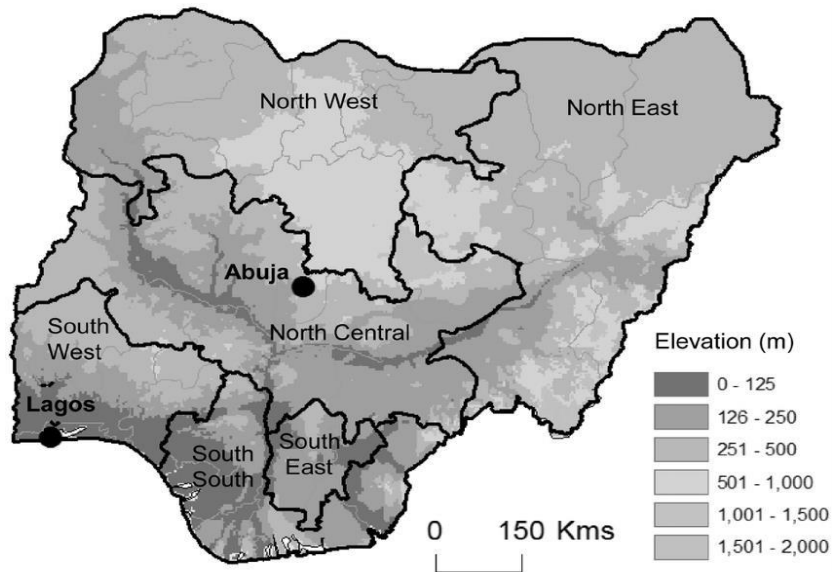


Figure 11. Map of Nigeria and her six geopolitical zones

I considered each of these characteristics to be likely to shape individual responses to independent learning whilst studying in their respective subject pathways within each of the three colleges. Four of the students were studying the Science pathway, one Business, one Humanities and two Engineering. Although some of the students were enrolled on the same subject pathway, none of the students were applying to study the same academic course at university which adds to the diversity of the students' perspectives. Therefore, I developed profiles of the students in order to help the reader create a mental image of the students who have shared unique accounts of their experiences in this study. Table 5 below is included to present pen portraits of the students.

Table 5. Student's pen portraits

Vlog Pseudonyms	Interview pseudonyms	Participant description
'Ayo explains IL all'	Ayo	Ayo, from Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti state, South West Nigeria, is a current IFP student at Wesley, and is on the Business subject pathway. He speaks two languages (Yoruba and English) fluently. Ayo considers himself as a high-achieving student who went to boarding school at the age of 10. He has five A1 and seven A2 WASSCEs from Nigeria. Ayo loves and is very good at maths and statistics. Ayo is very motivated to become better at these subjects. He enjoys computer games and maths challenges, and sports. Ayo has two brothers (one who is four years older and one who is two years older) who are studying postgraduate degrees and undergraduate degrees respectively. His parents are married to each other and both work as Chartered Accountants in Lagos, Nigeria. He experiences a lot of pressure and encouragement from his family to do well academically, and has developed a strong sense of perfectionism as a result of this pressure. He plans to study Accounting and Finance at university.
'Independently Me'	Bolu	Bolu, from Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, South West Nigeria, is a student at Wesley. She is studying the Medicine pathway. Bolu was a frequent tourist to London before settling for college study in the North west of England. She speaks Yoruba and English fluently. Bolu considers herself a high-achieving student. She spent six years in boarding school and has seven A1 and five A2 WASSCEs. She is actively involved with college social life, college enrichment activities and is very religious. Bolu says she has always been motivated and engaged as a learner, which she thinks is a reflection of the highly 'academic-minded' home she comes from; both her parents are university educated and her father works as an academic in Nigeria. Bolu has one brother who is three years older and another brother who is a year younger. She is an avid vlogger and has been running a YouTube lifestyle channel for two years. She plans to study Medicine at university.

Vlog Pseudonyms	Interview pseudonyms	Participant description
'Ife's independent life'	Ife	Ife is from Sagamu, Ogun, South West Nigeria, speaks Yoruba and English fluently, and has a working proficiency in French. She is studying in the Engineering pathway and hopes to study chemical engineering at a university in London. Ife mentioned that her parents and teachers have shaped her values and beliefs about learning. In addition to this, she values independence and being challenged to achieve her best. She spent six years at a private boarding secondary school in Nigeria. Ife is an only child, and has a mother and a father who are divorced from each other. She lives with her mother in Lagos. Both her parents went to university, her father is a politician and her mother works in the civil service. She considers herself to be mostly a confident person, in her social and academic life. She describes herself as an academically high-performing student, and left secondary school with 12 A2s.
'Becoming and being independent'	Kamsi	Kamsi is an IFP student in Science. She is from Asaba, Delta state, South South Nigeria but has lived all her life and went to school in Abuja, North central Nigeria. She says she is very occupied with her academic coursework and does a lot of studying on her own. Because of this she hardly has time for her music, (she plays the viola and piano) and she misses the regular twice-weekly music sessions she used to have in school. Kamsi has six A1 and six A2 WASSCEs. She is a strong believer in hard work and demonstrates this in her studies. She sees herself as a bit of a perfectionist and this makes her anxious if she does not get the results she expects in her studies. She says she has been typically successful in her academics. She has one brother who is older, a brother and a sister who are younger, and parents who are married to each other. She thinks she and her siblings have benefitted from her parents academic and career success; her father owns his own medical practice and her mother works in the banking industry, but also feels that she is under pressure to do well in her studies. She plans to study Pharmacy at university.

Vlog Pseudonyms	Interview pseudonyms	Participant description
‘Life with independent learning’	Simi	Simi, from Ife, Osun state in South West Nigeria, is an IFP student in science. She plans to study Molecular Biology in university. She is often anxious when she has to learn something for the first time because she feels that unlike her classmates she needs more time to grasp certain concepts. She thinks that she is having a difficult time adjusting to college life and is very conscious of the teacher’s feedback. She values deep learning but feels she can never be as good a student in college as she was in secondary school because of the different learning she is encountering in college. At boarding school, she was actively involved in drama and debating and tries to do the same in college. She has five A1, six A2 and one B. She talked a lot about her perceived inability to cope with college studies but she also emphasised her accomplishments. Simi is the third generation of her family to aspire to university studies; both sets of her grandparents and her parents all have university degrees in the Humanities, Law and Science. She has an older sister who is a doctor in the National Health Service (NHS) in England.
‘Gee in progress’	Grace	Grace is from Onitsha, Anambra state, South East Nigeria. She finished from a top secondary boarding school in Abuja, Nigeria with four A1 and eight A2 WASSCEs. She considers herself deeply religious and finds strength from her belief in God and listening to gospel music- something she feels she takes after her father. He is a Chartered accountant and a Reverend in the Church of Nigeria Anglican communion. Her mother is a registered nurse. She actively participates in learning and team work and is hardworking. She sees herself as outgoing and competitive, wanting to take charge of her actions, but sometimes doubts her own ability. Grace wants to study Law at a top Russell Group university.
‘Newbie’s guide to college life’	Dele	Dele, from Badagary, Lagos state, South West Nigeria, is an IFP student in the Business pathway and intends to study Politics and International Business at university. He enjoys socialising with friends, and learning new things. He values hard work and is

		<p>determined to be a success in future. He is the oldest of four children and often sees himself as a role model for his younger sisters. Dele watches a lot of educational documentaries and motivational speakers on YouTube to increase his knowledge and confidence, and uses a lot of online study materials. He sometimes believes that he is not well-prepared for university because he is still trying to understand a new way of learning in college. He constantly compares his perceived failures in college with his frequent successes at school and this makes him think he needs to work harder to get back to being a success. Dele finished from secondary boarding school with seven A1, four A2 and one B.</p>
Vlog Pseudonyms	Interview pseudonyms	Participant description
‘10 things IFP taught me’	Zayda	<p>Zayda is an IFP student in student. She is from Idah, Benue state, North Central Nigeria. She describes herself as a strong and independent young woman with the mental toughness to overcome any challenges in her social or academic life. She is an athlete and is very proud of her sporting ability, winning a number of gold medals for her school at various state and national competitions. Nevertheless, she does equally as well in her academics, finishing secondary school with five A1 and seven A2 WASSCEs. She says she often applies the mental toughness she uses in competing in sprints to her studies, particularly during difficult moments in her studies and she finds this useful in her college experience. Zayda values the way she keeps growing as a learner and taking responsibility for her own learning. She plays down her academic success in a way that she does not do with her sporting success. She is often hard on herself and she thinks it is because her parents and coaches are/were hard on her; pressuring and challenging her to excel in sports and her studies. She has an older brother who is studying at a top military academy in Nigeria. Zayda is very optimistic and hopeful about her future. She plans to study Geophysical Science (International) when she leaves college.</p>

Adopting this approach is coherent with the Afrocentric value of inclusiveness (see Section 2.8.2). I chose to involve a group of Nigerian students, who are undergoing the experience of independent learning in different locations and from different personal experiences. The students were chosen to discuss relevant issues uncovered by the study and to provide feedback on whether the study and my interpretation of the data embodied the principles, ideals and values they themselves recognise as Nigerians. I initiated direct correspondence with them to conveniently and efficiently solicit their views. Such inclusiveness enhanced dialogue in the research design and implementation.

3.5 Data collection strategy

I conducted a pilot study to test the viability of the VIM. The pilot study brought a different insight about the research context, which led to re-focusing the main study and providing guidance to improve my data collection instruments. Additionally, the pilot study was used to practice an inductive approach to research, my interviewing techniques, my interaction with research participants, data analysis strategies (for example, memoing, coding, constant comparison, etc.). The outcome of that study included feedback from the participants and my supervisors, which suggested that a combination of the more traditional research method, interviews, and an online research method accessible to them, such as vlogs, would likely yield a wide array of experiences at college. For example, during the pilot study students suggested what might be included in a vlog post besides social commentary, such as in and out of class perceptions and experiences of significant aspects of teaching and learning, descriptions of what college is really like on a daily basis, and points of view about their interactions with others in academic spaces.

The VIM involving student vlogs and student interviews was used to facilitate a free flow of Nigerian IFP students' accounts in order to generate rich amounts of data. Ultimately, providing useful insights into concepts and issues identified as comprising the students' independent learning. The VIM in this study meant that data collection was flexible to fit into the students' and my schedule, and involved

relatively few respondents, as this requires minimal coordination. In addition, the VIM in this study produced rich and useful data aimed at building understanding, rather than confirm extant theory. Furthermore, the VIM gave the students and I, greater ‘authorial voice’ and enabled greater involvement and interpretation.

The procedure for the VIM activities involved:

1. designing and distributing vlog prompts and interview questions
2. students complete the vlogs and select 3 for discussion
3. during the first interview, researcher and participant watch selected vlogs for content and context, while researcher refines interview questions
4. collecting observational vlog data ,
5. conducting the first interviews
6. transcribing and analysing interview data
7. re-watching vlogs for analysis
8. drafting follow-up interview questions
9. conducting follow-up interviews to confirm and check initial analysis
10. revision of some vlogs by participants
11. final transcription and analysis.

Detailed description of data collection and analysis is presented in Section 3.4 and Chapter 4 respectively.

Table 6 below provides an overview of the contact that I had with each student over the research period.

Table 6. Students and contact (overview)

September 2016- July 2017 IFP	Name	Vlogs	Interviews	Duration	Total
Wesley	Ayo	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (5 minutes 10 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (5 minutes 08 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (5 minutes 10 seconds)	4 th April, 2017 24 th July, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 8 minutes

		20 th February, 2018 Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)			
Wesley	Bolu	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (2 minutes 50 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (3 minutes 21 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (3 minutes 20 seconds) 17 th February, 2018 Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)	4 th April, 2017 24 th July, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 3 minutes
Wesley	Ife	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (5 minutes 22 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (3 minutes 30 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (4 minutes 49 seconds) 24 th February, 2018 Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)	4 th April, 2017 24 th July, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 6 minutes
September 2016- July 2017 IFP	Name	Vlogs	Interviews	Duration	Total
Wesley	Kamsi	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (3 minutes 44 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (3 minutes 39 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (5 minutes 10 seconds) 3 rd February, 2018, Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)	4 th April, 2017 24 th July, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 5 minutes

Wesley	Simi	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (5 minutes 08 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (3 minutes 21 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (3 minutes 21 seconds) 17 th February, 2018, Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)	4 th April, 2017 24 th July, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 5 minutes
January 2017- December 2017 IFP	Name	Vlogs	Interviews	Duration	Total
Bell	Grace	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (6 minutes 31 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (5 minutes 01 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (3 minutes 20 seconds) 28 th February, 2018 Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)	16 th May, 2017 13 th November, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 8 minutes
Trinity	Dele	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (4 minutes 03 seconds) 8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (3 minutes 39 seconds) 9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (3 minutes 21 seconds) 27 th February, 2018, Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)	15 th May, 2017 9 th November, 2017	30 minutes 20 minutes	1 hour 4 minutes

Trinity	Zayda	7 th February 2017, Vlog 1 (5 minutes 34 seconds)	15 th May, 2017	30 minutes	1 hour 8 minutes
		8 th February 2017, Vlog 2 (3 minutes 57 seconds)	9 th November, 2017	20 minutes	
		9 th February 2017, Vlog 3 (5 minutes 06 seconds)			
		9 th February, 2018 Vlog 3 [UPDATE] (3 minutes)			

This method differs in particular from Harricharan and Bhopal’s (2014) blog-interview method in that the data was collected using vlogs (detailed description in Section 3.4.1) rather than a blog. Also, I did not create or maintain the vlogs used in this study. Rather, I guided each student to develop and maintain their vlogs and thereafter participated in individual face-to-face and online interviews with me. Each exercise was carefully chosen to complement the other. Furthermore, in contrast to the blog-interview method, the vlogs were not kept in a chronological order and I did not participate in and monitor students’ vlogging process. Additionally, the vlogs were not publically accessible and comment sections were disabled. Therefore, there was no room for the vlogs to emerge as a community in which the students shared group experiences, unlike the blog-interview method.

The vlog-interview approach was particularly relevant to the research question since it allowed me to give meaning to the students’ experience of independent learning, as well as facilitate the creation of a framework for conceptualisation of independent learning. The overall methodology provided an opportunity to use in-depth interviews to gain deeper insight into the issues and ideas identified in the vlogs. The student-authored nature of the vlogs provided the students with a familiar and comfortable setting to stimulate reflection and freedom of expression to offer personal views about their experiences with independent learning. In-depth student interviews allowed for greater interaction between the students and myself;

this enabled an interactive, dialogic encounter between us, in keeping with my belief about knowledge and learning, and which furthered detailed discussion about issues that arose in the students' vlogs. Data collected from different sources, enhances the triangulation of data collection methods and constant comparative analysis of the resulting data. Using different data collection methods made the research robust and strengthened the trustworthiness of the study because the methods complemented each other, taking advantage of and using the strengths of each method to address limitations in the other.

3.5.1 Student Vlogs as research

Vlogs, along with other internet-based research methods, have several practical advantages. They are easy to set up, the participant sample can be relatively extended to represent young people from a wide geographical area, and there is a capacity to examine in-depth individual stories (Griffith and Papacharissi 2010). Vloggers (individuals who post vlogs) can share these with the world on an online platform and allow viewers to comment.

Through vlogging, individuals are able to introduce dynamic content and produce new knowledge (Taylor, 2013). In my study, vlogging is demonstrated to be a participatory and innovative research method that was useful to elicit student voice, as an insightful form of student expression, as an ideal medium for producing and digitising knowledge, and as potentially impacting student development.

Although blogging is increasingly acknowledged as an effective teaching, learning and researching tool (Bloch, 2007; Dyrud, 2005; Burgess & Green, 2018; Kerawalla, Minocha, & Kirkup, 2009; Johnson, Kaye, & Bichard, 2007; Sullivan & Longnecker, 2014; Weller, Pegler, & Mason, 2005; Zinger & Sinclair, 2013) not much is known about the application of vlogging in those same contexts (Snelson, 2015). This is despite growing recognition of the pedagogical benefits of vlogging, such as the potential of learner-generated vlogging to empower students and

enhance learning (Kearney & Shuck, 2006) and the extensive use of video production as a valuable educational resource in teacher education.

In these contexts, and at a conceptual level, some of the benefits of vlogging to learners and teachers include the potential of vlog projects to facilitate critical analysis and self-reflection of own work and the work of peers (Girod et al., 2007). The opportunity vlogging gives for learners to develop fundamental skills for successful and effective learning enhances their ability to evaluate their practice and adjust where necessary (Tripp & Rich, 2012). In so doing, potentially enhance their metacognition. In teaching terms, pre-service teachers' analysing and evaluating user-generated videos can lead to an elevated sense of empathy and a sense of identity (Koc, 2011).

Some literature problematize the use of the visual form with young people in relation to the changing ways in which they learn (Uygarer, Uzunboylu & Ozdamli, 2017) because of the presumption that young people because of generational advantage are digital natives (Helsper and Eynon, 2009). Noyes (2008) highlights the limits of research focusing only on classrooms to explore and explain young people's responses in a specific learning context. However, vlogging as a research task has the potential of being an effective resource for students to show and describe their school experiences (Snelson, 2015). The richness of the video format for effective communication and the student-centred approach to teaching-learning also addresses the learner's academic competence and experience (Sweat-Guy & Buzzetto-More, 2007). Creating regular vlogs is an excellent way to chronicle one's life as a means for others to gain an understanding of the subject's life (Snelson, 2015). As a reflective tool, it is a valuable resource for journaling progress and for personal and professional development (Taylor, 2013). Vlogging, in this sense, intersects with notions of independent learning in two important ways, through self-regulated learning and learner autonomy (see relevant section in Chapter 2). On self-regulated learning, Zimmerman (2000) is clear that self-regulated learning encourages learners to express "self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that

are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (p.14). In this study, vlogs were deemed appropriate for helping to establish links between various experiences, and as a resource through which the students constructed and expressed their knowledge about independent learners. Deci and Flaste (1995) explain that an individual acts autonomously when they exercise a degree of freedom coupled with “a sense of volition and choice” (p.89) in any endeavour. Crucially, therefore, vlogs have potentially helped in this study to minimise the power differential between the students and I.

Vlogs are an effective means to understand how young people describe their experiences and a valuable resource for students to draw upon to construct narratives about those experiences within a certain period of time in their academic journey. Vlogs were thus an appropriate means of documenting and examining these narratives because they offered the author the voice, power and control over what they say and who they share this with. The vlogs which participants contributed in this research are similar to reflective visual journals, as they served as a record of the students’ reflections on their experience of independent learning within their IFP.

3.5.1.1 Vlog ethics

Using vlogging as a research tool creates a number of potential ethical concerns related to the role of the researcher, especially if conflicts emerge about ownership of data. For instance, my responsibility lay with guiding the content of the vlogs in terms of what the students could or could not post on their vlogs. Furthermore, an important ethical concern was related to the question of who owns the vlogs after they are produced (Bloch, 2007), whether student participants can rightfully lay claim to the vlogs they self-authored, or whether I have access and right of use of vlogs as I see fit. In relation to an African ethical research approach, dialogue, agreement and consensus involving the researcher and all participants (Chilisa, 2009) were important to guide any decisions to be made about ownership of data.

It was mutually agreed that the students would retain ownership of their vlogs and permit me to access them only for the purposes of data analysis.

In this research project, I was guided by the ‘consequentialist’ approach described by Wiles et al (2008, 2:2) and Pickard-Smith (2016) which proposes that “an action is morally right if it will produce the greatest balance of good over evil”. They synthesise and outline the specific ethical issues associated with visual research and offer guidelines for visual researchers undertaking research using participant-generated visual data, like video, film and other creative media, and provide justification for the impracticability of full anonymisation of visual data (see also Hughes, 2012; Ess, 2009). The ethical issues are related to anonymising visual data, consent matters about respondent-generated images, the construction and consumption of such images, informed consent, and confidentiality. Following them, I was guided by the legal and moral obligations of a visual researcher to the research community and the research subject to navigate ethics guidelines to do with using visual media in research and establishing privacy.

The discussions I had with students were in keeping with African ethics: justice, respect and honesty. Justice in the way that the vlog activity I was asking them to do did not further deficit thinking and theories that seek to construct international students as the problem. Also, I did not include subject matter in the research prompts which might be controversial or cause students any embarrassment and I asked them not to include the same in their vlogs. Respect for the students’ beliefs, their academic practice and their presence in the study. The students had administrative powers to determine public or private access to their vlogs. They chose to maintain public access but set privacy restrictions for any vlogs used in the study and I amended the PIS to reflect this. Respect of their recognition and acceptance of a ‘hierarchy of importance’ in African traditional culture, but despite this, having an equal space for agreement and consensus building about my having access to their vlogs. While some students thought it as a good idea to make the vlogs public, most suggested that it was better to place restrictions on public views

in order to retain their copyright. Ultimately, it was mutually decided that neither I, nor the public would have access, and that the only time I could watch the vlogs would be together with them. This at first felt to me like a ‘bad’ suggestion, but eventually I saw the advantage of not having pre-formed notions about the vlog posts by not watching the vlogs before interview. Honesty in terms of being open with the students about specific issues of privacy, including anonymity, confidentiality and safeguarding, the students created their own video channels on password-protected sites. Before the vlog exercise, I discussed with the students the risks involved with web based activity and how they can stay safe and gave them a copy of vlogging guidelines. In so doing, I avoided presuming that the students were digital natives because of our generational differences.

The students, some of the parents, and I, had a discussion about the reasons for anonymity of research participants and discussed limitations to anonymity and confidentiality of web-based data, ensuring that the students and parents were clear on this so that the students could make an informed decision about participating in the research and what they wished to share in their vlogs. I explained confidentiality to students in terms that they understood, the extent to which confidentiality can be fully assured in the event that issues around safeguarding arise during the research process, and that confidentiality will need to be breached if this happens. Luckily, they were already involved in some form of independent research project as part of their subject modules in college, so they were already familiar with some of these issues. The students went on to choose that their own pseudonyms for the vlogs and the interviews which I used when reporting the results.

Overall, vlogging emerged as a valuable method for data collection, and this sentiment was shared mutually between the students and I. In this research, vlogging required students to document their own experiences in vlogs, and subsequently select some vlogs for detailed discussion in following interviews. The structure of the vlog exercise involved students uploading vlogs in their spare time; therefore this did not require any specific permission from the college principals or

any staff at the college. I emphasised that the vlogs would have no bearing on their studies, other than that it might be beneficial to their personal development to participate, and that they should feel as if they had to participate in my research. Furthermore, because the participants were over 16 years old and not considered ‘vulnerable’, in Euro-western eyes, they are deemed to be able to give consent. However, in keeping with the African ethical approach of this study, I had to take into account “individual consent, community consent, group consent, and collective consent” (Chilisa, 2009, p. 421). Even after my university ethics review committee gave consent that research can be carried out, I consulted with the college principals who, in turn informed the students’ parents and the house parents to reach a consensus before I asked for students’ consent as individuals and as a group.

An African ethical framework addresses hierarchies of power between individuals, significant others involved in their care and the wider community. In this research, consent involved a cyclical process of collective decision-making, which involved seeking consent not only at the participants’ level, but at parents’ level, principal level, and house parent’ level through written emails (see Appendix G) for email invitation to parents, principals and house parents) about the following:

- the right of an author to be recognised for their work
- the vlogs created by the students as data deemed to be in the public domain with access and copyright remaining with the author
- vlogging as an appropriate and ethical approach guiding research with individuals such as young people who are deemed ‘voiceless’
- vlogging to address the power imbalance, exclusion, inequality and stereotypes associated with doing research with young people and with individuals from historically marginalised settings and post-colonial contexts.

As an additional methodological layer, none of the vlogs was initially transcribed in order to minimise the risk to loss of data. Rather, I used memoing to document initial thoughts about themes that I observed in the vlogs, and aid my reflection on them. Where I identified ideas from the students’ vlogs that I deemed important to my study, I went back, replayed the video segment, and transcribed that segment

alone. Memos I wrote were also useful for triangulating vlog and interview data and validating the themes that emerged from both.

Within this study the aim was for the eight students to self-author three to five vlogs over the course of their IFP. This ensured that students posted approximately twenty-four to forty vlogs over two/three terms in college. However, due to mocks in the middle of the academic year and final exams in the last term, the students did not post the maximum number of vlogs. Additionally, video data can be time-consuming to collect and analyse, the 3-7-minute vlogs students produced were essentially short segments of data, which offered only a starting point for analysis. However, this constraint was offset by focusing on providing a thick description of the interactions of those temporal and sequential structures evident in the vlogs (Jewitt, 2012). As mentioned earlier, I gave students useful prompts to guide their vlogging and with them, created a vlog schedule of timings for vlogging. This allowed for flexibility within the research design and ensured that students had a clear focus for vlogging. I asked the students for their signed consent before they started vlogging and collected their signed informed consent forms (Appendix H).

The table below (Table 7) lists all vlogs with title of the vlog, author, vlog post number, and date posted.

Table 7. Final list of vlogs

Title of vlog	Author	Vlog post number	Date posted
'Ayo Explains 'IL' All'	Ayo	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	20.02.2018
'Independently Me'	Bolu	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	17.02.2018
'Newbie's Guide to College Life'	Dele	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017

		3 [update]	27.02.2018
'Gee in Progress'	Grace	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	28.02.2018
'Ife's Independent Life'	Ife	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	24.02.2018
'Becoming and Being Independent'	Kamsi	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	03.02.2018
'Life with IL'	Simi	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	17.02.2018
'10 Things IFP Taught me'	Zayda	1	07.02.2017
		2	08.02.2017
		3	09.02.2017
		3 [update]	09.02.2018

Students vlogged in their spare time, in different locations, at different times of the day and after critical events that occurred in college. This allowed for a variation in students accounts with regards to different social contexts and individual priorities. For example, some vlogs were posted after what the students described as 'high/low-level assessments' involving independent activity. Students explained that assessments were considered as high if awarded marks made up a percentage of the students' final mark and low if they were not. The vlogs offered an initial glimpse and eventual focus on the identification of broader perceptions and experiences, which were explored in greater depth during the interviews to elicit how they influence perception, connection and understanding of their unique experience.

3.5.2 Student Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with individual students were carried out to explore students' understanding of independent learning. Face-to-face interviews took place within college premises in locations that were familiar to students which enhanced their levels of comfort. Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes and were held during students 'personal enrichment' time to minimise disruptions to class and study time. Interviews provide a meaningful opportunity for participants to give personal accounts of their own perceptions and interpretations of the world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017) and emphasises their sense- and meaning-making of that particular phenomenon in the real world (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In this research, interviews were used to explore Nigerian IFP students' understanding of independent learning; to explore further, fundamental aspects of experiences of independent learning students identified in the vlogs.

The interviews facilitated a mutual exchange of knowledge and understanding as they related to intervening contexts in the students' study experiences. The interviews were useful for enhancing the interactions between the students and I; and for the process to be fluid and flexible in order to enhance rapport and trust and offer the students a unique conversational setting. Thus, the interviews in this study were an on-going experience of speaking, listening and reflecting.

I asked the students again for their signed consent before the interviews began and collected their signed consent. This process of repeating consent-seeking and consent-giving further minimised the power differential between the students and myself and gave them more control of the interview process. The interview questions included both open- ended and closed questions in order to cover the breadth of issues that needed further scrutiny. The variation in question types was necessary to aid flexibility in the wording and ordering of the questions in line with the peculiar situational contexts of each interview (Kvale, 2007). The less rigid schedule encouraged the use of probing and follow-up questions to deepen discussion (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017) (refer to excerpt of Simi's

transcript in Appendix I). Therefore, the interview schedule I developed, helped to guide questions I asked the students. It covered about a range of topics to do with their learning at college and perspectives on independent learning in particular. The flexibility of the interview, however, allowed the students to speak as openly as they wished, and depended on how the conversation developed.

Before each interview started, I asked the student I was interviewing to select 3 vlogs for discussion. Together, we watched the vlogs. I listened and took notes as they commented on, and explained their vlog posts. I also refined my interview question where necessary. The schedule for the follow-up interviews was created by drawing on analysis from the initial interview and further watching of the vlogs, in order to ask the students further questions regarding their first responses, and to clarify and validate their accounts in the vlogs. All interviews were digitally-recorded and transcribed in full using the Sound Organiser application in Microsoft word. This application helped to edit out any background noises and facilitated slowing down and speeding up of playback to minimise the distortion of data. I then uploaded each interview transcript to NVivo software for analysis. Memos that I wrote during and after each interview process helped me sharpen my thinking about the data during analysis.

3.6 Triangulation

Overall, data collection yielded a vast array of data from the vlog and interviews. The analysis of the data began almost as immediately as I commenced data collection. While member checking contributed to validating my analysis of the data, I also undertook triangulation of my findings by comparing and contrasting the data I collected from the vlogs and interviews from the different students. I also used the follow-up interviews with the students and the vlog updates they made to revisit their responses from the initial vlogs and interviews. With each student, I drew upon some of the issues other students had raised to see whether such issues existed for them as well. I used this additional information to develop the interview schedule for subsequent interviews.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, it was necessary for me to adopt an iterative approach to the analysis of the data, which I will explain and describe in more detail in Chapter 4.

African knowledge claims are subjective and related to the habits and customs of the people. Trustworthiness in knowledge production, therefore, is culture-bound and context-dependent. My approach to trustworthiness attempted to balance the data I recorded and actual events during data collection and evaluate the appropriateness of the research instruments to achieve what they set out to do. Crucially, that African knowledge is included in the research design and implementation to accurately uncover and describe independent learning experience. Furthermore, trustworthiness involved ensuring that the research and its findings could be trusted by providing a detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. Additionally, trustworthiness of the research was increased through the specific ways data was collected and analysed. Vlogs were the first method chosen to uncover the college experience of the students in a natural setting students were familiar and comfortable with and which ensured that the views expressed there were truthful and thus meaningful not only to the students themselves, but to the overall essence of experience sought in the research. Data collected through student interviews contributed to addressing the research question and the trustworthiness of the research. It was necessary to combine interview data with the vlog data which proved to be a valid measure of overall experiences so as to compare them. During data analysis, I also used both data sets to look for evidence which verified students' responses and my understanding of these.

Addressing any issues of congruence required me to elucidate my epistemological perspective and give a comprehensive account of the methodological approach and the decision-making behind the choices I made to ensure trustworthiness of the research. Starting with a clearly defined research question, constructing a qualitative research framework appropriate for addressing this question and

selecting compatible approaches that help in answering it. All the while questioning and probing the objectives of the research, and the tools with which to reach them.

I also sought to overcome the limitations which are inevitable in employing established qualitative methodologies that could have fit this research; not by ignoring their usefulness in a research of this kind or by completely discarding them, but by using what was available to create something new as I worked within and outside existing methodologies. The specific criteria of addressing issues of congruence and my epistemological and theoretical perspective, selecting appropriate tools and techniques for the research, and adopting a reflexive position while addressing the scope of the study and ethical considerations, provide an audit trail of the research endeavour. In establishing trustworthiness, it was important to conduct and present the study in a way that makes it recognisable and understandable to the reader, and the research findings of significance to a variety of stakeholders. In so doing the quality of the research is established by way of methodological discourse and techniques irrespective of epistemological or ontological differences.

3.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed designing and implementing my research using VIM to understand students' independent learning experience by explaining and resolving how sampling and the recruitment of participants was carried out, the strategy for data collection, and some of my efforts at establishing and maintaining research trustworthiness in this study. In the next chapter, I present the strategy I developed for a systematic analysis of the datasets generated by the VIM.

Chapter 4: WORKING WITH THE DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address the process and procedures followed in the data analysis stage of my research. I offer an overview of the measures taken to organise, account for, describe and interpret the data. A process of meaning-making followed identification of patterns, categories and themes in the students' definitions of the experiences occurring in their academic lives. In keeping with the qualitative design adopted in this research, it was necessary for this process to be interpretive, with themes emerging inductively.

4.2 Analytical process

I was working with different forms of data, video and text-based, so it was important to develop a framework (Figure 12) that would help me analyse both data sets and explain how the findings emerged.

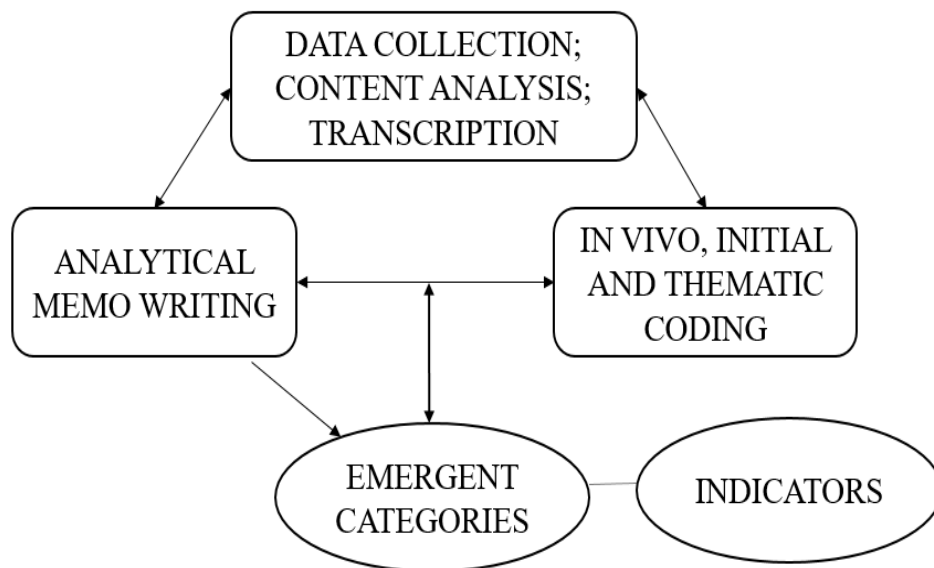


Figure 12. Analytical process

As identified in Chapter 4, following a multimethod inductive analytical approach allowed me to understand and make sense of the data, systematically. In this study, I utilised vlog and interview data from eight young students, and the datasets provided sufficient variability to construct the central theme, experience and the dimensions of experience. Following a holistic and intuitive approach, I carefully scrutinised and reflected on the vlogs and interviews. I articulated and documented the result of this exercise in analytic memos using simple, yet rich descriptive language to accompany the vlog and interview data, taking into account the students' both explicit and implicit utterances and actions. In so doing, I was able to attribute labels to the data by naming each segment of data. This helped me to categorise, summarise and account for each bit of data, including thoughts and feelings, actions and understandings that emerged from the data (see Appendix J for example of my analytical memoing).

Thomas' (2006, p.242) inductive approach for data analysis highlights conceptual patterns leading to the development of a framework or model; and describes the simultaneous process of data collection and data analysis directing my efforts in this investigation. The following steps (summarised in Figure 13 below) were significant in guiding my strategy for data analysis:

- Initial watching/re-watching of visual data, and reading/re-reading of text data; establish 'closeness' through immersion in the data and to each students' context, background and experience -> summarising both sets of raw data.
- Identifying categories within the raw data, which address the proposed experience; developing interpretive meanings and aligning this with the original descriptions in the research protocols
- Collecting more data as categories developed; focusing on reducing overlap and redundancy among the categories and testing their trustworthiness in follow-up vlogs and interviews

- Re-shaping the vlog focus and interview questions to yield more useful data; allowing students to expand upon recurring categories discussed by fellow participants without forcing the data
- Evaluating and making sense of the final categories; creating a framework incorporating the most important categories
- Iteratively comparing data, code, category, and concept; developing a conceptual awareness of the topic under investigation from recorded accounts, word frequencies, and contextual definitions relative to the data.

As the study aimed to understand Nigerian IFP students’ independent learning in college, the constant comparison method was instrumental in abstracting the experience derived from Nigerian IFP students’ narratives.

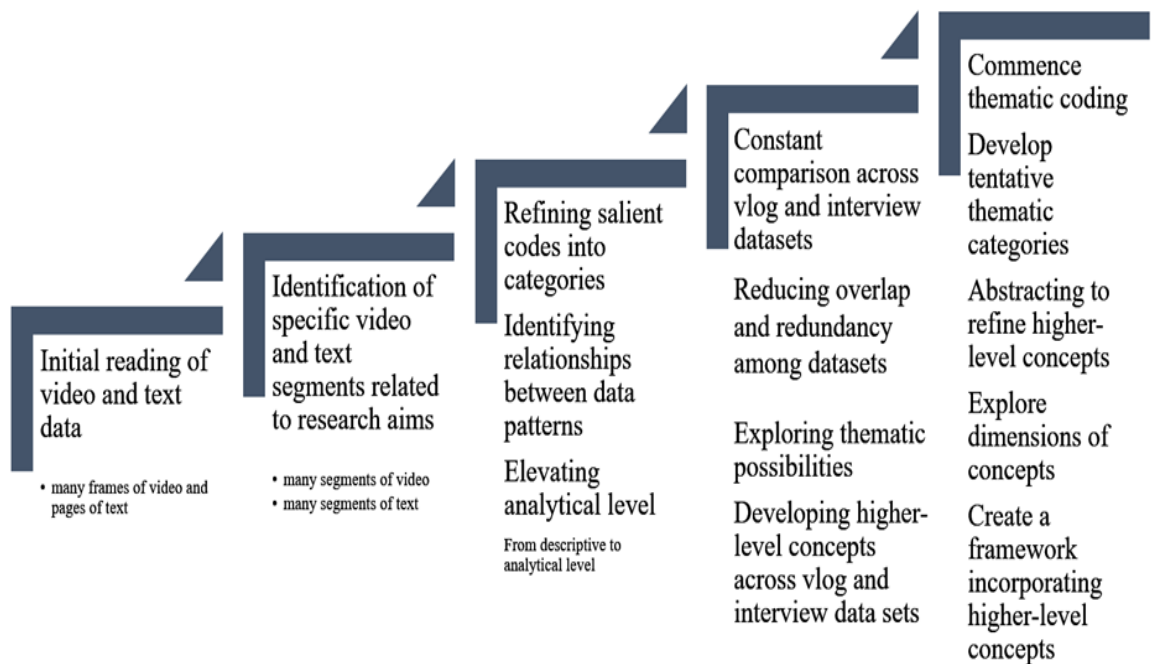


Figure 13. Data analysis steps

The analysis of data mirrored the collection of the data in that it occurred in multiple layers and at multiple levels. Furthermore, it was in keeping with the pragmatic perspective I took in the research. My process of inductive thematic analysis began with reviewing those research questions and my research approach. Next, I read a few transcripts and wrote summary memos. I believe there is immeasurable value in simply ‘reading’ one’s qualitative data (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Initial reading of data, without memoing or coding gave me a feel for the language, flow and important details research participants communicated to me. During coding, reading data also reoriented me to my participants’ lived experience. Following this I developed a coding strategy and wrote up the key issues coming out of the vlogs and interviews. As I did this, I reflected on how they related to my research questions and developed an initial broad coding strategy. This generated themes. As more nodes containing all the content about a theme emerged, I created a ‘mind map’ of initial codes and their elements, and constantly reviewed the range of concepts within. Any new thinking about the data or fresh insights that occurred during this process or emerging codes and up to the point when the core theme was written up were faithfully recorded in written and oral memos. The memos also helped with reflecting on the codes and moving the analysis from description to deeper interpretation of the data. Memo-writing and recording not only helped reduce the data so that it was clearer which categories were important, they also helped in me finding and developing my voice within the interpretation (see example of one written memo as I tried to make sense of the data, in Appendix K).

To determine research rigour, Tracy (2010) suggests that an abundance of rich descriptions and explanations of “theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts and samples” is necessary to study “complex, flexible and multifaceted” phenomena (p.841). Furthermore, the researcher’s choices about samples and context should be made with the aim of identifying nuanced and complex research issues. Moreover, it is acknowledged that through richness and rigour, trustworthiness of a study is enhanced (Golafshani, 2003).

In this research, I took care to collect and analyse quality vlog and interview data that represented participants' views on their independent learning experiences. The use of vlog data offers a rare and unique contribution to the study notwithstanding the small number of participants supplying this. The number and length of individual student interviews, the staging of the interviews and choice of interview sample, the interview protocol and accurate transcription of interview transcripts added rigour to the study. Furthermore, I analysed my data inductively. After each level of analysis, I decided whether there was enough data to support emergent findings. Where I felt that was not the case, I analysed more of the data. This consisted of line-by-line reading of data and using "in vivo" codes to enhance closeness to the data and rigour, (a brief account of the analytical process is provided in Chapter 4).

The findings and discussion presented in Chapters six, seven and eight make useful links between the analysis and students' accounts. These were interspersed with memos written in the first person about my feelings and what sense I was making of the data (a sample of this memo is included in the appendices). The memos helped me during the constant comparison phase of the analysis to evaluate and rationalise the emergence of themes. Rigour was further achieved by providing an audit trail to enhance transparency and trustworthiness in relation to how the raw data was sorted, chosen and organised to give a comprehensive research report.

4.3 Working with vlog data

The analysis of visual data enhances the visual representation of cultural and experiential contexts behind a study (Emmison et al., 2012). However, little attention is paid in methodological literature about visual data collection and analysis techniques, in particular most of the focus has been on visual data (researcher instigated or participant generated) in the form of photography, drawing and painting, collage, quilting and embroidery (Pauwels, 2011). There is increasing interest in alternative data forms such as video media (Holland et al., 2010; Pickard-Smith, 2016). In this study, I contribute to this emerging methodology by explaining

and resolving the techniques I used to analyse the vlog data. The experience of systematically analysing vlogs generated by the students was new to me and the process of analysing complex behaviour and words from video records was time-consuming. Although there are some efficient video coding software available, they are expensive and I did not trust available 'free' open source software because I could not establish the security of students' data. As stated earlier, very few researchers have previously outlined methods for analysing visual data such as coding, sorting, mapping and content analysis but have not offered much detail about how such techniques were employed (Jewitt, 2012).

In this research, the complete data set was made up of 24 vlogs (8 of these were updated vlogs), and vlog metadata (including vlog author, and title, duration, soundtracks, sounds, and date of posting of the vlog). I used this data set alongside the interviews to prompt discussion and stimulate recall. I viewed the vlogs and wrote memos of my initial thoughts about emerging themes in Microsoft Word. After this, I conducted two cycles of coding (Saldana, 2016) to generate themes from the data set.

First, I conducted initial and in vivo coding on my memos to identify emergent concepts, ideas, or themes for further analysis (Saldana, 2016). For instance, in vivo coding enabled me to identify the phrase 'crossing the bridge' which Bolu had first voiced (Chapter 7). The first cycle of coding involved my watching and re-watching the vlogs, frequently pausing and rewinding when 'critical' moments were identified that required further discussion during the interview, and making memos about the vlogs and the vlogs contexts. That is, where the vlogs were recorded, how long the vlog lasted and so on. At the end of the first coding cycle, I had 49 coded nodes related to the overarching ideas about independent learning and experience.

The second cycle of qualitative coding involved my identifying patterns in the codes. Nodes relating to independent learning and experience from the first cycle,

corresponding to affect (perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, value, motivation, identity, and so on), behaviour (actions and outcomes, engagement, connections and so on) and cognition (their knowledge, their thinking, their understanding and so on) were coded and categorised in Microsoft Word (see example in Figure 14 below). I performed both coding cycles simultaneously with analysis of interview data, because I wanted to compare both data sets for recurring patterns or irregularities. After concluding this cycle, I repeated the process to see if any new coded segments emerged. When I was satisfied that no new information was forthcoming, I ended the coding process.

2nd cycle coding	Example comments on vlog posts
Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>so</u> how was it initially for me? Very stressful! I had this feeling - that I'm incapable of coping with it - Coming from Nigeria where we did things differently
Beliefs, identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In a way, my identity symbolises how far I've come from some of my belief - it was sort of like I'm disappointed in myself...like I'm falling short of what is expected of me - so I motivate myself to continue
Value, motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think we motivate each other this way... and not just in the classroom, but when we go online whether in college or personal group chats
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - try and try again - planning our work
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>learn</u> to develop time-management skills. - That's the only way you can take charge of your own learning and when you feel that you have achieved something through your own efforts you feel satisfied
Engagement	
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - which is why reflection is important - The messy place is all part of my experience
Thinking understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I have started to think more about who I am, what learning means to me now and in future, how to be a better learner - I think it's <u>on-going</u>, this new understanding of what I'm doing. - Preconceptions are not bad...they are part of being and becoming independent.

Figure 14. Example of second cycle coding

To validate and cross-check my interpretation, further analysis of the vlog data was done in two ways: through a discussion with the students who generated the vlogs during the interview process in which memos were written, and through personal

reflections recording in a research diary during the coding of vlog data (Saldana, 2016). Each students was asked to select a sample of 3 vlogs for detailed discussion. I watched the selected vlogs with them, and while they identified noteworthy moments they wanted to comment on, I wrote memos about what I observed and heard. We stopped the vlog at 2-minute intervals to discuss and compare our thoughts and things I might have missed. Where necessary, the student reversed the vlog to confirm/clarify my analytic insight. During my reflections in-between each 2-minute segment, the student and I were able to build consensus on specific events in relation to their experience of independent learning and what they understand by these. As a result, I was able to refine my follow-up interviews. Some of the events that I thought were important to independent learning were only marginally touched upon in their vlog posts, so I had to check my assumptions and ensure they did not overly influence my interpretation of events. This exercise resulted in rich data that comprised students' reconstruction of past-thinking about learning, students' accounts of independent learning they engaged in, and students' reflections on present and future actions.

The value of my vlog data lies in my effort to be honest and authentic with myself, my research and whoever reads a report of my study. My task as 'transformative healer' (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010, p.619) is to embark on an ethical self-questioning of:

- who [I] am
- how it is that [my] story/experience informs the research
- how self-aware and self-exposed [I] are on the issue at hand

and "how to render a self-critical and accurate account of the research process and the internal and external dialogue they carried out in the course of executing the research" (Tobin & Bagley, 2004, p.392).

An exploration into 'self' in this research enabled me to acknowledge my strengths and shortcomings in analysing video data. In so doing, I was aware of personal

biases and positional power and of the links between my experience and connections I was making in this study. In this research, self-reflexivity was a dual-process of introspection and retrospection in order to locate the biases and motivations from where my analytical insights is conducted. In the course of negotiating access and addressing issues of trust, data collection and analysis, and presentation of findings from the students' vlogs, I have considered the implications of this study for the students. One way I did this was in memo writing and member checking- as I explained earlier. Another was through transparency in relation to analysing the vlogs: How did I come about my analytic insights? How has the study focus evolved over the course of data collection? How were the students positioned during data collection and analysis of the vlogs? What were some of the challenges I encountered in the course of collecting and analysing vlog data, and how were they overcome? Have I sufficiently acknowledged the time and effort the students have put into the vlog data generated? Reflexivity and transparency are also in keeping with the African-centred view of research. This view calls for sincerity on my part, in terms of coming into the analysis process from a place of self-effacing vulnerability rather than brash self-assuredness.

4.4 Working with interview data

The aforementioned data analysis strategy was also followed to develop important themes from 29 interview transcripts. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Memos were useful for recording my interpretations of the data as the data was analysed. Following a constant comparison analysis procedure, the textual data was compared to the vlog data. To begin analysis, data from two interviews were read, and then subsequently coded (using line-by-line open and in vivo coding) in NVivo software to identify specific text segments related to the research aim and label emergent themes. The emergent themes were then named in vivo (Saldana, 2016). This use of the participant's actual words to label themes was to maintain students' 'authorial voice' and the significance of the students' understanding of independent learning in their own words.

The transcripts were analysed further segmentation of the data, following a continuous coding process. Any coded texts that appeared not to fit into clear categories were re-coded and re-labelled. As I continued analysis, I began to reflect on the role of NVivo in the analysis of the data. NVivo works well in a research design and analytical approach such as this study (Silver and Lewins, 2014). In particular, the ability to arrange information in nodes makes it compatible with the thematic analysis approach used in this study. However, the hidden role of NVivo, which emerged as I continued to use it, was that it promoted my ability to be more creative with the data. This is because as a researcher, I found that NVivo encouraged me to order my vlog data codes too early but eventually, in my opinion, too rigidly. Afterall, I hoped to modify my interview questions as I analysed the vlog data, and reflect on the first interviews as I conducted follow-up ones. So, I had to resist this early on and be content with a flat hierarchy of nodes to begin with. As I did more coding, I refined the nodes. In addition to analysing the data within the NVivo system, I created a visual board (see photo below in Figure 15) on my office wall of some of the themes which I was developing. I included duplicate nodes to show commonalities across themes. This helped with further analysis of the data because I could see how the codes linked together; and how categories and subcategories were connected as I continued working with the data. After I did the initial coding with NVivo, I printed the codes out and worked with the data manually because I still felt with generating preliminary themes, I could only get so far with NVivo. What resulted was a systematic development of relevant thematic concepts.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, I adopted a multimethod approach during fieldwork to generate two types of datasets. Therefore, it was appropriate to constantly compare all the data to facilitate data analysis and interpretation of the data. The constant comparative method (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) allowed a robust comparison of vlog data and interview data. Furthermore, it allowed conceptually similar incidents to be categorised under a single descriptive concept

and closer examination of text based on similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, data saturation was reached.

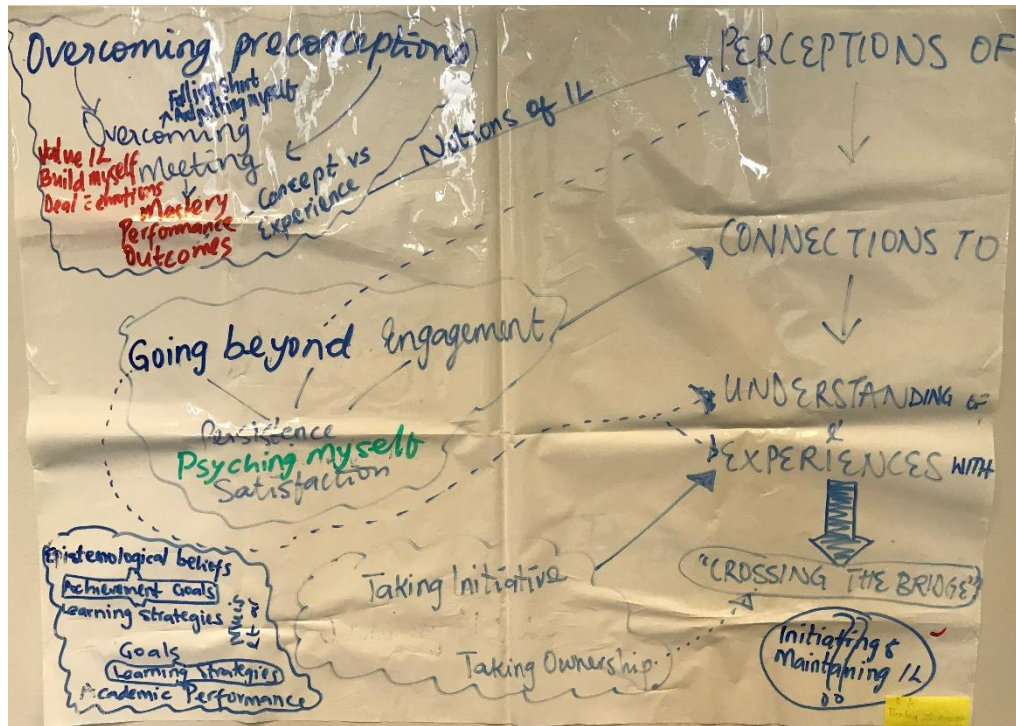


Figure 15. Visual board of emerging themes

As I was unable to identify any new information from the data, initial themes were developed. As with the vlog data, data reduction was enhanced by reducing overlap and redundancy amongst the initial themes, which resulted in the core themes emerging.

I kept communication open with students during analysis as a way of providing member checks to verify/extend my interpretations and conclusions. When I was through with analysis, I fed back the outcome to the students as a way of checking the accuracy of my interpretations. When I was satisfied that the core themes were a true reflection of the original descriptions in the data, sub-themes were developed which further reflected students' views and were regarded as their understanding of independent learning. The resulting themes and categories address the research question.

4.5 Emergent themes

The vlogs provided a rich source of stimulus for the interviews. The interview protocol set the stage for a rich description of the college students' understanding of independent learning. An inductive approach to analysis of the vlog and the interview data first allowed me to identify words, phrases and sentences. Next, I started to identify patterns in segments of the data so I assigned descriptive labels to units of meaning. The words and phrases used by the students such as 'crossing the bridge', 'telling myself, I got this' and so on were kept in vivo at this stage to "prioritise and honour" the students voices (Saldana, 2016: 106). As these early patterns were identified, I journeyed back and forth to the vlogs, audio recordings, field notes, memos and my research diary to ensure that any meaning-making I was carrying out stayed true to the actual data collected. At this stage I also started going back to the literature; if there was a phrase or thought in the data that was similar to something I had come across in my initial reading, I would acknowledge this. Or look for related literature when this was not the case. Dunne (2011) suggests that such inductivity and reflexivity are important aspects of research. In this case, I found these techniques particularly useful during data analysis. Following a description of units of meaning by identifying patterns in the way the students described their understanding and experiences of independent learning, I identified approximately 60 categories as significant to the study to support the formation of themes.

When these were cross-referenced with any complete responses each student gave to my research question new meanings were induced from the following categories: autonomy, identity, feedback, parental involvement, peer interactions, student-teacher interactions, teaching and resources, learning opportunity, college environment, classroom environment, home environment, subject pathway, feedback, time management, personal dispositions, learning disposition, expectations, and reflection on progression and outcomes. From these I generated six main themes: 1) understanding independent learning through having prior

conceptions and expectations; 2) understanding independent learning through learning opportunities and experiences; 3) experiences of independent learning being shaped by motivation, engagement and outcomes; 4) factors facilitating/impeding independent learning; 4) forming cliques; 5) being autonomous; and 6) sustaining independent learning. Further data induction resulted in three core themes and subthemes (Table 8):

Table 8. Outline of core themes and sub-themes describing Nigerian IFP students' understanding of independent learning

Core theme (Experience)	Summary	Sub-themes (Dimensions of experience)
Challenging preconceptions	Nigerian students consider challenging preconceptions key to their attitude about independent learning. They consider the ability to regulate their responses to new learning experiences to be the gateway to the essence of independent learning experience in college. The students' general beliefs about knowledge and learning are important for understanding and overall experiences of independent learning at college	Dealing with emotions
		Feeling incapable
		Learning to value
		Building myself
Extending engagement	Nigerian IFP students respond to their encounter with independent learning by extending their experience of it. They are ultimately successful at developing persistence, making themselves more confident to approach any perceived difficulties with independent learning and derive satisfaction when they do	Developing persistence
		Psyching myself
		Finding satisfaction
Crossing the bridge	Nigerian students engage in personal and collective growth, and shifts in identity because of making sense of independent learning and their experience of this. Their transformation demonstrates their experience of who they are, and how they see themselves as independent learners. This experience reflects the power students have to develop and consolidate transformed identities during their academic careers to successfully cross the bridge to independence	Reflection on concept in light of experience
		Transformation

4.5.1 Challenging preconceptions

A common thread within both vlog and interviews was Nigerian IFP students' affective experiences with independent learning and this was immediately clear from their responses. In particular, from the first sets of vlogs over 22 different codes were used to describe 12 sections of text related to preconceptions and expectations of learning in college (see Appendix L for example of analytical strategy for the theme 'Challenging preconceptions'). As I continued analysing the data I kept memos to give additional meaning to my interpretation of these. The memos noted the importance of challenging preconceptions, such as dealing with emotions regarding perceived (in) ability to do independent learning, and students' choice in learning to value independent learning and working toward building themselves to develop independent learning skills.

Similar to this, the first set of interviews which were conducted immediately after vlogging resulted in data which upon coding indicated some of the same idea as the vlog data; so these were grouped together under the same categories. This helped to halve the number of codes and enabled me to carry out a conceptual level of analysis. The result was strong conceptual codes which fitted into clear categories for important themes. I was less concerned with what labels to assign the themes because I had already made a decision to use students' own words as long as they captured the essence of the phenomenon in question. *Challenging preconceptions* was a phrase used by two students in various sections of the data which explained their perception of independent learning.

4.5.2 Extending engagement

Further analysis of vlog and interview data contributed codes related to Nigerian IFP students' behaviour experiences with connecting with independent learning. At this point I was slightly concerned that it was too early for another theme to emerge and that I might be interpreting things in the data that did not match students' experiences. So I slowed the analysis process and kept reviewing the codes and

memos I had written. When I was satisfied that my interpretation was a true reflection of the data I resumed coding which started off as basic descriptions but were eventually refined to reveal sub-themes '*Developing persistence*', '*Psyching myself*' and '*Finding satisfaction*' which together described students' connection with independent learning as they understood the experience.

4.5.3 Crossing the bridge

The final theme I identified, 'crossing the bridge, is related closely with Nigerian IFP students' understandings of their independent learning. To be clear, referring to this as the final theme to emerge does not suggest that thematic emergence happened sequentially or in a linear fashion. Throughout the other themes there was sufficient evidence of overlaps of the concepts, themes and sub-themes emerging and undercurrents of this throughout the data and it took many months of breaking the data down for this final theme to emerge. To be able to make a clear distinction between categories that I considered significant and the core category that was deemed to capture the essence of cognitive dimension of independent learning experience. *Crossing the bridge*, the In-Vivo code I have appropriated from one of the students, Bolu, from which the thesis takes its title refers to transformational shifts in students' understanding of independent learning as experience. This term was used by one student but occurred more widely in all the data and succinctly explains the independent learner identity Nigerian IFP students not only understood but recognised in themselves. The identification of this theme was a 'light-bulb' moment for me as well and returning to Kolb's writing on learning as transforming experience further confirmed that this was indeed a key theme. Re-examining all the data, coding and memos reinforced my findings and made me satisfied that I had identified this as the main theme.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the process and procedure followed for inductively analysing the data. A summary of components that make up the essence of Nigerian IFP

students' understanding of independent learning is presented. An overview of the emerging themes evidencing this is also presented. The next three chapters expand each of the themes that are outlined above. Each chapter presents the data as evidence and then discusses thematic aspects relevant to it. The themes are deliberately addressed in separate but related chapters to allow a robust discussion of students' understanding of independent learning.

Chapter 5: CHALLENGING PRECONCEPTIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the construction of the thematic category *challenging preconceptions* using the methodology detailed in Chapter 4. Working with the data enabled the development of four sub-categories, providing insight into the affective experiences that influenced how Nigerian IFP students experience independent learning in college, how they understand independent learning because of these experiences, and how the students' insights furthered my own understanding of independent learning. The detailed findings for the theme, relating to the affective experiences that determined Nigerian IFP students' perception of independent learning, are presented in the following sections as excerpts of vlog and interview data from all the students in this study.

The findings are presented as four interrelated dimensions of this theme, 'dealing with emotions' (Section 5.2.1), 'feeling incapable' (Section 5.2.2), 'learning to value' (Section 5.2.3), and 'building myself' (Section 5.2.4). These terms are taken in vivo from three student vlogs (Simi's 'Life with Independent Learning', Ayo's 'Ayo Explains 'IL' All', and Bolu's 'Independently Me'), and alluded strongly to by all eight students in their interviews. The findings are helped along by a synthesis of related literature presented in Chapter 2 and revisited during data analysis. An in-depth discussion of the dimensions that account for students' independent learning affective experience follows the presentation of these findings (Section 5.3) in order to describe and explicate the experiences surfaced within the study.

5.2 Findings

Perceptions and attitudes influenced students' affective experiences of independent learning. Each student described their beliefs and attitudes about independent learning in vlogs and interviews. Working with the data gave prominence to the conceptions students have of themselves and of learning and how they challenge these preconceptions (see figure 16 below). The following vlog and interview

excerpts demonstrate the nature and extent of preconceptions influencing students' overall independent learning experience, and its significance to their affective experience.

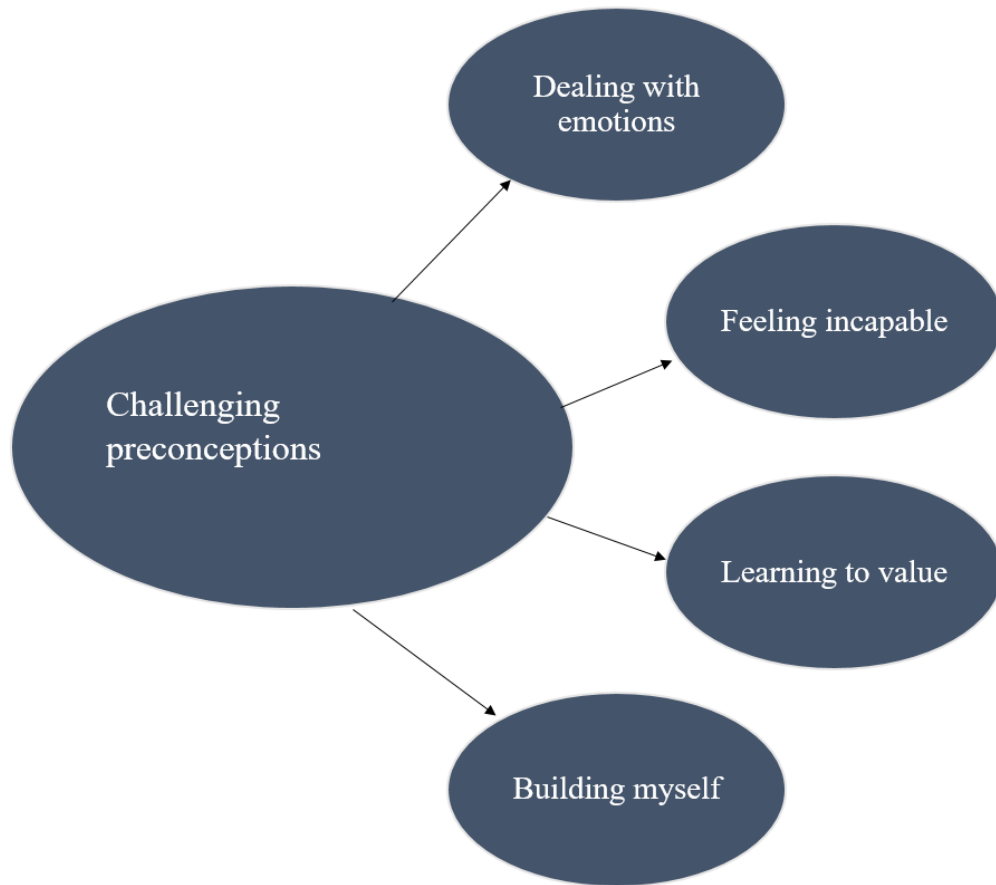


Figure 16. Challenging preconceptions

The students generally had a positive view toward studying at college and they believed that challenging preconceptions about independent learning is crucial to their overall experience.

All students seemed to express preconceptions associated with affective experiences of what they saw as new academic demands. They mostly entered college study with preconceived beliefs that the knowledge and skills they left

secondary school with were either insufficient or not adequately developed for learning at college. In college, they experienced expectations of thinking critically about and evaluating their learning autonomously which they initially considered themselves incapable of doing. Consequently, they said that they initially struggled with confidence and felt like they were failures. However, many said that they eventually overcame this by letting go of some of these preconceptions and going through a period of persistence and maturing through failure.

Their beliefs about periods of adjustment to new learning varied among the students. However, all the students began to re-evaluate their roles as learners and the role of the teacher within the context of college early in the term. Many of the students started to believe less that they needed expertise to become independent learners, and many started to recognise that they could learn from failure and that learning from the mistakes they made could make them better students. All the students also started to recognise the connections between their prior knowledge and skills and their current learning, relying on some of their old notebooks and assessment papers. A number of them looked toward their teachers and peers both within and outside the IFP as a valuable resource for understanding learning content.

A number of the students first discussed their beliefs about, attitudes toward and significance of independent learning to their affective experience in their vlogs. Their views in relation to these were also a dominant thread across the interviews I carried out with the students. The impact of students' affective experiences related to challenging preconceptions of independent learning is expressed in the sub-themes dealing with emotions, Feeling incapable, Learning to value, and Building myself.

5.2.1 Dealing with emotions

Human beings have unique opinions and preconceptions about events and the emotions they show in how they respond to them. Some learners have beliefs, for

example, about the ease or difficulty of some subjects or subject topics, how students respond to these, the extent of their or the teacher's role in facilitating or leading this response, and under what circumstances they do so. Students' beliefs can be seen to be shaped by experience. Their beliefs are significant because they can affect what happens with students in new or unfamiliar learning cultures.

The students were reluctant to ascribe the term emotions to their initial experiences with independent learning. They explained them as feelings but in the course of their discussion in the interviews I realised that to get to an understanding of what they were describing I had to view these more as emotions, as lower level responses to their encounter with independent learning, so in presenting their words I have replaced the term 'feeling' with 'emotion'.

Feelings and emotions are, along with desires, "significant components in an interactive process" loop". Cookson (2015) differentiates between feelings and emotions by arguing that: "feelings [and desires] are placed on the engaging side of the interacting loop, while feelings register the feedback gained from interaction" (p. 108). The students' reactions to their emotions are further expressed in the sections feeling incapable and learning to value. It was only when I was able to achieve this clarity in my understanding, that I discovered the connection between students' affective experiences and the shifts they experienced in their preconceived attitudes toward independent learning. The students described the emotions they developed as a consequence of new courses and there were mostly similarities in students' individual experiences. The most common emotions the students experienced were frustration and hopelessness. The students experienced these emotions more strongly during the first few months of college (mainly autumn and spring terms). Ayo stated:

I definitely experienced [frustration] adjusting to academic life in college. Specifically when I had to carry out independent

research for a course that I was not familiar with, international relations. It makes me doubt myself even more and makes me feel that this is not for me (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/2017)

Dele expressed that he was frustrated when learning about British politics. Grace, similar to Dele, said that she experiences frustration learning about the British legal system

it's frustrating that what I am spending so much time learning in this way, getting in-depth knowledge about topics that may not be relevant if I go back home after uni to work. I started thinking that maybe I was right, that independent learning does not work if it does not relate back to what I know and how to use it here (Interview with Grace, 16/05/17)

Both explained that their frustration was borne out of their unfamiliarity with concepts which are contextually British, they believed they could not link these with previous learning, so they found independent learning difficult as an approach to understand new concepts. Bolu, Kamsi and Simi shared similarities with expressing frustration at encountering specific topics in biology in college, as Ife did for the topic basic principles of construction in her Engineering pathway.

Zayda did not speak at length about experiencing frustration with independent learning in her vlogs, only giving a general response when I raised the issue during the interview; however she did recall a particular event in class:

I guess I was frustrated when the teacher was explaining something and I was like, 'oh my God this is too hard,' or ...you're thinking they're speaking so fast I can't understand their accent (Interview with Zayda, 09/11/17)

This answer lacked the depth that I needed to further examine dealing with emotions and as the other students did not mention their teachers' accent, I did not pursue this issue any further.

When asked about specific instances of frustration, Ayo's account was an expression of an internal experience of frustration, which other students described was directly related to developing independent learning skills in their individual subject pathways:

One thing I remember is, I remember that first assignment in international relations, just trying to grasp the key theoretical approaches...it's overwhelming all the resources out there. You have to be selective about choosing the right one, and not Wikipedia o! The teachers say that's a big no-no, but that's the first place I want to go to...

Loretta: Why is it?

'it's easy to understand, as a starting point, you know, and contains useful links. Besides I'm used to it so when they say don't rely on it that can be frustrating. But I see why they say that, it's not always reliable.' (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

Students' hopelessness associated with science practicals and problem solving exercises was evident in some accounts. Grace stated that inability to apply theoretical concepts that she was familiar with to real-world problems often leads her to experience hopelessness but at the same time she was starting to recognise that problem solving might be important for learner development. Dele also reiterated that under-developed problem solving skills increased his experience of hopelessness in college. Simi said that she experiences hopelessness when she cannot carry out a 'simple' practical exercise. When discussing specific experiences of hopelessness, Grace, Dele and Simi all reported that hopelessness was directly associated with having to encounter a different learning approach and adopt learning styles that they were unfamiliar with. They explained that sometimes they just lack the skills or knowledge to do what the teacher expects them to or to make it in college and this leads them to experience hopelessness:

That, if we can't make it in college, how can we make it in university where things are three times as hard (Interview with Dele, 15/11/17)

That time in biology when I couldn't dissect a heart properly. I'm thinking, Simi, you're just hopeless... and she's moving around checking our work and I can just feel my heart beating overtime... (Interview with Simi, 07/04/17)

Grace: So, okay there are times when it will just hit you and you're like, I'm completely hopeless, and it might happen when you see others doing well what you can't manage to do. So you study the text. You look for all the resources known to man and make notes. Then you get to class and present your stuff and the teacher is like, 'Grace, I can see you have put a lot of effort into this, but can I suggest...' and you feel this great sense of, okay, this was such a waste of my time ('Gee in Progress', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

It appears that Grace's strong reaction to feedback suggests that she sees this as criticism of her abilities as an independent learner. As a negative reaction which becomes associated with independent work and that might potentially monitor or help shape further interaction whereby independent learning development is or may not be possible. Bolu also associated this experience of hopelessness with seeing the progress her classmates were making on the same topics she found difficult.

In the midst of these emotions the students recognised that they have to make a conscious effort everyday to deal with them otherwise these emotions will affect their academic outcomes. The students expressed that hopelessness led them to feeling incapable, to struggle with confidence and almost lose the motivation to persevere. Ayo felt that hopelessness was something that made him believe that he was not reaching the standard he expected. Similar to Bolu and Simi, Kamsi explained the feeling that hopelessness raised in her, resorting to looking for short-cuts to just get through the course and pass. Ife and Zayda described how hopelessness made them think that they were not ready for college and made them want to give up. The students reported hopelessness that was experienced in and

outside class but they were adamant that they had started to deal with it, although it was quite difficult in the first months of college.

Emotions of hopelessness or frustration provides examples of experiences that elicit multiple perceptions of independent learning related to students perceptions of autonomy and competence. The emergence of dealing with emotions as a sub-theme of *Challenging preconceptions* reveals an important dimension of affective experience that has seldom been addressed in independent learning. Crucial to consider concerning these emotions is that in challenging them, students experienced attitude shifts as further interaction with independent learning occurred.

5.2.2 Feeling incapable

When Nigerian IFP students express the transition from school to college, they explained that the transition to more rigorous study was the reason why they found it difficult at first to adjust to independent learning. When describing their attitudes in response to general questions about their notions of independent learning in college in the UK, all of the students cited the transition from secondary school in Nigeria to college in the UK as a hurdle, academically which left them feeling incapable of adapting to a more independent form of studying.

Simi: So how was it initially for me? Very stressful! I had this feeling...that I'm incapable of coping with it [independent learning. Coming from Nigeria where we did things differently... The hardest thing is adjusting to college life...at first... it was sort of like I'm disappointed in myself...like I'm falling short of what is expected of me... ('Life with Independent Learning', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

The way the classes and lessons are structured in college is a lot different from my secondary back home. I remember that for the first few weeks I was so overwhelmed by it all. When you get handed the course outline that tells you everything you'll be doing that whole term, you're like 'oh my God! What is this? (Interview with Grace, 04/04/17)

... I mean, I understand that going away to college in a different country is the start of my independence, right? My mum says 'you're almost an adult now you know'. So for me it's not just with my personal life but I suppose with my studies as well, I have to learn how to live and study independently (Interview with Zayda, 15/05/17)

Zayda's words are significant if one is to come to the realisation that experiencing independence in learning might not be altogether different from experiencing independence in any other facet of the student's life and development.

The findings from the study show that for these students, their beliefs that the WASSCE syllabus is not adequate preparation for IFP courses influence their perception of independent learning at college. All the more significant for curriculum development when we consider that the entire purpose of the IFP is to bridge this gap. Furthermore, they suggest that students carried prejudgements about their lack of knowledge and skills to operate successfully at post16 level. This led to a loss of confidence in the students.

...in spite of them making us work so hard at secondary school, I felt like my understanding of, say biology fell short of...was inferior to...you know, what is expected at this level...not always...just sometimes...so I remember once, my biology teacher here said, think about where you've come across this before...er...no...I don't want to. I wasn't able to...or maybe I was unsure about contribute anything because I thought what I know is not really linked to what I'm learning...I mean I suppose it is, just in a different way, just that I learnt it a different way and I didn't see how it's relevant here in the UK. (Interview with Bolu, 04/04/17)

'...it's like I didn't think that I knew anything there is to know about how to work independently...I thought, you have to know how to discover things yourself, learn different, creative ways of doing things... doing more independent work...I didn't do all that in secondary school so I felt incapable of doing it here...It's like when you fall short of what is expected, you feel bad, [you] lose confidence' (Interview with Kamsi, 04/04/17)

Dele: It can knock your confidence. Big time! All of a sudden, you go from the kid who gets most of the prizes at prize-giving day, to an anonymous big failure...everything that got you through the tough SS years don't seem relevant anymore...then you ask yourself, how do you survive? ('Newbie's Guide to College Life', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

As a consequence, challenging preconceived attitudes about independent learning competence requires concerted efforts to build and grow in confidence. Confidence there becomes the key to enabling students' assumption of active agency to promote conscious acts of self-determination and self-regulation that are widely presumed to be missing in international students' learning behaviours and actions (Kingston & Forland, 2008; Petersdotter, Niehoff & Freund, 2017).

Ayo: I tend to pay more attention to the details the teacher is giving...to just give those same answers when you have a test or exam. But that didn't work here...Here you have to understand the meaning of what you are learning... I wasn't prepared to do this so I struggled. And at first it might feel like you're incapable of that. But it helps when you have the interest and you know what your end-goal is. For me... I just want to get through the exam at the end of the year. So yeah, maybe that's my goal...maybe that's why it was hard for me to make the adjustment...at first ('Ayo Explains 'IL' All', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

So in just a few weeks I realised that understanding the topics is different from just learning to know the answers...But if I'm being honest, it's not like the teachers back home told us that understanding is not important, they were just putting us under so much pressure to finish the syllabus, especially as SSCE was getting closer and closer. So I wonder...if we were being rushed to complete three years of a syllabus then, now that we have one year to finish this one [IFP], why the difference in approach... (Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

These accounts further demonstrate that the students were conflicted about what to privilege within the 'brief' period of the IFP; reproduction of knowledge or

comprehension. Their comments also suggest the relatedness of their beliefs about knowledge and independent learning.

At school, I was one of the smartest, all through SS [short, conversational variation of SSCE; see explanation of acronym in table of abbreviations] , so for me I couldn't understanding why I did badly those first few weeks, after I got the results from half-term (Interview with Ife, 04/04/17)

Dele: I have to admit...at first it's gonna be tough...everyone goes through challenges in college...many people don't do very well in the first tests they do...what's important is that you don't dwell on your failure. For me this was the first time I got really bad grades, so I have to admit, [it was] a big shock to me and my parents but it was my second test, I think, so I just saw it as beginner's wahala¹. We all did. That's how you overcome all the hiccups. ('Newbie's Guide to College Life', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

I came into college with the experience that high marks are all that matters so when I'm not getting it and the teacher says, oh that's not so important, for me it is. That's why I'm doing this, right? To get the grades I need for uni. Simple. (Interview with Grace, 16/05/17)

So slowly, I have to adjust my mind-set, adjust myself and start to mature as a learner. (Interview with Grace, 16/05/17)

The key points here feed into the idea of transformational shifts which emerged as the overarching explanation of *Crossing the Bridge* (described and explained in Chapter 7) and hinge on the strong preconceptions that students have of

¹ Wahala' is a slang commonly used in Nigeria meaning *problem*

independent learning and the effect this has on the actions they take overcome them and their overall experience of independent learning.

5.2.2.1 Adjusting

It emerged from the data that the students went through a period of academic adjustment in order to overcome their preconceived attitudes. Many of the students described how they began ‘toughing it out’/ letting go of misconceptions-beliefs about knowledge and learning/teacher presence/ having expertise/ persisting and maturing through failure.

Many of the students described periods during the first term when they started letting go of misconceptions they had about teaching and learning: [refer to this page in discussion about misconceptions]

you just have to, you know, drop all those ideas you have about what it [independent learning] is and what it's not...or how difficult it is to do it otherwise you'll not make any progress (Interview with Dele, 15/05/17)

Zayda: So Number 2, understanding the topic means that you'll get better results; when you get better results you'll be less anxious about mocks or finals; when you're less anxious you'll perform better; when you perform better, you'll pass. It's that simple. ('10 Things IFP Taught Me', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

The students' attitudes are likely to facilitate an uncovering of what learning means and what it means to them. These attitudes reveal a continuous internal process of discovery about their beliefs. It is interesting that in both cases, the students placed themselves in control of what they think and feel and, ultimately how they behave to new learning situations or cultures.

Additionally, the students expressed how the teacher being an active participant in learning throughout their time in secondary school affects how they experience independent learning now; many of them privileged the role of the teacher over the

student in learning. However, they also believed that this type of interaction does not encourage students assuming more independence in their learning.

...we spent most of the time copying the teachers' never-ending notes from the board. Of course we had practicals too but for the practical exams they were just that. There wasn't much connection between the two.. And that type of approach, the result is what you notice first when you do science at college, you cannot make the connection. So it didn't work in school and it wasn't working in college, so I had to quickly adjust myself...(Interview with Kamsi, 24/07/17)

Kamsi's account here suggests that entry expectations do not match the reality of many learning settings. Whether it be at school or college or university level, this implies that as students have expectations of academic transition at each stage of their academic lives, so too are students' expectation for academic independence heightened.

The students also brought up instances in secondary school when in class they felt that they had a lot to contribute to the lesson because of some independent research they had done but were discouraged to speak up because the teacher would think they were, according to Simi, *'trying to teach me my job'*.

Some of the students shared experiences in secondary school where the teacher in the guise of letting them develop as independent learners left them with little or no guidance. This thinking parallels Knight's (1996:35) suggestion that for some, independent learning *'implies going it alone, unaided'*.

Zayda: So Number 6, leaving the students to get on with it is not independent learning...but also, no hand-holding, because you can't really be independent that way. So, I think you want both, a balance, the best of both worlds. So the teacher is present, available to help if or when you need it. ('10 Things IFP Taught Me' Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

If the teacher believes that I can do it, regardless, and is helping me find ways to approach the material and is not crazy about marking and stuff...and says it's important that I understand not just know it, then that helps me overcome my fears and doubts (Interview with Simi, 07/04/17)

When Simi says '*it's important that I understand not just know it*', it suggests a deeper epistemic belief about independent learning.

For a student like Bolu, a similar experience in a French class in which the teacher's perceived lack of presence was interpreted by Bolu as independent learning was almost a positive one because she said that this gave her '*an opportunity to feel free to do my own reading, and look for relevant examples to help me understand that topic*'. However, she noted that in the course of completing the task, she felt that the absence of what she perceived as more guided and expert support from her teacher left her unsure about whether she could relate what she was doing to independent learning. According to her, not all her teachers behaved as facilitators. Some teachers adopted a more traditional, content-focused approach to teaching:

You can tell the ones that don't know how. They focus on just the content, give instructions, do this, this and this. They don't give room for reasoning out, for debating what we're learning. There's never enough time for interactive debate, problem-solving. It's almost like I'm back in secondary school (Interview with Bolu, 04/04/17)

Bolu's views led me to think more about the learner independence in the relational context of 'expertise'. Ayo's use of the phrase *having expertise* is related to hers and, reflects his own epistemic beliefs about knowledge and learning.

...you couldn't be an independent learner or any kind of learner without having expertise...having expertise means that you know what you're doing and how to do it. That's what I think (Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

Simi related her beliefs about expertise to the role of the teacher in independent learning. She believed that having expertise is one of the qualities of a good teacher and a quality the teacher can use to help their students develop their own expertise too.

'it's useful when the teacher knows their stuff and they are there to clarify what the task is, especially when they give assignments, because it can be easy for us students to misinterpret the question (Interview with Simi, 18/05/17)

Bolu: ...you come to a stage where you start to think, hey, it's not about them knowing everything but knowing just enough about their subject so that they can help us the students, you know, find out what we know, or what we don't know... I think that that is maybe the best way to summarise the teacher's role in helping students develop as not just independent learners, but successful learners. ('Independently Me', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Similarly, perceptions of their own expertise can influence students' beliefs about their ability. But, their perceptions also represent a deeper level of perseverance in the development of useful strategies to overcome preconceptions about independent learning being related to expertise in order to adjust to the academic demands of college. Toughing it out emerged as a 'minor' code to describe one important mechanism students adopted within that experience of academic adjustment.

...so I suppose I just told myself that, I'll just have to keep up with it myself, and even if in the beginning it's hard, I'll just have to tough it out knowing that passing IFP will be the result (Interview with Bolu, 24/07/17)

The students described very real experiences with adjusting to independent learning, but they believed these were opportunities for growth. They felt that their attitudes toward this period of adjustment was likely to shape their overall experience with independent learning and, ultimately their final results. As Grace explained:

Grace: One thing that I've learned is that no matter how tough things are to begin with, you just can't give up. I had to think of it [independent learning] as a new way of doing familiar things. If A doesn't work, try B, and so on until you get it right ('Gee in Progress', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Zayda compared it to the mental toughness she often applied to sports. Adjusting, she said created in her a sense of 'inner strength':

I moved up to 400m in SS2 and it was not something I was used to coming from the long jump. At first it was difficult to make the adjustment...but I just started believing in myself, building on my inner strength, like Zayda, come on, you can do this, don't panic, focus, you can achieve your goals'. So when things get too tough in class, that's just what I just do. (Interview with Zayda, 15/05/17)

Ife explained how her Maths teacher in college describes it:

He says it's an academic mind-set – if you give in to negative thoughts about it [independent learning], if you think it's hard, that it doesn't work, then it won't. He encourages us to challenge our beliefs that we're not smart enough to succeed at it, to overcome our doubts during independent study, that we belong in this advanced level college maths class (Interview with Ife, 04/04/17)

As far as academic mind-sets go, there is evidence in the literature that teachers' and students' mindsets in learning can predict individual academic achievement and by extension promote those skills that lead to the development of independent learning (Zhang, Kuusisto & Tirri, 2017).

5.2.3 Learning to value

The essence of this sub-theme relates to how students have expectations in their ongoing experience with independent learning in college. The students emphasise the importance of independent learning to their learning, performance and outcome goals. Demonstrable improvement in approaches to learning provides students with

a positive expectation of independent learning. Students express feelings of satisfaction and expect internal and external affirmation of their development as learners when they use independent learning successfully to perform and complete learning tasks. Students say that high grades they get after submitting work they completed either individually or as a group during independent study periods leads to increased feelings of self-worth and assurance that they would get the results they expected to get into university, and the likelihood that they would continue to adopt independent learning strategies.

All the students described, in their vlogs and in the interviews, the value of independent learning associated with the expectation that this approach to learning will help them reach a level of mastery that they perceive is desirable for college study and help them to develop study skills in preparation for university. Reflections in their posts and discussions with me during interviews regarding what the term, independent learning, means in the context of their learning goals and their daily encounter with independent learning either in or outside college uncovered emerging patterns defining this code. All the students stated that the independent learning traits expected of them were developed and sustained when they were motivated to self-direct their own learning:

Ayo: There's no use in learning the skills to become an independent learner. You have to WANT [emphasis his] to become an independent learner ('Ayo Explains 'IL' All', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

The beliefs about learning behaviours which Ayo engages in as an international college student, similar to those uncovered in wider research of international students, furthers understanding of an important aspect of independent learning and what experiences of students' behaviours and thoughts influences their construct of independent learning.

Students mentioned how they observed increases in their motivation to engage in class, and outside class while also commenting on comfortable levels of mastery from this expectation. This was more visible in their group or individual project work than anywhere else in the IFP. Dele explained it in one of his vlog posts:

Dele: ...whatever that it [independent learning] means, like being responsible, or taking control of your learning, or being involved in your studies, it helps if you can set your own goals. You have to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve. Ask yourself, 'what is independent learning going to do for me in college?' That's the way to be motivated and when you are motivated you begin to see the value of independent learning, when you see how that it helps you with independent research, you are understanding the topic better and quicker and can apply your knowledge in any situation. ('Newbie's Guide to College Life', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

Ife describes her personal experience of the value of independent learning in terms of the way she started to take the initiative in her learning which was something that she felt was expected of her as a college student. According to her, taking initiative involved, for her, a daily plan:

Ife: ...it's funny, the only way I can describe it is [she pauses and assumes an expression of thinking] ...is, like becoming a manager of your own learning, yes, it's like you're managing yourself...make sure that with or without the teacher's help I can identify what I want to get out of the lesson...make sure that I know what my goals are...make sure that I use the strategies that can help me to understand...make sure that I reflect on what I have learnt. ('Ife's Independent Life', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

In the interview, I asked her about those strategies and she listed the things she came up with herself to 'manage herself' and the suggestions given by her teachers at college:

...so I plan ahead of the meeting with my research tutor by reading revision notes, then I set targets for myself based on what

I want to get out of the meeting, like what specific area I'm struggling with and I need help with. So I do all that before I even step into the meeting. I even do a similar thing during class...But the most important thing is that I always, always, reflect on my learning, not just what I learnt that day or at the end of the unit, but to look at my approach, to check whether it worked or not.

Loretta: What would you do if you find that it didn't work?

It will just motivate me to work harder. So I'll try something else. But that happened a lot when I first started college. I'm getting better at it with more practice so now I know what usually works for me. (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

These words provide some evidence that certain situations or circumstances predict and enhance academic motivation as a construct which the students felt strongly about. The students expressed that the classroom was a significant site for experiencing the most motivation for independent learning. They mentioned that their motivational experience was felt more when they were studying their favourite subjects or their major pathway subjects. Ayo, for example, described his love of maths and statistics that heightened his motivation to practice independent learning because

I prefer numbers...I like numbers. I do a lot of maths now. Not every day but enough to keep me happy and I'm doing very well in maths but I want to do better. (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

Kamsi stated that she experiences motivation when she has lessons that involve her proposed university major (Pharmacy). Grace had feelings similar to Ayo and Kamsi; she mostly felt her motivation to develop as an independent learner when she studied subjects in college that related to her passion and which she knew would qualify her to study Law at university-level. Suggesting that motivation is associated with perceived relevance to aspirational goals and self-evaluation of one's own learning. Dele in addition to experiencing increased motivation in class,

described how they also felt that their motivation for mastery extended beyond the classroom setting.

...so it's not just in the class. It's also when you have self-study period. I mean the way you feel about the subject can also determine how hard you work, like the amount of effort you put into it, to become better at it. Even when the teacher is not there. I just feel fulfilled when I do this. But when you don't feel the motivation then you will not continue and that can prevent you from being successful. (Interview with Dele, 15/05/17)

Dele and Grace mentioned experiencing opportunities for independent learning in tutorials, as a central focus for their motivational attitudes toward independent learning, in their vlog posts. Both felt that in tutorials, they felt motivation to explore in-depth their understanding of the topic a way that they could not in class where they felt content was the focus:

Dele: I learn best when I'm motivated...My group felt more in control of [tutorials], like we schedule it the way that suits us best and so on...when we get really stuck in it's like we don't want it to end...and everyone had something new and interesting to add, I had a lot to teach my classmates but I learnt a lot of new things too, I understood more about the topic than when it was first introduced by the teacher in class and I had this motivation to explore more and more...(‘Newbie’s Guide to College Life’, Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Grace shared similar feelings about her experience during tutorials:

I think it motivates you to engage more in the learning process... you have to talk then, share your own views...we don't feel like we're novices when we do this, we feel like we know what we are discussing because it's important to us and we've done the research. (Interview with Grace, 16/05/17)

In addition to motivating students, opportunities for independent learning enabled students to understand its purpose; they were able to acknowledge the value of

independent learning in their development as learners, make the connections between new and previous knowledge and understand how the skills they developed might be applicable in future learning situations:

I'm looking forward to my university visit so that I can experience first-hand, see the connection between all I'm learning in subjects like human biology and stuff they do in uni...Hopefully the critical thinking I'm learning now will make me appear knowledgeable. (Interview with Bolu, 24/07/17)

...Through tutorial, I was able to continue studying topics that are important to me independently and with my tutor group...learning about biology and human physiology motivates me to study pharmacy at uni. (Interview with Kamsi, 04/04/17)

... I'm beginning to connect the dots. Comparing what I'm learning about vectors here with what I learnt in secondary school, it's different but only in the sense that here its more at the advanced level but I can see how those basic concepts I learnt can be applied here and I didn't know this at first, or sometimes I didn't know how to apply the knowledge...I'm beginning to make that connection and that's helping me (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

...we are all motivated by to develop our learning for different reasons, for me, it's all about the practicals, moving from theory to practice, seeing things the way they work for myself, that hands-on approach, it helps me to understand when I can relate what the teacher is saying, what I'm reading, to what's right in front of me. It doesn't stop it from being challenging, I still have to do assessments and stuff but when I UNDERSTAND [emphasis hers], when I see the result of all my hard work, when I master that topic, ah, I'm satisfied; the teacher tells me 'well done', I'm proud of myself. (Interview with Simi, 07/04/17)

Students' response to encountering difficult content is consistent with independent learning attributes related to self-direction. Students especially derive a sense of satisfaction when they grasp difficult concepts and topics. However, there is a sense that this feeds into the notion of instant gratification in terms of academic outcomes

and as discussed later, this is potentially harmful for sustainable shifts in independent learning.

5.2.3.1 Expectation of performance

Expectation of performance explains a component of the affective experiences that relate to students valuing independent learning. It describes how Nigerian IFP students believe their value attitudes influence current academic performance and can shape future academic performance.

‘...I think how I do in assessment is important to how I view independent learning, whether I am satisfied with my progress or not....(Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

Grace and Kamsi, had strong expectations of personal growth as a result of independent learning and they first expressed it in their vlogs.

Grace: I see myself developing, growing as a learner...becoming more successful, I am starting to value this new way of learning, you know... (‘Gee in Progress’, Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Kamsi: so I just got my marks, for this project...they were great! Even better than I had expected, so that’s progress, which is a good thing because I have to make up for the marks I lost on the written test...(‘Becoming and Being Independent’, Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

According to the students, satisfaction was an affect experience that they associated with the learning to value independent learning:

Ayo: Of course, I feel satisfied, seeing all my effort and hard work developing as a learner, paying off. It erases all the doubts and fears I have about independent learning (‘Ayo Explains IL All’, Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Ife: *My first paper was a disaster, all over the place. By the time I started learning and applying those academic writing skills I could see how the structure of my discussion improved so just looking at the finished product made me feel satisfied that it's working...I can see the value.* ('Ife's Independent Life', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Simi: *...I'm not a flop after all...I'm satisfied that even with all this pressure I'm still performing well, maybe not the same as in school but to a different standard. And I value this experience, doing things differently, learning in a way that is unfamiliar but is giving me results.* ('Life with Independent Learning', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Dele: *'To be honest, I'm never really, completely satisfied. So when I get good grades especially in a subject I'm really good at, I'm like, ok, yeah, what next, what more can I do, how can I set myself apart from everyone else getting good grades? Get better grades, or the best grades, that's when I start to value what I'm doing, you know...* ('Newbie's Guide to College Life', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

These comments suggest how closely identity is tied to academic performance and how some performances transform or consolidate learner identities. Ayo said he only felt true satisfaction when he received affirmation from his teachers.

I don't see how I can be satisfied with my work only by feeling thinking about the effort I put into it or whether I'm motivated to do independent study. At the end of the day, if the teacher doesn't see the quality of my work then it's not worth it. They are the ones who give the marks. At the end of the day they're the ones whose grades will determine whether I pass or fail foundation so their marks are more important. When I get great ones from them then I can feel satisfied. (Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

Overall, the students expressed that meeting performance expectations in their learning made them value independent learning more. Grace said:

I started feeling like, this approach, I can see it working, I can feel that it suits me, my style, so why not. Without seeing improvements, I don't think I will value it as much... (Interview with Grace, 13/11/17)

Kamsi stated that in valuing independent learning,

Another way you can tell is whether you are satisfied with the progress you're making. If you can see yourself improving then, yeah, why not continue with it.' When I'm satisfied with my performance, it helps me build my confidence... so now I've started to believe that I'm not bad at this. (Interview with Kamsi, 24/07/17)

Dele spoke about a sense of community in the shared experience of getting desired results that increased the value he places on independent learning.

You know, there are times when we feel a collective sense of satisfaction, especially when we have group projects and we're all counting on each other to get the grades. (Interview with Dele, 24/07/17)

5.2.3.2 Expectation of success

All the students described the way that they value independent learning in relation to the meaningful impact from experiences with independent learning on their outcomes. This impact is typified through the students indicating the value in getting high grades after their first major assessment, the value in writing strong personal statements that got them strong offers from the universities that they applied to, and the value of a successful completion of the IFP. Bolu reflected on the connection.

I valued it [independent learning] more when I got really good grades after mocks in March. But I also valued it because of how it made me feel as a student, the confidence I felt...apply those skills to every aspect of my learning...if we extend the skills we're learning to every aspect of our academics, we will get more out

of it. It will be almost second nature. (Interview with Bolu, 24/07/17)

Simi shared an experience that highlighted the impact of grades on the value of independent learning and her academic goals. She recalled that it occurred after the mock exams in March and in the run-up to the main exam of spring term.

When I got the results it was a shock...C, C, B and C. I remember the first thing I said was that I don't think introducing independent learning at foundation is a great way to help us prepare for uni. I was worried that the unis I chose would see the grades and would think I was not prepared for uni. (Interview with Simi, 24/07/17)

Ife described experiencing a shift from feeling doubts about doing well to confidence that she would achieve her desired outcomes. She understood the value of independent learning but she also shared Simi's doubts regarding whether, what she described as, the high-stakes one-year IFP was an appropriate place to introduce independent learning.

Which is good for preparing us for uni but come on – how much of these skills can we really be expected to master in one year? But the main issue is that at the end of the day we still have to write a set exam that will not always be based on evidence that we have independent learning skills...so what's the point? (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

Expectation of success is one of the beliefs Nigerian IFP students had related to independent learning. Through their accounts, the students revealed a sense of value for independent learning when had good results, ultimately means that they would get into their university of choice.

5.2.4 Building myself

Of all the sub-themes, the sub-theme of building myself presented a number of similarities in regards to instances students felt strongly that they started to develop

and nurture this in order to overcome their preconceptions about independent learning and thrive in college. Students expressed that they understood independent learning during contact hours (in class) and when they had independent study or study leave as where they mostly *'build myself'*.

Building myself- being the experience of developing self and confidence in self- was the last theme that emerged, which is understandable given that the students were well into the IFP when they posted their last vlogs and participated in the last rounds of interviews. Five of the eight students (Bolu, Ife, Dele, Kamsi and Simi) all had vlogs with posts talking about 'self':

Grace: So do I ever reflect on what I'm learning? Not much...I'm just trying to take each day at a time, good or bad. ('Gee in Progress', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Ayo: ... Yes, I can see myself changing, shifting, and this has definitely not been easy but, no, I won't say that I pay much attention to that ...('Ayo Explains 'IL' All', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Zayda: ...how I see myself...to question how I learn...(10 Things IFP Taught Me', Vlog 3)

Kamsi: ...so starting to believe in myself...in my ability... ('Becoming and Being Independent', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Simi: it's developing, each day I find myself more and more not thinking so much about my grades, about passing exams. ('Life with Independent Learning', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Of all the students, Bolu, Ife and Dele were the most reflexive about their experience of independent learning. They seemed to be the most inclined to learn from those experiences as part of understanding independent learning. They saw themselves as learners first and foremost, and saw everything in their college environment and their experience of them as opportunities for learning, for growth and for development. They talked, almost with excitement, about all the things they

can become presently in college and beyond college, all because of this experience of taking more control of their learning. They conceded that it was only after they had spent a few months studying at college that they started to develop a more confident view of learning and their place in it.

Bolu admitted that although she feels connected to learning in all her classes, she is

...most confident in the subjects that I do as optional courses and as learning enrichment. Just anything that doesn't have to do with science per se. (Interview with Bolu, 04/04/17)

Ife expressed that she reflected more about herself as a learner when she experienced learning situations in college in which she had to use prior concepts from previous learning in secondary school as a starting point to make sense of the present topic. Similar to her, Dele said being exposed to independent learning is helping him nurture and sustain a sense of self that he was previously unaware of:

Dele: Before I came here, I always felt that passing is everything...now I don't think it's THE MOST [emphasis his] important thing about learning...here, I feel more and more like...passing a test is way down that list, now I'm just thinking, my priority is what am I expected to know about this topic, how can I understand this, how can I use the knowledge in different ways, so that I can explain it, stuff like that. And for me, it lifts the pressure. ('Newbie's Guide to College Life', Vlog 3)

When discussing specific experiences of building myself during the interviews, most of the students readily described instances within college where this mostly occurred. Students' personal accounts centred on constructs of self-concept and self-efficacy as involved in experiences of building myself. Grace described how present moments of experiencing independent learning built on some of the learning she experienced in secondary school and how these experiences help her understand who she is as a learner.

I did foundation maths here. It's not like I chose to but my college has it as one of the core subjects for the first term, no matter what pathway you're going for ...I hated maths all through secondary school. And that's why I decided to study law.... I guess the idea came from years and years of maths teachers telling me that I don't know it, that I can't do higher level, you know, that sort of thing - in the end, that's what I believed. (Interview with Grace, 04/04/17)

Ayo talked about learning skills in his computational maths course which is making him able to reflect on what he is learning in topics like calculus, and he further noted how that personal growth associated with transformational self-beliefs brought forth a sense of 'building myself':

...in differential calculus I can use those skills, because the tasks are problem-based, it makes me feel the teacher allows me to use my skills to find the answer, so it's not like he has these sets of answers that I should memorise. I'm doing this myself, becoming a 'math-magician. (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

If I don't believe that I can learn that thing then how can I? It's about believing in my myself, that I can own my own learning, that everything that I'm learning in college is helping me grow and develop as a learner... I'm beginning to understand my own unique way of learning. (Interview with Zayda, 04/04/17)

Many of the students also attributed attitude towards transformation and identity to the influence of significant others which is similar to evidence in the research about the influence of social network on self-actualisation and educational motivation. Comments from their teachers, parents and peers played a role in the way they saw themselves and shaped their evaluations of their learning successes and failures. Simi spoke about how involved their parents were in their learning but some did not find that this was always helpful.

When I got low marks in my mocks, my mom was very upset and called me after the college sent her my mock results. She was like, 'Your dad and I did very well in school and we're doing well in

our professions as well so you cannot be different'. In a way it made me feel like, so after all this effort I put in, after studying so hard, I didn't as well, maybe I'm just not as smart as they think I am. (Interview with Simi, 24/07/17)

Bolu mentioned how positive affirmations from teachers nurtured her belief in herself,

All my teachers throughout the time I was in secondary always said the same thing, 'Bolu, you're smart, Bolu you know this...the teachers would always collect my books to show. So I started to believe that too, that I'm smart...So sometimes I won't put in that extra effort because I feel, like why do I need to? And that's when I started to struggle, when I came here. Here, they don't know me like my teachers did... (Interview with Bolu, 24/07/17)

Kamsi and Zayda both explained that doing very well in her mocks and course work helped them see academic growth in themselves. Dele, described building myself as something he did whenever he believed in himself and his abilities and understanding that he was experiencing growth every time he completed work independently and received good outcomes. However, he noted that this changed slightly when he struggled with a particular topic:

I look at it as, hey, today wasn't so good, and pray that tomorrow will be a chance to have another go at it. (Interview with Dele, 04/04/17)

So, according to him, he had to keep reaffirming to himself that he was: *'doing my best.'*

The students were unanimous in expressing that the process of building myself led them to a better understanding and a positive perception of independent learning. They stated in their vlogs that their experience of independent learning was very much tied to their understanding of themselves as learners, how they see learning and their role in learning. Five of the students summed it up in the following ways:

Simi: *It's meant that I am knowing who I am as a learner, and me I know now can do it.* ('Life with Independent Learning', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Kamsi: *I think it gives me a focus on what I'm doing and why I'm seeing who I'm becoming now.* ('Becoming and Being Independent', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Zayda: *So Number 8: It allows you to be a less anxious learner. To enjoy learning. I never thought that you could actually enjoy academic learning...When you spend so much time thinking about passing or failing you'll have no time to enjoy the experience.* ('10 Things IFP Taught Me', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Ayo: *I guess I didn't know that I actually enjoy learning. I look forward to using those skills now. I don't think you can learn as much if you don't identify who you are as a learner.* ('Ayo Explains 'IL' All', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

Ife: *I feel like when I'm thinking that I'm in charge of my own learning then it just flows. I'm able to plan ahead of the lesson, I participate in class, I'm focused, and I'm confident in myself that I will do well.* ('Ife's Independent Life', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

5.3 Discussion

The students in this study have identified challenging preconceived attitudes as critical in initiating and nurturing independent learning. The students succeeded in challenging their preconceptions about independent learning without becoming disillusioned with college study. Crucially, the students' perception of independent learning as they progressed in and neared the end of college was in part due to progress with independent learning competence. Mainly because they overcame preconceptions through the experience of learning to deal with emotions, adjust to new learning, value independent learning and build themselves. Each of the eight students who participated in the study described how their first experience of independent learning in college changed their preconceptions of and approaches to learning. The findings also give prominence to the students' changing role in

learning which influenced their expectations of college. My findings suggest that generally, students' beliefs about and attitude towards knowledge and learning are shaping their experience of independent learning at college and what they understand by this experience. My findings led to three major conclusions. The first is that students' preconceptions evolved as they experienced independent learning. The second is that, the students' understanding and experience of independent learning consisted of the intersection between students' perceptions and attitudes, which ultimately determined their affective experience of independent learning. The third is that as students' preconceptions evolve, their learning approaches transform and their academic performance improves as an affordance of this evolution and transformation.

Students come into college with beliefs about knowledge and learning related to affective experiences in their encounter with independent learning. This draws on the idea of transforming experience in ELT (refer to 'Learning as transforming experience, p. 51). Their experiences had a significant impact on their approaches to learning and academic performance. The students' experiences highlight the relatedness of epistemological beliefs, their beliefs about their independent learning experiences, and self-efficacy for independent learning (Hofer and Stern, 2016; Pintrich, 2004), and how these affective experiences enable the students to interpret and reflect upon independent learning. Students' preconceptions about independent learning result from prior experiences, from secondary school in this instance, which are sometimes resistant to change (Lucariello & Naff, 2013), and as such, challenging them can shape students' understanding of learning which is a central idea throughout the thesis. Secondary students' expectations in particular can often be at odds with the reality of college and higher education (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Khattab, 2015; Merisotis and Phipps, 2000). This links with ideas from social cognition, which point to the distinction between "the potential environment and the environment people actually experience" (Bandura, 1999, p. 158). Students' views are shaped by perceptions toward new learning approaches and their ability to understand and use them and this can influence their overall learning experiences

of college study. Furthermore, as described by Ayo and Grace, their preconceptions about independent learning as an approach to learning were often inconsistent with reality of independent learning and these beliefs can influence students' affective experiences. The study results reflect strongly the literature related to expectation from self-determination theory (see Section 2.5) and notions of expectation described and explained by vicarious and forethought capability (Section 2.6.2 & 2.6.3). These support my argument that preconceptions of students at college might not be dissimilar to those of students at university, and are therefore not bound in time or space. Few students demonstrate an ability to make a seamless transition from school to college. For most of the students, concerns about self-responsibility, new learning, engaging with new material, acquiring a new set of skills or fear of failure were significant. Over time, individuals strive to adapt to new situations and have certain expectations met, based upon prior experiences or preconceived notions acquired in the course of their existence as human beings. International students' adjustments in England, in particular, seem to have transformative aspects related to the international student journey (Brown, 2009). In a learning context, preconceptions impact on students' ability to appraise and reflect on their learning which could enable or hinder their academic performance (Lew & Schmidt, 2011).

Generally, most students in this study shared Dele's and Zayda's misconceptions about what independent learning entails (see 'Adjusting' p. 160), some believing that they are expected to take responsibility for their own learning activities without supervision or guidance from teachers and have difficulty making the connection between old and new learning experiences. Two things might happen during encounters with independent learning; such experiences may be filed away, confirmed or reinforced and embedded if they meet students' preconceptions, or broken down to gain deeper understanding of independent learning and evaluated to examine the validity of initial preconceptions (Woodford, 2016). These beliefs influenced the way in which the students (positively/negatively) perceived the learning they would do in college, explains why they were struggling or succeeding as independent learners, influenced the strategies and techniques they applied to

independent learning in college, and generally impacted on their academic outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2010).

Students have emotions which are related to affective experiences of independent learning. These affect how experiences are linked to their self-efficacy and their learning (as described in Section 2.6.4). In their review of literature, Pekrun et al (2002) found that the literature is limited in highlighting achievement-related emotions. As a result of their own study they found that ‘academic emotions are significantly related to students self-regulation’ (2002, p. 91) and that ‘emotions influence students’ cognitive processes and performance...’ (2002, p. 92). They examined ‘hopelessness’ and ‘frustration’ as two of the negative emotions associated with learning processes experienced by students, which corresponds to the findings from this study. Crucially, however, they were not affected negatively in students, but seen by them as opportunities for transformation. Hernandez-Martinez & Williams (2013) identify similar emotions related to resilience in mathematics students during a period of academic transition from school to college to university. The overall impact of negative emotions on students’ learning has shown that it hinders the nurturing of self-regulation while facilitating students’ reliance on teachers beyond the provision of an enabling environment for guidance in completing learning tasks and meeting learning goals (Wolters, 2003). Furthermore, emotions shape experience of learning. In some cases it can improve learning by increasing student’ motivation to work to overcome those irrational emotions, which could lead to increased performances in future learning situations.

Feeling incapable is an affective construct associated with feelings fostered by doubt and low confidence about one’s ability to succeed at something and a fear of failing at it. Some of those doubts arose from the students’ inability to make links between their prior knowledge and new knowledge, emotions often exacerbated by FE environments, such as the IFP, which can be fertile ground for sustaining such emotions. As they progressed in college, some of the students (see Ayo and Grace’s comments about preconceptions resurfacing on p. 162) found that it was not enough

that they were willing to learn how to learn independently, they also had to be able to do this and their perceived inability to led to a resurfacing of preconceptions about learning in college.

This is related to students' preconceptions about independent learning and their learning experiences. This reflects the literature that suggests that individual dispositions to independent learning vary, with some students flourishing in group projects while some are more inclined to individual projects. Something that Kamsi alluded to when she mentioned her experience in tutor group work (p.177). The students' inability to define or describe specific independent learning skills they felt they lacked was considered secondary to their desire to develop independent learning as a valuable skill for college and to sustain these skills for use in their future learning at university.

Students' affective experience involved a period of adjustment. Nevertheless, they continued to have doubts over their independent learning ability because of their belief that using this learning approach will benefit them in college and beyond. Related to Bandura's (1997) notion that some individuals have a stronger belief than others that they can organise and execute a given task. However, Bandura notes that this can be dependent on the level of difficulty or ease of the task. This is consistent with findings from a doctoral study (Cukurova, 2014) conducted with first-year undergraduate students studying Chemistry. She finds that regardless of students' inability to explain what they understand or identify as an 'independent learning ability' they were willing to adapt to this approach as they saw present and future benefits of this approach to learning.

Findings that reveal student's beliefs about their competence and ability, their fear of failure and sense of adapting to new learning approaches in order to take command of their outcomes are elements of challenging preconceived attitudes, and they parallel the concepts identified within self-efficacy theory. The focus is on the impact of an individuals' confidence in their ability – expectation of success. An

individuals' expectation of success or failure lies in a 'locus of control' (Anderson, Hattie and Hamilton, 2005; Stipek, 1980) and this explains the competence that develops from one's ability to control achievement outcomes. This is supported by the findings in this study which uncovers college students' fear of failing as a result of doubts about their competence and ability to adopt an autonomous approach to their learning. Their fear of failing has also been shown to result from their inability to make appropriate connections between prior and new knowledge. Even though independent learning is conceptualised as giving students more autonomy and more control over their learning (Walker, 2015), students felt they were incapable of taking and maximising that control because of a fear of failure and an overdependence on teachers borne out of their secondary school experience. Suggesting that the IFP might have failed to sufficiently address its aims for independent learning development and students had not embraced the independent learning culture of the IFP

Through independent learning experience, students learnt to value themselves. The findings suggest that their views evolve when they considered the learning approach used in the IFP as an 'experience-based' approach which has a transformative impact on their development as learners, on their academic performance, and on their academic outcomes. Findings are similar to ELT concepts of grasping and transforming experience (see Section 2.4) which suggest that learning which changes the way the way an individual sees themselves, what they consider as knowledge and how they acquire knowledge, and how they are transformed can be borne out of experience (Boud, Keogh and walker, 2013; Kolb, 2015; Mezirow, 1991). Houle (1980:11) suggests that:

[Learning is] 'the process by which people gain knowledge, sensitiveness, or mastery of skills through experience of study'

The quote supports the findings which show that students' growing appreciation of independent learning was as result of their anticipation of attaining mastery in the

subjects they are studying. This attitude was a deviation from their beginning attitudes which, based on their secondary school experiences, placed more value on a results-based demonstration of learning. Similar to the FE learners in the Towler, Woolner and Wall (2011) study and the school-aged learners in the Ritchhart, Turner and Hadar (2009) study, students expressed that they had privileged surface-level learning over deep-level conceptions of learning prior to their experience of independent learning (see students comments about this on pp. 162-163. Also, Dele's comments, p. 182: "*Before I came here, I always felt that passing is everything*"). This might be because students at the initial stages of college study are more inclined to seek instant gratification for learning which might come about as a result of the choices they make about which learning approaches and techniques suit them best (Bembenutty and Karabenick, 2004). Furthermore, individuals who attain such levels of mastery feel successful and are likely to persist in those activities that generate such feelings (Deci & Ryan, 1985a; Paige et al., 2017). The importance of motivation for expertise was highlighted multiple times in the vlogs and interviews excerpts above. I have established that the classroom setting was a valuable site to promote this but they also defined independent and self-study periods away from class as equally important academic settings where they experienced motivation to attain expertise and the significance of teacher presence on their experience.

The findings from 'building myself' speaks about the way college students transform themselves actively or intentionally as one of the affordances of their changing preconceptions and their experiences of independent learning. This is comparable with ELT which identifies that learning and development arise from and transform through students' ability to overcome preconceptions about learning situations and their behaviours in response to these and fostering self-concept, which as Bong & Skaalvik (2003) described "*represents one's general perceptions of self in given domains of functioning*" (p. 5).

As mentioned, student beliefs and demonstrated response to independent learning was central to understanding and experiencing independent learning. Many of the students involved in this study attributed some of their self-concept and self-efficacy to their encounter with independent learning and expectations of mastery as an affordance of that encounter. Similar to the scales Bandura (2006) applied to his model of self-efficacy, almost all the students in my research described how marginal successes they have in their daily study reinforce their increasing self-belief. The students spoke about developing how they viewed their teachers as experts, as ‘masters’, and how they expected to attain a certain level of mastery themselves before they can consider themselves to be independent learners. Bandura makes the point about how ‘mastery expectations’ (Bandura, 2006, p. 194) is one way in which individuals create self-efficacy, bolstered by repeated successes. Bolu expressed this in ‘Independently Me’, Vlog 2, 08/05/17:

I think I've learnt more about who I am, what I'm capable of, since I started college...I guess I've kind of understood what it [independent learning] means cos I'm living it, day by day, and I've learnt sort of like by trial and error really, what works and what doesn't... but I'm glad because its helped me to see myself...

The more positive a student’s self-concept and self-efficacy, the more they are engaged with and motivated in learning and the better their academic functioning and outcomes (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Similarly, students who described an increase in their self-belief also described how their immediate success and long-term expectations of continued high academic performance increased their motivation for independent learning. For them, these moments of successes were demonstrated in both individual and shared domains, as described in community of practice (Section 2.7). The students’ self-belief was linked to the shared experiences they had with their peers; a feeling that they were *all in it together* and that they shared each other’s successes and failures. Albeit to a lesser degree. The students were more inclined to seek validation about their own abilities rather than from comparison with peers. This is akin to what Bandura refers to as “vicarious

experience” (Section 2.7.2); a sense that observing others succeed or fail can serve as motivation to push them harder to succeed. The students described this connection in reciprocal terms. The community they describe is one in which they learnt from each other to develop as learners:

I think it's something like group projects, we learn from each other, if one member is not able to do something there's someone who can put them through (Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17).

During tutorials, they got a chance to listen to their peers explain a given topic and discuss their study approach to understanding that topic. The positive feedback and high marks those classmates received from teachers affirmed that classmate's success and the rest of the class who scored were motivated to adopt similar strategies. Many of the students described the relatedness of teacher presence, and teacher and peer-generated feedback to how they regard themselves as independent learners. Students' accounts of satisfaction, interest, boredom and anxiety resulting from teacher/peer connections related to their self-efficacy affect. The students who described satisfaction with and interest in their learning tended to have stronger self-belief than those who did not. Students' boredom and anxiety are known to be heightened when their actual performances fall short of teacher and peer affirmation of their academic performance (Eren & Coskun, 2016). Rayner & Devi (2001) describe the influence students' prejudgements about expected standards not matching “one's own traits and accomplishments” (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 3) and doubts about whether or not they have what it takes to be considered independent learners, through intrinsic and extrinsic domains. Students had similar experiences about their perceived abilities as independent learners stemming from prior experience, with expectations that this would be the same in college. However, they quickly became concerned that the skills they acquired in secondary school back home were not adequate or relevant to college study in the UK. Furthermore, they measured their performance and accomplishments against those of their peers not only in the IFP programme but also in the A levels programme. They also

compared the levels of their study skills against the perceived standards expected at college level.

The students described how they felt their high grades at WASSCE gave them the confidence that they could do well in college. But at the same time, they shared concerns that they needed to elevate their academic levels in order to get into university at the end of their IFP. Some described a feeling of pressure from the involvement of significant others (parents and teachers) regarding their learning at college as well as seeking affirmation of their ability as college learners from them. Others were concerned about university expectations related to cognitive abilities, study skills (Fairbairn & Winch, 1996), and attain a certain level of autonomy at the end of college study and this further motivated them to study work harder. One of the ways the students did this was by ‘adjusting [themselves]’ by seeking ways to accept greater personal responsibility for their education. This is different from Kettley’s (2007:187) summation of his findings regarding A/AS-level study students:

‘[they] did not become autonomous learners and usually refused to accept personal responsibility for their education’.

One reason for this could be the difference in delivery and or outcome expectations of both IFP and A-level study programmes. Or, it could be that there are differences between the expectations and attitudes of IFP students who are predominantly international students and their peers in A level study who are predominately home students. These are interesting premises past the remit of this study, but worthy of future exploration.

Rogoff et al. (2003) suggest that learning levels are raised through students’ participation in community activities. They described how certain conditions foster this sense of shared academic community. Several students involved in my study attributed the sense of a community of independent learning to their reliance on the international capital they brought to the IFP, which helped them control what/how

they thought of their learning. Through this, they felt empowered to set realistic learning outcomes, structure learning activities to achieve them and carry out self-assessment of their learning. These feelings also fit within the concept of ELT. Many described the accessibility and availability of their teachers as a determining factor in building confidence in them. The college ethos of developing the whole student as creative and independent thinkers can be manifested through building on students' regard for independent learning by sustaining an enabling environment in which teachers improve on their availability to students, encourage student participation in learning activities and provide positive and on-going reinforcement (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). This suggests that teachers, far from having a passive role in independent learning, have a crucial role to play in engendering communities of learners and neutralise students' prejudgements about independent learning as an endeavour devoid of teacher supervision.

A student's ability to neutralise preconceptions and expectations of learning is an important factor that shapes their overall experience of independent learning (Kember, 2000). My study indicates value of the learning environment shapes students' understanding and experience of independent learning and their academic self-concept and self-efficacy facilitates the development and sustainment of independent learning. Similarly, although using high school students as a sample set, Dart et al., (2000) found that there were "important associations" (p.267) existing between the students' conceptions of learning, their approaches to learning and their academic outcomes.

Students in their vlogs showed strong positive regard as a response to independent learning in college related to this. The students posted about how the teaching context and college environment was different from secondary school and that this helped to neutralise preconceptions they had, enabling them to begin to regard independent learning more positively. They said this enabled them to develop a deeper meaning and understanding of the learning content. Several students described in the interviews how the shared bonds with peers and the positive

interaction they had with teachers fostered a sense of belonging and helped to build confidence in their abilities to develop as independent learners.

5.4 Chapter Summary

The key findings of this chapter indicate that Nigerian IFP students' challenging preconceived attitudes about independent learning is how they experience and come to understand independent learning. Furthermore, this might follow a similar pattern of affective experiences observed in university students elsewhere. There are links between students' beliefs prior to starting college study, students' approaches to learning in college as a result of these beliefs, and students' academic performance/outcomes as a consequence of those beliefs and highlights affective experiences evolving as they progress in their college study.

Chapter 6: EXTENDING ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Introduction

Extending engagement describes Nigerian IFP students' connection with independent learning in relation to the behaviour dimension of independent learning experience. The students describe how they develop approaches for responding to the learning they are being introduced to in college; not only by taking pride in their development as learners, but also by recognising the affordances of independent learning that go beyond good or bad exam marks.

The students' approaches were based on their understandings of on-going independent learning experiences, and the way they responded to these encounters. The students described what extending engagement in independent learning is to them; how becoming engaged in their learning helps them develop persistence in the face of daily challenges with independent work; and how college best fosters engagement opportunities for Nigerian IFP students for whom the independent learning principles are unfamiliar.

Students also expressed how *Extending engagement* contributes to experiencing and understanding independent learning and how this promotes becoming and being an independent learner. Holding at the same time, notions of their individual capacities for learning independence and their transformation to independent learners, triggering a feeling of satisfaction related to their experience of independent learning and perceived affordances of this experience.

6.2 Findings

Alongside *Challenging perceptions*, *Extending engagement* was developed as an important theme related to significant connections and experiences Nigerian IFP students had with independent learning as they settled into FE. This analysis framed their behaviours and attitudes as a product of the ever-present dependent/independent continuum of learning experience. It offers a new paradigm

to interpret changing student experiences in a particular set of learners who enter college with specific beliefs and expectations about college study, which distinguishes them from their peers who are home students and A-level students.

The strategies that adopt in response to extending engagement are similar to those that they adopt to understand independent learning. However, all the students described three conditions necessary for them to extend engagement- ‘developing persistence’, ‘finding satisfaction’ and ‘psyching myself’ (see figure 17). As with the previous theme, students described where and how (in relation to engagement with independent learning within the IFP) they persist, ‘psych’ themselves and feel satisfied with independent learning, gave accounts of specific experiences of this, and expressed these as outcomes of extended engagement. Developing persistence, psyching themselves and finding satisfaction are identified as stronger predictors for extending student engagement, beyond the all too common paradigm of student involvement (Astin, 1984; Garland, 2010; Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013).

Students developed a nuanced sense and understanding independent learning and took active steps to extend engagement with this experience of independent learning. Positivity became attached to their engagement in independent learning and important to sustain engagement as one of the outcomes of independent learning. The students were all engaged but their descriptions of persisting in study, encouraging and urging themselves on, and satisfaction become all the more compelling when we connect them to the concept of independence in learning.

Students engage in a great variety of ways, to varying degrees of effectiveness and success, in independent learning. Of crucial importance is the broadening of our understanding of these variations in relation to extending engagement as a significant component of independent learning experience. They also indicate that extending engagement is a key response to their on-going encounter to independent learning. The students began to cultivate a sense of belonging, an identity as confident learners aware of what is the best fit for them in terms of learning

preferences, satisfaction in the acknowledgement of self as co-creators and enablers of knowledge and as active members of a community of learners, who are involved participants in study activities in college. In some cases, students were satisfied that they were becoming more receptive to independent learning, but had less satisfaction when the outcome of independent learning was tied to test marks. The lower the marks, the less satisfied they were with their level of engagement.

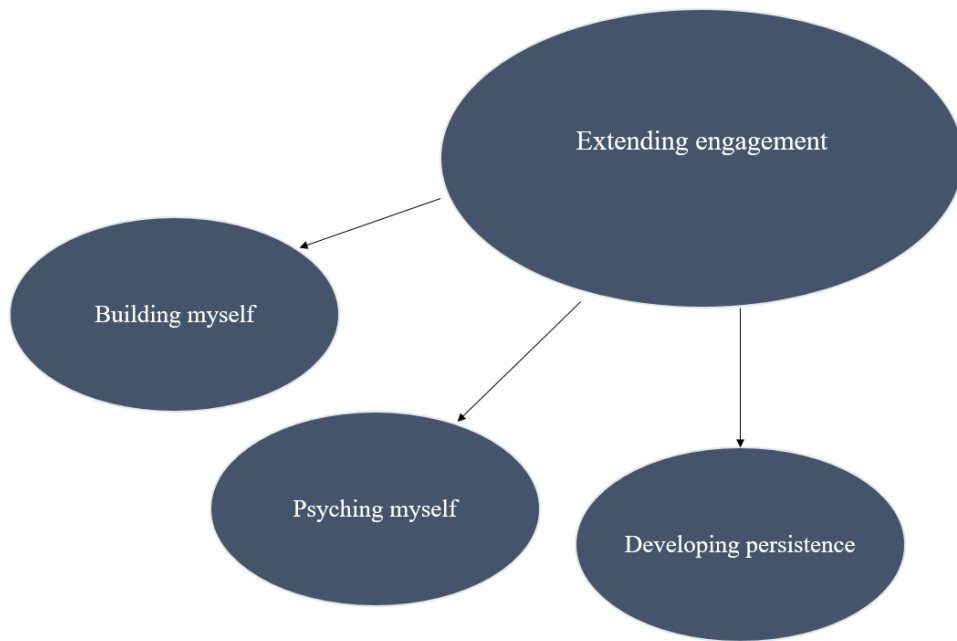


Figure 17. Extending engagement cycle

Extending engagement thus furthers what is widely known about student engagement in studies carried out in higher education- that students engagement is tied to the ‘surface-strategic-deep triad’ (Marton and Säljö, 1976), the ‘engagement-alienation dyad’ (Mann, 2001 p.7), and the ‘student involvement’ paradigm (Krause, 2005).

6.2.1 Developing persistence

Developing persistence was one of the ways students extended engagement with independent learning. Crucially, it was an important factor in students' understanding of independent learning. Particularly when they experience independent study. Each student stated that they had about 19 hours of contact time every week and they usually spent an average of 10 to 16 hours per week on independent study. Much of this was done before mocks and during study leave (a period of revision time away from regular contact time on examination days when the students either studied in the library/study spaces on-campus or studied at home.

It was found that there were a number of factors which influenced students' persistence: willingness; stimulating tasks; and stimulating environments. The students describe it in this way:

Bolu: You have to be willing to try and try again because there'll be initial difficulties. Especially for anyone that wants to be a medic. I'm not saying that I'll be happy making mistakes as a doctor o! [laughs]. I mean, when I got some modules, it was hard to see where to begin but it was important for me to be WILLING [emphasis Bolu's] to learn, WILLING [emphasis Bolu's] to make mistakes. For someone like me, going to school in Nigeria, you had to get all your equations right, all your measurements and titrations right, no room for error. One mistake in one subject in an end-of-year exam can make you lose that one mark that would make you not reach the cut-off mark for promotion to the next class. When you submit an essay to the teacher, that's it...You can't get it back, you know, to revise it and make it better. That's it. So you couldn't afford to make mistakes, especially at SS level; everything must be correct first time. Independent learning in college is teaching me that mistakes are part of the learning process. ('Independently Me, Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Ife: ... we have problem-based tasks that give us independence in planning our work. So of course we make some mistakes along the way, but we learn from them; the teachers even ask us to build them into tasks and proposals and stuff, like, you know, what could go wrong, do you have a plan for if something goes wrong, how can you fix it? Here's a flow chart that I designed for a group

project last month [holds up a flowchart reproduced below-Figure 18]. It's for a poster that we did about bio-organic strategies to address environmental degradation. I'll include a link for it below in the description box. You can see I have a symbol there for mistakes [points to a part of the chart and puts the chart down]. Yeah, we made some mistakes but that's okay. We've learnt more from them than if we hadn't. Plus, it's almost like it's important for the teacher to see that we can learn from our mistakes. If you're willing to learn from it, then you can be easy on yourself and realise that you're not perfect and that you can learn with the right guidance and the right strategies and become a better student... ('Ife's Independent Life', Vlog 3, 09/05/17)

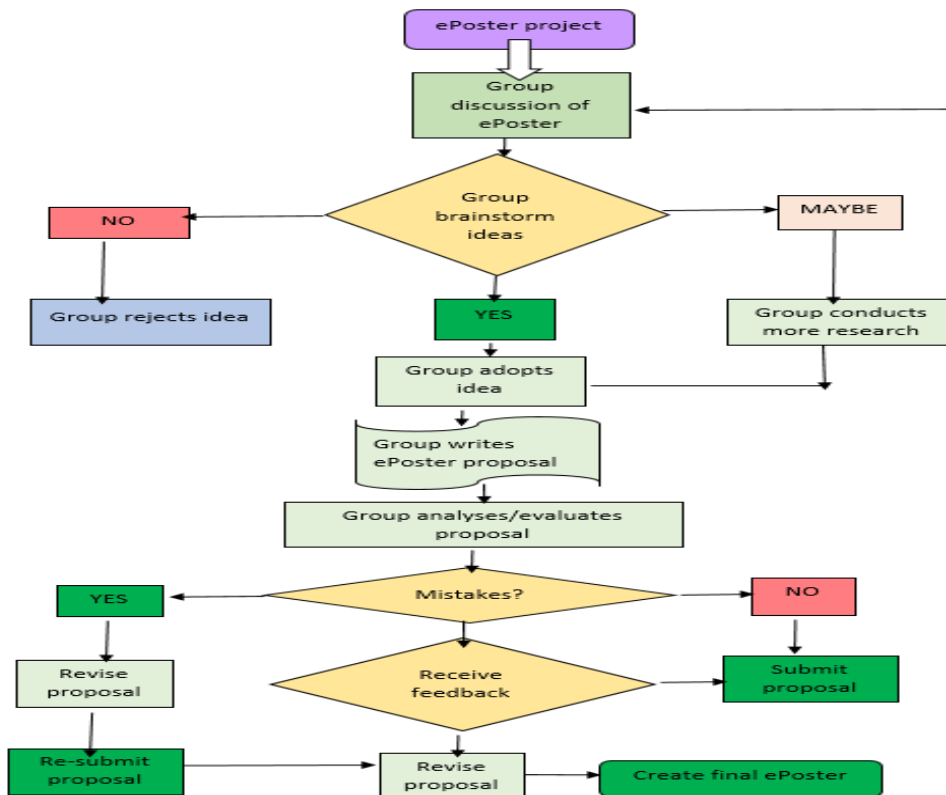


Figure 18. Ife's flowchart for a college poster project showing how mistakes are built into the design.

Bolu and Ife also explained that persistence was a driving force to help achieve their academic goals – passing their final exams and getting into the university of their choice- and influenced their becoming more adept at independent learning.

Although Ife expressed that she could see that her goals and becoming an independent learner were not mutually exclusive, she understood how achieving these goals would be as a direct consequence of sustained independent learning activities.

Bolu expressed how high motivation, engagement and interest to keep putting in the effort and practice were needed to develop her independent learning skills. This in her opinion, is an outcome of persistence:

...it [persisting] goes hand in hand with willingness, you know. I want to be the best that I can be so I motivate myself to continue, to show interest, be more involved, to keep trying, to put in the effort, practice more to improve...but it helps that the college is promoting independent learning and teachers are teaching us strategies to develop these skills. I think my persistence is helping me extend my engagement with independent learning, otherwise I don't know how I will have continued. (Interview with Bolu, 04/04/17)

Ife explained that the higher her sense of self-efficacy the longer she was willing to persist in independent learning:

I have a target, so I set myself goals to achieve it...This ability to increase my engagement with the type of learning we're doing here...I learnt that from my dad...and I can't begin to think that I will not perform well on any task or that it's too difficult. Because if I doubt myself, then I will lose interest in it [learning] and that will make me not place any value on any work I'm given and I won't continue to do it...but sha², it depends on if I really like the subject or if it's a research project [laughs], I'm sorry [laughs], I know that I shouldn't see it that way, I know that all

² Nigerian slang meaning 'though', 'anyway', or 'like that'

subjects and activities are important, but sometimes it's difficult not to. (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

Ayo spoke about how he expected to succeed in his final exams and why his persistence in independent learning made him a better student,

I want to do well in my final exam, but I can also see how persisting in independent learning, apart from getting top marks, is making me a better student. (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

However, was of the view that overconfidence in one's ability can prevent one from developing persistence:

If it's a topic I've done before I don't go beyond engaging in class, because I have this belief that I know it, no matter what, I can't fail it. I remember one time, we were learning a new application of derivatives in calculus, but because I felt that I was already good at this, I didn't pay much attention to develop those skills he was teaching. So when he gave us an assignment, I struggled to complete it. But I learnt after that that overconfidence is just as bad as no confidence. (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

Developing persistence was a construct Dele, Grace, Simi and Kamsi also described in their vlogs. Related to extending engagement in independent learning, the students mentioned that stimulating activities that incorporated opportunities for reflection, time management, organisational strategies and goal setting were key to developing persistence.

Dele: There will be rough days; a low grade, a negative feedback, and so on. Spotting your mistakes when the teacher gives you feedback, even after you know that you have engaged in a lesson, will be very demoralising...which is why reflection is important. So look at that feedback, read it well, most times the teacher's feedback shows you where you went wrong and points you in the right direction. One teacher will also give you verbal suggestions in class for coping with mistakes and help you see it as part of

learning, of doing better next time. Then ask yourself: Why did I get a low mark? Is it that I didn't understand the question? What can I do next time to correct these mistakes, and so on... ('Newbie's Guide to College Life', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Grace: I have found that I don't do as well on independent work when I misjudge the amount of time needed to complete it. My mum said that's why I had to learn to develop time-management skills. One time, I had to submit an essay and I gave myself one week to do it. Bad idea. It took me almost one week to prep for it, gather all my sources...I didn't start writing until about a day to submission. That's when I looked at the question again I found out that I had completely misread it. Because it was so close to deadline, I had to submit it like that and no surprises, I got a 45. I felt bad, but only because I knew that if I'd read the question properly then I would have searched for different sources to support my answer. And if I had given myself more than a couple of days to prep, I would have had more time to do a proper job. ('Gee in Progress', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

This long exchange with Kamsi illustrates the importance of goal-setting but is also instructive about the on-going challenge of implementing those skills that the students themselves mention as crucial to developing as independent learners:

Kamsi: I like that at the beginning of every week my personal tutor makes me set achievable goals because they have to be things I am confident that I can achieve...she explained the difference between performance and mastery goals...

Loretta: So there's a difference?

K: Yes, because you can have a goal just to pass exams which is different from learning because you want to or because you want to understand or putting in more effort to improve in your learning

L: So how does the differentiation between the two help you develop persistence?

K: It helps me identify and focus on what's more important in my learning, to persist when things are challenging or even when I fail, it helps me to learn the value of independent learning approaches for not just now but for when I go to uni, to develop more effective ways for learning. It's not like doing well on a test is not important anymore to me but it goes back to thinking about what I'm learning and why...

L: So why do you learn?

K: [laughs and covers her mouth] So, I know that if I've grown as a learner I should say 'because I want to understand' but to be honest, right now it's just about passing the final and getting a place at uni. (Interview with Kamsi, 04/04/17)

More specifically for Ayo and Zayda, a stimulating environment increased their willingness to develop independent learning strategies. Both gave specific instances where reflection and discussion opportunities were built into each lesson and each assignment and test. Also, where there were opportunities for questioning to uncover and dispel their misconceptions about a topic/about approaches to learning/about their identities as learners. They stated how self-assessment opportunities were built into assigned tasks. According to them, networks that foster a learning community in the IFP were important of the. They recognised the effort they put into independent learning regardless of outcomes. All these contributed to the students' persistence which shows a deeper engagement with their understanding of independent learning.

In the excerpts above, all the students demonstrated how they gauged their persistence with independent learning, not just on their behaviours, but responded based on their assessment of their interactions with either parents, teachers and personal tutor. Ife's conversation with her father below best illustrates this:

[Describing a conversation with her father just weeks into college] 'I told him that the standard is different here. Like what's expected of you as a student, and I'm not thinking in terms of just

different because it's college. It's different from Nigeria and sometimes I feel that's the reason I'm not coping well; I'm lacking the basics unlike the home students. So sometimes I think I'm not intelligent enough. But my dad, keeps telling me that intelligence is not for only one person or for one day and that getting a low score one day or not understanding something one day does not mean that this is the case forever and that it's not fixed, that it can change...

...Funny enough, my tutor says the same thing: Ife, as you develop as a learner some things you learn will make sense immediately, some things will not and you will want to concentrate on these. But even those things you think you do well in you need to keep practicing, and those things that you think you're rubbish at, you will also get better at if you persist in using the skills you're learning now. That's how I understand independent learning, as moving from one extreme to another, and vice versa some days I can learn with little or no guidance. Other days I need more guidance. It's on those days that I tell myself that I have to keep trying harder (Interview with Ife, 04/04/17)

6.2.2 'Psyching myself'

Psyching myself is a term first introduced by Dele. In the initial stage of analysing the data I failed to pick up on the significance of Dele's use of the phrase 'psyching myself'. But as I developed greater insights into motivation as a critical component of independent learning understanding, I went back to the original transcript of the data and recoded it in light of additional knowledge. Although none of the other students used this specific term to describe their encounter to independent learning in relation to the theme Extending engagement, they all gave accounts about the self-directed mental preparations they carried out daily to get themselves ready for learning and external support they give or receive, about encouraging and urging themselves and each other on.

Dele stated that, as he also tells himself, he often reminds his peers to avoid negative thoughts but to think positive and to always push themselves to improve even when things seem difficult to learn. However, there are some differences in how students

use this strategy of ‘psyching’ themselves. Dele mentioned that his preparation for learning included watching TED Talks videos every other week:

I don't know if you've watched any of the Ted videos. There's this video by Sir Ken Robinson where he talks about reforming the education system. Can I show you? [I say yes and he searches Ted.com for the video and fast forwards to about the 15:30 min mark]. I like the way he says the future is about 'creating a movement in education in which people develop their own solutions based on a personalised curriculum'. There's also an interesting video by Sugata Mitra about how learners are capable of solving problems with the right guidance. I watch a lot of videos like these to motivate myself. So I know that the college has a major part to play, but so do I and videos like these help me in psyching myself up, you know, telling myself that I can do this, that I can do more than the teacher tells me, you know, go beyond what the books say...Extending engagement with the learning... (Interview with Dele, 04/04/17)

The strategies that students reported that they used to psych themselves can be divided into inner motivation and outer motivation. Inner motivation is where the student engages in learning by focusing on their own mental processes. These include using self-talk as a strategy to affirm themselves and their ability to succeed, imagining themselves as independent learners, and seeing themselves as future undergraduates. Outer motivation arises from encouragement outside the student. According to the students, these include peer involvement, inspirational (gospel) music listened to on the way to class and when working during independent study, and watching inspirational vlogs.

Many of them explained that experiencing with independent learning had more to do with how they geared up for learning than they had expected before coming to college. They expressed how they pushed through by encouraging themselves and each other to improve independent learning skills, by creating mental images of themselves as independent learners not just in college but beyond, and by taking

active steps to set goals and develop strategies for overcoming any obstacles they perceive as preventing them from achieving independence.

Grace and Ayo both mentioned how one of the biggest obstacles for going beyond engagement is not independent learning itself; apart from their difficulty in adjusting to it, is finding the motivation to persist in learning these new (unfamiliar) skills. For them it is important what they believe about themselves as learners not just in college but beyond it as well.

You know what's weird, finding ways to tell yourself 'I can do this' when you're brand new to college. After smashing my SSCE, to come here and it's like I don't know anything. I mean it can you bring you down to earth. Make you think, 'I can't' or 'I don't belong here'. But I'm not a quitter. So sometimes, I tell myself that I'm strong, but I don't know why I don't do that more often because when I do I feel better already. I see myself improving almost immediately... (Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

I think doing the IFP has something to do with this, you know this whole independent learning culture here. But I think there's more to it than the college being responsible to keep us engaged in it. It's so much more than that...For me it's about telling myself 'stay focused', 'try and learn deeper', 'don't always first think like, is this helping me to get higher marks', 'okay so I can do more with this now' ... 'I have to be well-prepared for uni' those sort of things. But it's important to know why I need to learn this before I can...Like when we were asked to research on air pollutants, I told myself you can do more research about the health impacts on people living in an urban city like this one and I found out about the negative effects, how air pollutants impact our DNA by changing it. I felt fulfilled learning that on my own without the teacher telling me exactly what to research. That's why I'm so looking forward to studying biological sciences at uni... (Interview with Grace, 16/05/17)

Zayda said she applies the same technique of talking to herself that she uses in sports:

It works in the same way, kinda, if I tell myself that I can run faster, then I can actually feel myself running faster and this helps my performance. I believe that there is a relationship between telling yourself that you can, believing that you can and actually achieving. So I just apply it to, like, doing research and things like that. If I tell myself that I want to continue to improve my skills...then I start acting like it, going step by step...By making these connections, it's helping me to extend and deepen independent learning even though I wasn't too familiar with it (Interview with Zayda, 24/07/17)

Peer involvement in learning was positively associated with extending engagement. As an example, Kamsi mentioned academic and emotional support in one vlog to describe how she and her classmates encourage each other to improve as independent learners in and out-of- the college environment.

Kamsi: ...we encourage each other by explaining the teacher's directions to show that the task isn't as difficult as we think, or by giving each other tips about useful websites for resources or by simply comparing our course work... I think we motivate each other this way... and not just in the classroom, but when we go online whether in college or personal group chats...sometimes it's supporting each other emotionally, like knowing now that we can rely on each other, feeling like we all succeed when we each succeed. ('Becoming and Being Independent', Vlog 2, 08/05/17)

Similarly, positive peer interaction also helped to extend engagement according to Simi:

...there's a student here, Femi [not real name], who's in her final A-level and we're very close. It helps that if I need a different perspective on a topic than from my teachers or classmates; that she's there to help. She's a home student and she encourages me...when a classmate explains something or why learning something independently is important, it sort of carries more weight than when teachers or tutors say so, because they're doing it. It makes sense that because we're all in the same boat we can identify with each other more...so because we can approach a topic in a similar way this helps me to connect with the material more (Interview with Simi, 24/07/17)

Ife shared a similar understanding:

There was one week I was too sick to go to college, one classmate gave me her notes to go over what I was missing and she also Face Timed me to explain it. When I returned to class it was like I didn't miss much (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

Upon reflection on these comments, there is a suggestion that the Nigerian boarding school tradition, which these students experienced, might encourage students to rely more on each other (see similarities with conclusions in Papworth, 2014). As Bolu stated, peer involvement was important as a means to try to make each other feel confident.

I motivate my classmates too. I tell them things like, "Don't see this as too much for you, I know you can do this". I even wish them good luck before a test, you know, things like that. When we get our results I say things like, "Good job, well done" to them (Interview with Bolu, 04/04/17)

For Grace, her strategy for driving herself to go beyond engagement also includes a daily spiritual exercise that involves prayer and music.

I use inspirational music, gospel music...there are a lot of powerful lyrics that speak to me personally, they calm me down, mostly because they help me see the bigger picture, to have faith, to believe that if I focus on my faith, then every other thing like my social life, academics, future goals, finances, everything will fall into place. So I pray a lot, I pray for understanding, that sort of thing. It sounds embarrassing, I don't always talk about it, but I don't know how I would have survived studying in the UK without doing this. (Interview with Grace, 16/05/17)

According to the students, 'psyching myself' is also related to satisfaction, but the relationship is at times complex. Psyching oneself does not seem nearly as important for satisfaction for those students who do not self-talk. These students are focused on the process of sustained engagement, and this requires them to ensure

that they are satisfied with their own personal contributions to their development as independent learners.

I just focus more on what I did well and what I didn't do well and tell myself 'you can do better na³'. Simple as. If I know that I did my best and put in all my effort then I'm satisfied with that.
(Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

This statement explains his claim to extended engagement. Ayo goes on to link his independent learning experience with his overall engagement:

In college I follow a definite plan and this is a great way to extend my engagement with independent learning...I just pat myself on the back when I'm honest that I've done what I expect of myself. That's what the teachers also expect so it's a win-win (Interview with Ayo, 24/07/17)

Ayo seems to suggest that he is making the most of his ability to motivate himself and also gain approval from the teachers, and this indicates the balance Nigerian IFP students are starting to strike between their perception and teacher's expectations.

Results suggest that psyching myself is likely to challenge the students' beliefs about what independent learning entails, and may lead to the sub-theme, finding satisfaction, in their new-found awareness of their role in the independent learning process.

³ Nigerian slang generally means 'that is' or 'it is' and depending on the tone could be imply a statement or a question. Used in this context for emphasis to make something clear.

6.2.3 Finding satisfaction

The findings show a strong link between the understanding of independent learning and the experience of student satisfaction. As a consequence, students who are satisfied with independent learning tend to build on their engagement, and understand independent learning. Most of the students expressed views about satisfaction being associated with their expectation that the skills they are practicing are relevant and valuable to their progress and achievement as learners.

Ife, Kamsi, Grace and Simi all reported satisfaction and empowerment as a result of recognising the relevance and value of being an independent learner to their overall study:

Initially, I thought it's all about passing the final exam but the more I became more and more independent, learning to learn the right things, in the right way, without much guidance from them [teachers], I began to focus on how independent learning can empower me to develop, how it will also be useful in uni, it's easier to feel satisfied. (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

Kamsi: It is important that the teacher does not do it all for you. It's about you going deeper to discover the answers for yourself, you know, the why. That's the only way you can take charge of your own learning and when you feel that you have achieved something through your own efforts you feel satisfied. ('Becoming and Being Independent', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

[...] and it's not just the teacher empowering me, although that helps too... I feel satisfied when I empower myself to search for answers to a given problem, when I learn to think, learn how to learn, how this experience affects my life as a student...how it keeps me engaged to go beyond how they want me to be involved in my learning... (Interview with Grace, 13/11/17)

It's more than being engaged. I can just sit there and do what they say. Or I can benefit more by going beyond that. If I'm dependent on the teacher for my learning I feel that I lose out because I will know only what they know and nothing more. But

I see the advantage of going ahead of and beyond what the teacher is covering; they even encourage me to do so. I see how that makes me independent, how it raises my curiosity and increases my enthusiasm for learning (Interview with Simi, 24/07/17)

Reflecting on these comments, particularly Ife's comments about learning the 'right way', I wonder whether this is because independent learning is taught/structured in a particular way in the IFP, rather than students having autonomy to decide what's right:

...my dad and I were talking the other day about how I'm getting on, and it got me thinking. You know, I realised that the things that showed my progress in school, like regular report cards, marks, high percentages, prizes, certificates, those things are not really present in college, not in the same way. I'm starting to see why I was so anxious to begin with...I was giving too much importance to those things instead of focusing on who I was becoming as a learner and what it is that I am learning as a college student that I didn't in secondary school...but that's not to say that I'm not looking forward to getting high marks in my final exam, just that now that is not as important as reflecting on whether as a learner I have grown in a way that helps me not just now but in future (Interview with Bolu, 24/07/17)

These comments relate to satisfaction because Bolu stated that academic progress, which to her is evidence that she is developing as an independent learner, also leads her to find satisfaction. She expressed that finally achieving excellent final exam marks will be the recognition and reward of her growth but is not the most important.

Similar to Bolu, Dele and Ayo expressed that finding satisfaction was associated with progressing as an independent learner but Ayo stated that achievement will also help him find satisfaction:

...maybe after I get my results...So that's what keeps me on my toes. Not whether I'm progressing. Not whether I can do research

on my own. Or how many hours I have independent study. What is relevant to me is: have I achieved? How can my parents see that I'm achieving? By results. The results have to match my progress otherwise I won't feel satisfied. I feel satisfied when they're great! It encourages me to keep being engaged...So I always want to see the marks. That gives me the power to decide if I'm doing well or not, and tells me that I have to do more to get better. (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

All the students described how they find satisfaction with the experience of independent learning when they achieve the right balance between achieving high marks and achieving understanding. Grace stated that perception of what marks mean is very important to achieving that balance which will ultimately promote engagement with independent learning:

I think the problem I've always had, maybe because of my background, is thinking that marks show whether a student is intelligent or not. But do they really? Because, if it's about testing whether I understand the topic or whether I can apply knowledge and skills to different scenarios, then I don't think marks you get from tests or exams that I think are basically set to test remembrance shows this. But because I'm here to get into uni and the marks I get after exams will determine if I can or not, then I just have to make sure that in the midst of learning how to be creative and independent that I'm passing exams as well. (Interview with Grace, 13/11/17)

I'm happy now that I'm finding the right balance between what I know and what I can do. I'm a naturally inquisitive person so that helps. I'm able to get high marks while still being creative and having room to explore so that's a good sign. (Interview with Ayo, 04/04/17)

I'm not satisfied when I get low marks because then it looks like I'm not intelligent, or that I don't have the ability to learn. They don't show my success as a learner. I think also that they show that I lack understanding of the key issues in the topic. I remember in school, the subjects I was not interested in I always got low marks in like, languages. Or was it the other way round? Because, now I think that when I get low marks. To be honest, all

I'm interested in is getting high marks without understanding then I don't think that shows my interest. I don't think it's right that I will be judged on raw marks alone because I don't think that's a great way to test understanding. I remember when I scored 4 out of 10 in one Biology mini-test. Does it mean that I'll lose interest? That I'll not invest in my learning anymore? Of course not (Interview with Grace, 13/11/17)

According to Bolu, marks are just one part of the journey in her learning. Her ability to self-manage was a significant part of the satisfaction she finds with experiencing learning independence:

High marks are one way to show that I'm smart but they aren't the only way. It's like if I get a low mark, that tells me to check my understanding, like, am I practicing those skills, how often am I building my skills, to check that there are some areas of my learning that need improvement. So the marks alone, they don't define me as a top or low student, even if that is what it will look like if I get scores in the high 90s or in the low 40s. It's true that I'm never really satisfied with just scoring high if I don't fully understand the topic but there's that aspect of taking responsibility for my own learning behaviour and development. (Interview with Bolu, 24/07/17)

Like Bolu, Simi expressed the satisfaction she feels that she is able to manage herself:

When I think back to all those times I felt satisfied with my learning, it was because I managed my time well, my social life, my self-study time, I took the teacher's feedback...you know all those self-management skills that are important if you want to be an independent learner, and I am seeing the result now. (Interview with Simi, 24/07/17)

Furthermore, all the students suggested a strong match between relational and behaviour experiences as key to finding satisfaction with independent learning. In terms of comparing beliefs and expectations of independent learning with actual

academic performance, if their performance met or exceeded expectations then they feel satisfied and are more likely to stay engaged.

Kamsi's statements points to the students' belief in the role of the IFP environment in bringing about satisfaction that helps in extending engagement:

going beyond the engaged, they tell you you have to be here, constantly learning to set goals and manage my time, to keep motivated and avoid procrastination has helped me to avoid stress and distractions...foundation has provided me the opportunity to get involved in all aspects of my learning
(Interview with Kamsi, 24/07/17)

Many of the students believe that purposeful student-teacher and peer interaction – findings suggest high-levels of student-teacher and peer interaction are positively related to high levels of satisfaction with independent learning, enhance engagement with independent learning.

Similar to Simi, Zayda and Grace described feeling satisfied when they invested time and effort in looking for areas where they can improve their understanding of a topic.

Zayda: So Number 3, Ask yourself – and then what? What next? Why am I not satisfied? This will take practice. Don't just settle for the obvious. I had to practice this because you are looking at this piece of work and you can't see what else you can do to make it better like the teacher says. But the more you question yourself, you will discover ideas about what more you can do... ('10 Things IFP Taught Me', Vlog 1, 07/05/17)

But Grace was the only student who mentioned the relationship between student's preferred and actual learning environments and affective learning outcomes which, according to her, is:

...not directly related to my achievement in college but has a lot to do with my attitude toward independent learning. I mostly

prefer to be taught directly by the teacher even when they want me to do more independent work. I just learn better that way...
(Interview with Grace, 13/11/17)

Her comments imply that student satisfaction with independent learning is strongly predicated on students' preferred and actual learning environments, and there is a suggestion that her college can do more about bridging this gap by for instance promoting learning situations in the IFP in ways which match those preferred by the students. Dele shared this belief in the 'best fit approach' to enhance student satisfaction and consequently promote engagement with independent learning in the IFP but he discussed this in relation to learning style preferences:

The college can do more to improve student satisfaction by identifying and addressing our individual preferences. I don't believe that there is a single learning strategy to develop independent learners and I don't think that independent learning can work in all circumstances. For instance, to learn facts I can either read it or be told, preparing for exams needs more reading, there some times when a textbook is more useful to me than the internet; it also depends on subject-type, I do more independent work in my core subjects than my friends in science because I'm studying the arts and humanities. (Interview with Dele, 24/07/17)

I probed him further to suggest how he thinks the college might bridge this gap. He explained:

so there is huge problem when the expectations and needs of the student does not match that of the college so they should start by first finding out about our specific expectations and needs, then looking for ways to match these with the college strategy for implementing independent learning and finally considering how this serves us students well...this is a great way to keep us engaged with what we're doing here. Engaging more and more is the main thing for me. The experience will make me a better student... (Interview with Dele, 24/07/17)

These comments prompts further discussion about whether, given one of the aims of the IFP which is to prepare for independent learning in HE, this is realistic.

Finding satisfaction, similar to developing persistence and psyching myself, related to students' independent learning behaviour. Looking further into these aspects of the students' experience addressed these themes of extending engagement. These components together indicate that the connections students feel is an important aspect of their engagement highlights an important aspect of the student understanding of independent learning.

6.3 Discussion

The second theme emerging from the data, *Extending engagement*, builds on the constructs associated with student involvement and engagement and extends experience to incorporate the subtler but distinct set of behaviours, outcomes and competencies as crucial for independent learning. The theme captures the essence of students' connections to independent learning in college and illustrates how their understanding is informed or shaped. The central idea of *extending engagement* relates to behaviour as a dimension of independent learning experience.

In one sense, engagement means going beyond involvement or participation in the content and in the process of learning (Mann, 2001 p.7). Focusing on higher education, Krause (2005, p.9) usefully conceptualises interpretations of engagement as, a) an inconsequential component of student interaction with university experiences, and as a result of this interaction, b) coping with the challenges that might accompany such experiences relating to the transition to new learning environments (see also Kandiko Howson & Buckley, 2017). Although there is evidence of this latter meaning, beyond this, there appears to be in my findings, a cultivation of an increased engagement identity as a consequence of student connection with independent learning. Evidence from the data also demonstrates increased levels of independence as engagement is sustained, as a reflection of the student's sense of belonging. More engagement in most cases was

perceived by the students to lead to greater satisfaction with mastery and skill toward their own learning. This links with ELT in the sense that the engagement and interaction involved in the student's learning is mediated by and includes their experience of learning (see Section 2.4.1)

Experiencing success with independent learning typically supported and developed students' ability to be motivated, self-directed and self-regulated. Bolu was driven to continue engaging in building independent learning skills by maintaining willingness to persist, particularly when she encountered the challenges of independent learning, and she described the resulting impact as motivational and stimulating interest. For Krause (2005) higher levels of motivation and interest are given shape in the pursuit of self-management strategies to propel 'engagement behaviours' (2005:13). I will suggest here that willingness on the part of the student to persist in developing specific independent skill-sets is evidence of such behaviours, or engagement behaviours; which is still a relatively general conception of engagement. This links with Ryan and Deci's (2000) thinking in relation to self-determination which relates students' motivation and academic outcomes (Section 2.5). Kahn (2014) uses a similar concept to explain a range of educational practices in the interactivity between extended student engagement and the knowledge society. Similarly, multiple levels of affective learning that are associated with extended engaged learning levels were demonstrable in many of the students involved in this study, where a higher order understanding of their subjects is formed through integrating relational experiences about independent learning with behaviour experiences thus creating affordances of meaningful reflexivity on their independent learning experiences. I suggest that the student's experience in a multi-ethnic and multilingual country like Nigeria accounts for their ability to respond positively to their new learning environment.

Most of the students here also described a sense of belonging in a community of learners that they believed emanated from the IFP which enables a culture of learning. Similarities can be drawn from community of practice, for example,

relational learning experiences within a community promote a sense of belonging within that community (Section 2.7.2 & 2.7.3). Accounts by the students depicted a stimulating environment to which they were exposed, and in which they carried out meaningful learning activities. They described a community which is built around their interests, one where they are as much a part of their own learning as their teachers, where the teacher values and accepts the student's knowledge and is willing to also learn from them. All the students gave accounts of behaviours related to experiences with stimulating tasks and environment that increased engagement despite the conflicts that arose as a response to their independent learning experiences. This aligns with Rogoff et al's (2003) and Engle and Conant (2002) findings linking higher student engagement to learning environments which support problem-based learning, foster student empowerment, encourage student accountability, and support collaborative learning and assessment. I suggest that this counters the usual focus on independent learning as students in isolation.

Many of the students described having sustained engagement with independent learning from developing persistence. The students' accounts often included demonstrable examples where persistence spurred their interest in learning new knowledge and skills, and motivated them to continue applying them in all areas of their studies. Some of the students described the transformational effect of persistence and gave examples where they were willing to forgo their primary concern with academic rewards. Students' behaviour included delayed gratification, and they derived satisfaction in treating themselves to a concert or a movie after they got good marks following a test they prepared well for and not before (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004). For example, although Ayo constantly found himself preoccupied with an expectation of academic success in relation to test or exam results, he still saw the transformational influence of persistence and its affordances in relation to sustaining engagement in learning (p. 206).

Similarly, in the literature, the affordance of transformative learning for learners is identified as "constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners

interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 1). Although transformative learning is commonly discussed in relation to adult education, there are elements of this theory which can easily be applied to younger learners in further education as demonstrated here. The findings suggest that students identified with some of the phases of the transformative learning process in college. They understood independent learning in terms of evaluation of their conceptions, beliefs and judgement. They understand those involved defining or framing independent learning as an experience.

Students have transformative learning experiences (Rocks & Lavender, 2018). Through these experiences there appears to be a change in perception and understanding of independent learning; perceiving the independent learner’s performance, not as linear steps but, as sustained and holistic praxis and gaining a more nuanced understanding of what it is and how it is relevant to their overall academic experience in college and beyond. Thus, in making sense of their experiences, there is evidence of students going through a metamorphosis- a process in which they grow and change as they experience different stages of learning in college, when their understanding transforms into learning. Similar findings are discussed in ELT (Section 2.4) whereby learners experience a shift from abstract to experience as a means of improving their skills performance. At this stage, the students begin to act upon recurrent meaningful patterns they observe in their learning; sorting them in order of importance to their peculiar learning needs. This transformation is further evidenced by the fact that as the student begins to develop a feeling of mastery and the ability to cope with and manage obstacles and setbacks in their learning, they develop their learning behaviours in terms of longer term goals and plans (Pintrich, 2000). These learning behaviours involve conscious and deliberate planning of their learning, leading them from becoming to being efficient and organised learners. It is worth noting that the students’ transformation is helped along in no small way by an academic setting which institutionally stimulates cooperative and collaborative endeavour through learning

activities within and outside the classroom, and encourages choice and decision-making. Particularly for international students, this experience can begin even before they get to those institutions (Liu & Morgan, 2016; Maria Cubillo et al., 2006; Marjanović & Križman, 2018; Özoğlu et al., 2015). However, while some students may remain in a passive and inert state about their learning, for the rest of their academic careers (Krause, 2005), others through belonging to a meaningful community of learners and having this shared responsibility for learning will move beyond engagement in their transformation into independent learners.

The findings related to finding satisfaction align to principles of transformation in ELT, which emphasise student agency, flexibility and choice, in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. However, the transformation of learners goes beyond the idea that engagement will produce new forms of independence and new competencies. While student involvement plays an important role in academic independence and can facilitate or hinder academic success, involvement alone cannot ensure sustained autonomous learning (Haddad, 2016). This is important because student engagement in their learning has been seen to decline in later adolescence (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2017; Gnambs & Hanfstingl, 2016; Janosz et al., 2008; Wang & Eccles, 2011) for a number of reasons, including the disconnect between student and teacher expectations, the challenges in adapting to new academic situations, and the absence of greater opportunities for academic independence. Therefore, students' thought processes and mental strength matter in sustaining their engagement with independent learning in spite of challenges.

Zayda's engagement can be understood as a construct of mental strength or mental toughness (see 'Psyching myself' p. 202). Her behaviour provided useful insights into how she and other students experience independent learning by preparing themselves psychologically and developing mental toughness to give their best before and during learning. Jones, Hanton and Connaughtons' (2007) study which explored the influence of mental toughness and the use of psychological strategies in elite performers and found that self-talk, powerful statements, peer

encouragement and music were among several strategies which contributed positively to sporting success and performance. Students' behaviour as an aspect of their independent learning involves experience that enables them to seek to become, or affirm their ability to be, independent learners. Such experiences are accompanied by behaviours including discovering, doing, and innovating toward independent learning.

Although mental toughness have been widely researched in applied sport psychology (Jones, 2002), they are clear comparisons that can be made between this concept, as a vital component for successful sport performance among elite athletes, and identical attributes of mental toughness in elite students in learning such as the Nigerian IFP students. In a sense, these students can be thought of as 'elite' international learners because they have particular expertise of independent learning studying as international students in the IFP setting. It is suggested that these students reporting continuous engagement experiences are likely to have a higher propensity to the opportunities in independent learning compared to students who have little experiences, or have them rarely.

According to Clough, Earle and Sewell (2002, p. 38), attributes of mentally tough individuals include their tendency to be:

“sociable and outgoing as they are able to remain calm and relaxed, they are competitive in many situations and have lower anxiety levels than others. With a high sense of self-belief and an unshakeable faith that they control their own destiny, these individuals can remain relatively unaffected by competition or adversity”.

Consistency, determination, focus, confidence and control are main affordances of mental toughness in elite performers (Jones, 2002), and Nigerian IFP students demonstrated in their accounts these characteristics. As these qualities became deep-rooted, the students explained that they grew in self-efficacy and were motivated further to deal with the anxiety and frustration they mentioned were

associated with learning independently at that level of their academic life. This links with Schunk & DiBenedetto's (2016) findings which link self-efficacy related to behaviour (Section 2.6.4).

Behaviour experience in independent learning lacks extensive empirical support in existing knowledge. Therefore, *extending engagement* provides a critical addition to the literature in terms of bringing to the fore, the positive relationship between student behaviour and their conceptual understanding of independent learning.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This study found that extending engagement in independent learning is rooted more specifically in behaviours such as 'developing persistence', 'psyching myself' and 'finding satisfaction'. These behaviours govern students' overall independent learning experience. Far from solely the processes or strategies commonly associated with student engagement in independent learning, the theme extending engagement takes into consideration the dimension of experience as an essential aspect of student engagement. Upon examining the role extending engagement plays in independent learning of students, it is suggested that behaviour experience helps deepen understanding about independent learning.

In this chapter, I have presented my data. In particular, I have provided a conceptualisation of independent learning as experience involving behaviours and discussed students' behaviour experience as a crucial dimension of independent learning. In the next chapter, I synthesise and discuss the above themes and sub-themes by relating key aspects to cognitive experience that initiates transformation as the essence of independent learning-as-experience.

Chapter 7: CROSSING THE BRIDGE

7.1 Introduction

Crossing the bridge is identified from the findings as a cognitive dimension of independent learning experience. Crossing the bridge is a phrase taken from the vlog data; it is a metaphor Bolu used to capture her understanding (and experience) of independent learning. She did not describe this understanding in terms of linear-type processes but as an on-going journey, a flexible cyclical spiral that spanned dependence and independence and symbolised a necessary coming into oneself. The results of the data analysis, thus undermine any notions of linearity and sequence of processes in independent learning. Crucially, Bolu surmised that shifts in her understanding was all part of experience.

To confirm my interpretation and that Crossing the bridge is a theme that was recurring in all of the other students' posts, I asked each student to identify and update any vlogs where they had first alluded to a 'crossing' in relation to their understanding and experience of independent learning.

7.2 Findings

Students' interviews and updated vlogs helped with the identification of *Crossing the bridge* as a cognitive experience of independent learning experience, explaining what understandings of independent learning emerge for these students as they transform through experience independent learning. When asking students about this 'crossing', there were many verbatim first-hand accounts related to their perceptions, connections and understandings of independent learning, important with *Challenging preconceptions* and *Extending engagement*. This can be associated directly with consistent reflection on independent learning experience and the cognitive constructs of which it is composed.

Through the reflection process (interviews and updated vlogs), Bolu, Ayo, Dele, Grace, Ife, Kamsi, Simi and Zayda explained and demonstrated their 'crossing' as

cognitive experiences that are transformative and not limitless. The students alluded to the sense that they understand independent learning (experience independent learning) through cognitive awareness of learning experiences before, during or after the experiences. According to Bolu, Crossing the bridge meant taking the positives from what may be seen as the ‘messy’ place of adjustment, taking initiative, assuming ownership, reflecting, and experiencing shifts whereby she challenged her conceptions about learning and progressively negotiated an independent learning identity:

Bolu: The messy place is all part of my experience. It may be uncomfortable and I may not understand it, but that’s where I discover who I really am as a student.

In a way, my identity symbolises how far I’ve come from some of my belief.

It’s been one big experience really but I’m sure these beliefs have guided me to becoming the person I am.

...I have started to think more about who I am, what learning means to me now and in future, how to be a better learner... is it more helpful to do my own research on the internet or can I just go over the module materials? How do I improve not just at the moment but in the long run...It’s important to see if there is something I need to change and be ready to change it.

...it’s also about believing that I have the power to change things that are not working for me

...there’s more that I can do to take more responsibility, to add more value to my learning...that’s what crossing the bridge means, not just experiencing independent learning, but understanding the experience through all the experiences and challenges as a means of understanding ...’ (‘Independently Me’, [Updated] Vlog 3, 17/02/18)

Similar to Bolu, Kamsi saw the positives in the initial difficulties associated with new learning situations and affirmed that they helped her in becoming more responsible for her learning. Her vlog post shows how she recognised that the new knowledge and skills she is acquiring in the IFP represented a ‘coming into my own’ journey:

Kamsi: It has been an interesting journey, but not like one that has an end though, I think it's on-going, this new understanding of what I'm doing. As long as I'm living, I'm learning. It never ends. I know now that all those emotions and feelings have led me to coming into my own person and they are still leading me to improve, my self-confidence, my self-belief. I have understood how I'm learning and what this experience means for my future learning. When I can manage my own learning, my study, my time, my experience, it means that I will be in charge of my own destiny. I have lived on my own since arriving at college so I am starting to understand how I can apply this type of independence to my learning. ('Becoming and Being Independent', [Updated] Vlog 3, 03/02/18)

Ife reflected on her learning beliefs and how challenging initial preconceptions was an important aspect of Crossing the bridge for her:

Ife: Preconceptions are not bad...they are part of being and becoming independent. When I first started college, I would spend most of the time being frustrated that I had all this self-study to do, that I couldn't study important parts of the units on my own but I don't feel that way anymore. I see challenges like that as a stepping stone, as part of the journey to understanding independence. Now I can say that I am an independent learner! ('Ife's Independent Life', [Updated] Vlog 3, 24/02/18)

Her reflection further explained the account she had given earlier in an interview about her ability to establish an identity as an independent learner, understanding how each experience links to her overall understanding of independent learning and her learning development.

In school I got fed a lot of information that I had to memorise and reproduce and that helped me with SSCE and can help you with UMTE [the standardised Nigerian university entrance exam], but that's one way of looking at learning and not the only way. In college, I have learnt to have a strategy, and that to understand it's better to make connections with previous knowledge and critically evaluate new knowledge. I enjoy learning this way too and can already see the benefits. I am confident that I can apply this to university work too. (Interview with Ife, 24/07/17)

Ife suggests that the transformation she perceives herself undergoing extends beyond the superficial to deeper reflexive sense of self, which strongly embodies her academic independence as a college student:

Ife: ...it's more than what I'm achieving, it's about how independent learning is changing the way I see things, how I think about things. That's what I know I will take away from this learning... ('Ife's Independent Life', [Updated] Vlog 3, 24/02/18)

There is a suggestion from these views that she is positioning herself to be open to improve not only the enactment, embodiment and realisation of her academic independence in college but beyond college too.

Dele's updated vlog, similar to Ife's, also demonstrated how Crossing the bridge, related to the theme Challenging preconceptions, and is an important aspect of understanding independent learning. The style of his vlog (evident in the word 'Newbie' in the title of his vlog channel) suggests that as he has given meaning to his independent learning experience, he is giving advice to prospective or new college students who might find his insights into beginning independent learning experiences useful:

Dele: Go out of your way if you can to conquer, conquer, conquer your fears. I didn't know this before getting here so I'm gifting my understanding to you...

Zayda's also made a clear link between challenging preconceptions about independent learning and shifts in understanding as an on-going journey:

Zayda: ...I understand independent learning as an experience where I have learnt to overcome all the self-doubt and frustration. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't easy in the beginning and it's not all plain-sailing now but having understood this experience, I feel empowered to know what to do and can handle things better now. And it shows: I'm more confident in any learning situation, I look forward to learning challenging topics or concepts, I participate more in class, I share my thoughts more, my attitude and engagement towards learning have improved and I just feel generally I know who I am now and I love the independent learner that I am compared to before. ('10 Things IFP Taught Me', [Updated] Vlog 2, 09/02/18)

Ayo also demonstrated his understanding of independent learning as, initially, an uncomfortable experience that he believes his character as a 'non-quitter' and his own personal efforts generally led to shifts in his learning development:

Ayo: After I got my, I think my, second assessment result. It was better than the first but I wasn't where I knew I wanted to be, or where I knew I could be. So I did more thinking about what I was not doing well. I also used the teacher's feedback, which I didn't always pay attention to. But overall, because we get given a lot of projects that we are asked to apply real-life reasoning to, it gives me the opportunity to take responsibility for my own learning and that helps me in taking that step, to reach that place of perfection, which I'm being honest is what I'm looking for. ('Ayo Explains it All', [Updated] Vlog 3, 20/02/18)

Simi's and Grace's vlog posts also contributed to the emergence of this theme because of their comments about transforming identities as a result of their deconstruction of independent learning due to their experience:

Grace: I was very dependent before [college]. I think it made me aware of the fact that there are schools that do things differently. There are different processes for learning ...It's like I understand

so I look at things a lot more simply now...Schools are the same all over the world to a certain extent, not so? As a student you attend. You learn to pay attention and apply yourself. I used to think just negative thoughts about studying here. ('Gee in Progress', [Updated] Vlog 3, 28/02/18)

Simi: ...What I really thought about independent learning, because it's the UK, because it's college, is that it's going to be hard, that the teachers will not help. I understand that independent learning is an experience, so I have started to think about approaching it as I have approached all the experience I have gained living independently since I came to college. ('Life with IL', [Updated] Vlog 3, 17/02/2018)

7.3 Discussion

Crossing the bridge is a metaphor for shifts in understanding, whereby students' cognitive experiences lead to their transformation as independent learners, and acknowledgement that this understanding and transformation is limitless. It is clear that the students' experiences may have a way of positioning them in 'uncomfortable spaces', however, for students, the discomfort was understood as a crucial opportunity for change, which is at the core of the reconceptualisation of independent learning-as-experience. *Crossing the Bridge* involves on-going cyclical elements – components and dimensions - of students' independent learning. Crucially, I think it is wider than independent learning; it includes what underlies and what prompts, or gives rise to, what is normally conceptualised as independent learning. So, I call it 'independent learning-as-experience'. Through this conceptual representation of independent learning-as-experience, I move away from interpreting independent learning as a process or approach or practice leading to achieving independent learning or becoming an independent learner as described in . Indeed, my interpretation of independent learning-as-experience, as a concept, precludes thinking about independent learning as something that students can, or would wish to, or may, achieve. I conceptualise it simply as how students

experience in their learning. It is about a synthesis of different elements and aspects of their independent learning - affect and behaviour experience- that, similar to these experiences, is limitless.

The experience of adaptation and living abroad has been described as a “maturing process” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p.113). The international student does not experience a transformation in their personality, but rather “a personal expansion, an opening of one’s potential universe” (p.113). I argue that the experiences that inform and shape ‘personal expansion’ and consequently knowledge expansion encompass significant dimensions of cognition. *Crossing the bridge* is not only a theme of cognitive experience but also addresses what it means for students to connect with independent learning. Previous research with students at other levels also indicates understanding that learning is embedded in cognitive experience (Bandura, 1989). Thus, the essence of independent learning exceeds mere experience of it, but includes understanding because of this experience. Furthermore, they might reside in students’ personal epistemologies, and are more significant than previously thought. This thinking links to social cognitive learning, but elaborates the cognitive experience and establishes students’ ability to understand the power and depth of their individual cognitive experiences.

Students made useful connections between self-concept and self-efficacy because their beliefs about learning were clearly visible, or at the very least, the transformation they experience created through practical experience was evident. This suggests not only that it is possible to expand preconceptions arising from epistemic beliefs, but that the students’ understanding of learning and of self as an independent learner and their reflection of these can in itself be a major factor in their identity transformation. There is evidence of relations between epistemic cognition and students’ perception and engagement in learning (Bandura, 1997); therefore it is important that students develop transformative epistemic cognition encompassing epistemic beliefs and development, epistemological beliefs and personal epistemologies (Greene and Yu, 2016; Hofer and Stern, 2016). The data

in particular reveals the nature and extent of students' cognition in how they experience shifts in identity, which mediate academic outcomes. For all the students, *Crossing the bridge* is a transformational journey of discovery in which they not only construct identities according to evolving experiences, but perceive themselves as major actors in this experience.

When analysing the Nigerian IFP students' cognitive experiences, there were moments of reflection evident in the students' updated vlogs. The understanding that emerges from the student narratives of experience are related to reflection on concept in light of experience. This experience then, creates a cognitive association between independent learning and experience, leading students to view independent learning and experience as interchangeable concepts. In many aspects, this appeared to enable students to view understanding possessing a component of independent learning experience and independent learning experience as dimensions of understanding.

The study findings also demonstrate that students expressed their interactions with independent learning went further than simply experiencing it with others. When students reflect on independent learning, it allows them to fully immerse themselves in making sense of their connection with independent learning. Nigerian IFP students have the capacity to challenge themselves and then acknowledge their successes, and these are recurring in students' narratives in vlogs and interviews. The extent to which the students' experience and acknowledge the importance of decision-making in their accounts highlights the potential of 'student voice'. In particular, when discussing preconceptions about and engagement with independent learning, Nigerian IFP students in their vlogs and interviews are able to develop understanding about their beliefs (affective experience) about independent learning and potentially extend their engagement with independent learning. Similarly, students' reflection about what they do with independent learning (behaviour experiences) may result in shifts in behaviour and ultimately, understanding. Their transformation might also be applicable to the power and

depth of Nigerian IFP students' beliefs and actions that influence them in their learning, in relation to their experience with independent learning.

Crossing the bridge thus offers a cogent basis for the deconstruction of independent learning. The concept of cognition in light of experience embodies how students understand independent learning and how they understand themselves within independent learning, and how the students use their experiences to understand independent learning. Within the summation of their independent learning as a crossing, the consequence of student perception is that it enables students to perceive independent learning fully and to direct their beliefs about knowledge. On the other hand, it is also the consequence of student engagement – the intersection between the need to perform in independent learning and the need to perform as independent learners. In this regard, it is the essence of students' independent learning to experience shift; change in relation to what they know or understand and to their knowledge structures. In addition, *Crossing the bridge* is about shift relating to the extent of and the nature of reasoning that students apply to their learning. Crossing the bridge involves the enhancement or increase of students' knowledge and understanding of the foundation upon which knowledge is maintained and transformed.

7.4 Chapter Summary

Having validated the theme crossing the bridge with evidence from the study findings, I believe that Nigerian students experience shifts which they negotiate within independent learning. Crossing the bridge is a useful concept to explain how understanding those shifts builds on experiencing independent learning and how this leads students to the ability to understand the significance and depth of cognitive experiences as a dimension of independent learning experience.

In the next chapter, I provide concluding thoughts of the study in relation to how it is possible to view independent learning through the core themes, Challenging preconceptions, Extending engagement and Crossing the bridge, as affective,

behaviour and cognitive experience dimensions of independent learning. I believe that my unifying framework provides a potentially useful tool for understanding of independent learning experience.

Chapter 8: CLOSING THE THESIS

8.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I have proposed that college students be viewed as ‘key independent learning experiencers’ (Section 1.5) in the context of a changing post-compulsory environment for learning that is increasingly concerned with independent learning as a desirable graduate attribute and learner transformation as independent learners. One key affordance of vlogs in this research is that it created a dynamic and creative space whereby students’ accounts of their transformation as independent learners, and what this experience entailed, could be explored.

My study sought to address three main questions, namely:

- What happens when Nigerian IFP students experience independent learning in college?
- What understandings of independent learning emerge for these students as they engage in this experience?
- How might their insights inform my knowledge about independent learning?

I took as a starting point the idea that independent learning is experience and occurs within the context of experience (Section 2.9 & 2.10). From an experience perspective, students have complex and related perceptions of, connections with and understanding of independent learning. Students’ perceptions of independent learning is part of all emotion-related transforming experience; their affective experience describe and explain what shifts students experience when they perceive independent learning, frustration, hopelessness, pleasure/displeasure, value/judgments, motivation. Students’ connections with independent learning is about performance (behaviour)-related transforming experience that constitute students’ practice – how they do or go about learning; their behaviour experience describe and explain what shifts students experience in relation to the processes,

practices, outcomes (achievements) and skills and competencies that are enhanced within independent learning. Students' understandings of independent learning is about knowledge, transformative reflection and understanding of transformative experience that constitute students' learning. Their cognitive experiences describe and explain what shifts students experience in relation to what they know or understand and their knowledge constructs, the reflection as well as the nature and extent of the reflection students apply to their learning, and how their understanding of independent learning is reached and enhanced by their experience.

In Chapters Three and Four, I ground this research in a systematic inquiry that sought to develop a tentative understanding of independent learning experience, understanding of experience, and finally narrating experience as central to a (re)conceptualisation of independent learning. Thus, the focus of the research, from my perspective, was the experience and understanding of independent learning. This entailed my choice of what and how to explore and understand, leading to my collection and analysis of data, and presentation of my findings in this thesis as presented above. The holistic understanding of experience characterises the approach to this research.

This final chapter builds on Chapters Five, Six and Seven to address these questions. It offers a consideration of independent learning-as-experience in three distinct but overlapping ways. In terms of affective experience as being essential for independent learning, behaviour experience as being helpful for independent learning, and cognitive experience as being implicit in independent learning. It offers a reflection on the findings in relation to my three research questions, demonstrating how the insights gained from this qualitative research and the understandings generated contribute to our understanding of the way Nigerian students on an IFP experience independent learning and, the way these students make meaning of their independent learning lives. This chapter also complements the preceding three chapters, as an exposition of what I believe are the contributions to knowledge that this thesis makes. It also outlines the overall implications of this

research to the study of the international student experience and provides unexplored and underexplored areas for further examination.

8.2 Key findings

Students experience independent learning through dimensions of affect, behaviour and cognition, which enable transformation of self.

Students' affective experience involves independence-related experience of perceptual, evaluative and motivational experience mediated by shifts in conception of self, and are the foundation of epistemological development. Students' behaviour experience includes independence-related experience of actions of/for learning, outcomes and competencies, mediated by shifts in relation to the 'doing' of independent learning, with the result that their independent learning is increased or enhanced. Students' cognitive experience comprises independent learning-related experience of understanding, mediated by epistemological and reflective shifts, in light of experience.

Core affect is a central construct influencing independent learning. Beliefs, emotions and attitudes mediate independent learning and through them students challenge conceptions about self and knowledge. Students experience the 'messy' place (p. 222) as change in conception that is part of independent learning experience. Change affects different people differently, even within the same context. Independent learning may for some people represent something positive, or for some something negative. In this study, students did not feel about their independent learning in such binary terms. They instead felt that their experiences were opportunities to evaluate and reflect upon. Therefore, within affective experience shifts in conceptions were a key aspect of independent learning.

Students' independent learning is linked directly to shifts in their perceptual, evaluative and motivational experience (Sections 6.3, 6.4 & 6.5). Students' perceptions, viewpoints, beliefs, and mindsets about knowledge, where knowledge

comes from, and ‘who knows what’, change in relation to affective experience. Students’ learning- or independence-related values, (as outlined in Section 5.2.3) and the satisfaction they find in what they value change in relation to affective experience. Students’ motivation and levels of self-efficacy change in relation to affective experience. In this way, a range of skills and experiences may be developed during independent learning in the IFP, which are valued in other contexts.

Students had perceived independent learning as something the teachers at college expected of them and not something they felt was particularly easy to accomplish or in their capacity to accomplish. Students described having to deal with conflicting emotions about coming into college, on one hand, as high-achieving secondary school-leaving students, and on the other, students seemingly struggling to stay on top of college study. They started to perceive the affordances of independent learning in relation to contextual situations (high-stakes or low-stakes assessment) and academic outcomes; and motivating themselves to develop independent learning skills and abilities. Furthermore, the college environment- whether ‘independence-supporting’ or not- also accounted for how swiftly students overcame their preconceptions of independent learning. However, in challenging their preconceptions, students do not understand these as negative, but rather as a means to discover who they are as learners and their capacity to use supposed challenges to positively impact on their engagement with independent learning.

I have explored the crucial role of core behaviour in independent learning experience. Addressed in Chapter Six, extending engagement is reflected in the behaviours and practices of students. An understanding of students’ independent learning requires a consideration of behaviour experience. In addition, it is important to recognise and understand the nature and extent of that experience. Reflecting on the accounts of independent learning in their vlogs and their responses about these experiences in the interviews, the students offered vivid descriptions about the proactive connections they enacted with independent

learning, which ultimately demonstrated their ability to transfer and apply their independent learning to a range of contexts. The concepts I highlighted relate to the students' description of developing persistence in building independent learning, building themselves independent learners, and finding satisfaction in the experience of doing so. When students connected with independent learning, this allowed them to develop persistence in building deep learning skills; thus, students' connectedness with independent learning allowed them to engage fully in the learning process. Students in so doing created an association between extended engagement with independent learning and their understanding of the learning process in college. In many ways, this was a significant means by which the students were able to shift in conception and identify their transformation in independent learning.

Developing and nurturing behaviours for engaging (Sections 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5) come from students' ability to motivate themselves (and others), and to acknowledge their individual capacity and ability to work as independent learners. Thus, engagement in learning went beyond showing up in class every day or completing tasks. Rather, there was an element of personal responsibility that came with gaining more confidence in their own ability and gaining motivation to do further independent learning. The value of students' mental preparation for tasks and incorporating self-affirmation about their competence for learning becomes evident. Self-regulation and motivation concepts of social cognition also affirm this notion by highlighting that maintaining persistence and managing experiences is key to understanding how learning is developed and sustained through perceived challenges. Then, through the experience of extending engagement, students become more favourably disposed to what they could and do accomplish independently in college every day, and in so doing understood what independent learning makes possible.

Finding satisfaction influenced students' connection with independent learning. Students were able to see value in the knowledge and understanding of independently arriving at this understanding, and potentially developing a capacity

for sustained engagement with independent learning beyond college. In addition, students' connection with independent learning afforded them a deeper understanding of their personal epistemology in relation to the teaching and learning process, a recognition that they are also 'masters' of knowledge, and an acknowledgement that the choices they are making are aiding them in their journey through academic careers to professional careers. Furthermore, the connections to independent learning afforded students the opportunity to evaluate their learning development.

The importance of core cognition for understanding independent learning was established. Cognitive dimensions of crossing the bridge are important for making sense of independent learning. This crossing reveals a shift towards an embodiment of the desired change of the transformative self as an embodiment of students' intellectual and experiential knowing of independent learning. This transformation is associated with the students' ability to engage in meaningful reflection upon the concept of independent learning in light of their daily experiences in college, and the behaviours they enacted. Crucially, vlogging enabled students develop a deeper connection with their vlogs as an extension of their real selves, because the vlogs were an honest reflection and accurate documentation of their experiences in the real world. Bolu's experience helped her to: "*understand independent learning.*" Ife's experience was: "*changing the way I see things, how I think about things.*" Dele's experience made him understand that he is a knowledge-producer who is able to give advice to 'newbies': "*I didn't know this before getting here, so I'm gifting my experience to you*". Zayda's experience made her "*feel empowered to know what to do... know who I am now...compared to before.*" Even the title students gave their vlogs provides an insight into how they understood independent learning. Tellingly, they chose to keep the same titles even at the end of the research in keeping with their belief that a crossing does not negate what some might regard as negative experiences, or signal the end of experience.

Students' transformation relates with performing well in their studies; progressive academic gains became an important outcome from which students recognised their most significant transformation. Kamsi associated independent learning with a "journey, but not like one that has an end though, [but that is] *on-going*." This journey is similar to the physical journey international students make when they leave their home countries for college and experience independent learning. They are able to reflect on the similarities between the independence they generally develop as a result of living away from home, to the independence they develop in their studies and how this helps them *become* independent learners. Thus, independent learning is not understood solely as a challenging process but as a transformative experience. Even the students who retained some of their preconceptions about independent learning being poorly understood and enacted by the teachers and students alike, still sought more ways to harness opportunities for independent learning. This direct action might explain why students eventually alluded to a crossing in relation to their being independent learners. Therefore, sustaining independent learning beyond college would involve not only an understanding of independent learning and all its affordances, but also the student's perception and affirmation of self as independent.

8.3 Addressing research question three

Throughout my thesis, I have developed my unifying framework for independent learning-as-experience. I now summarise some of these conclusions, clarifying its relatedness to affective, behaviour and cognitive dimensions of independent learning, what I believe are its contributions to understanding students' independent learning, and its usefulness for highlighting, analysing and, describing independent learning-as-experience, generated through this research. I have constructed a conceptualisation of independent learning to address research questions 1 and 2 and start dealing with research question 3:

How might their insights inform my knowledge about independent learning?

Reflecting on independent learning experience is an affordance of developing the concept of independent learning-as-experience in this research. Students' transformative reflection, which is evident in the data, is an unexpected yet powerful outcome of the research. I view their reflection as a necessary component of independent learning experience, characterised by deliberative action and verbalised understanding on the vlogs. Students' 'thinking about thinking about independent learning', understanding, and evaluating their multiple conceptions of independent learning, and shifts in action based on their evaluation on the vlogs, account for some shifts they have in their experience of independent learning. The vlogs, which students self-authored, offered a dynamic form of research engagement that facilitated narration of and reflection on experience. They helped to capture students' verbatim accounts of their experiences and understanding. This has implications for me as a researcher who seeks new and innovative ways to collect data that exemplifies the dynamism of lived experience in an evolving digital age. Building on Harricharan and Bhopal's (2014) work, I argue that to promote transformation in learning, international students, in addition to reflecting on their adjustment, need experiences of reflexivity through which they consider their personal beliefs, actions and understanding in relation to the immediate context of independent learning but also the broader international education context.

It has become apparent that independent learning-as-experience happens having been preceded by transforming an existing socio-psycho-cognitive experience, within present socio-psycho-cognitive experience, not necessarily in equal-linear amounts, but where dimensions of the affective, the behaviour and the cognitive are unchanging. Not dissimilar to typical life experience that should enhance the overall academic development of all students. I maintain that independent learning cannot be fragmented in a scale of linear processes and practices. Rather, independent learning is characterised by experience that includes reflecting on conceptions of independent learning, reflexively engaging with the impact of independent learning on self, and situating independent learning as a potentially transformative

experience likely to impact on students' overall learning directly. Figure 19 illustrates Nigerian IFP students' independent learning-as-experience, within the IFP context, in relation to their affective, behaviour and cognitive experience, reached through an African-centred framing of experience.

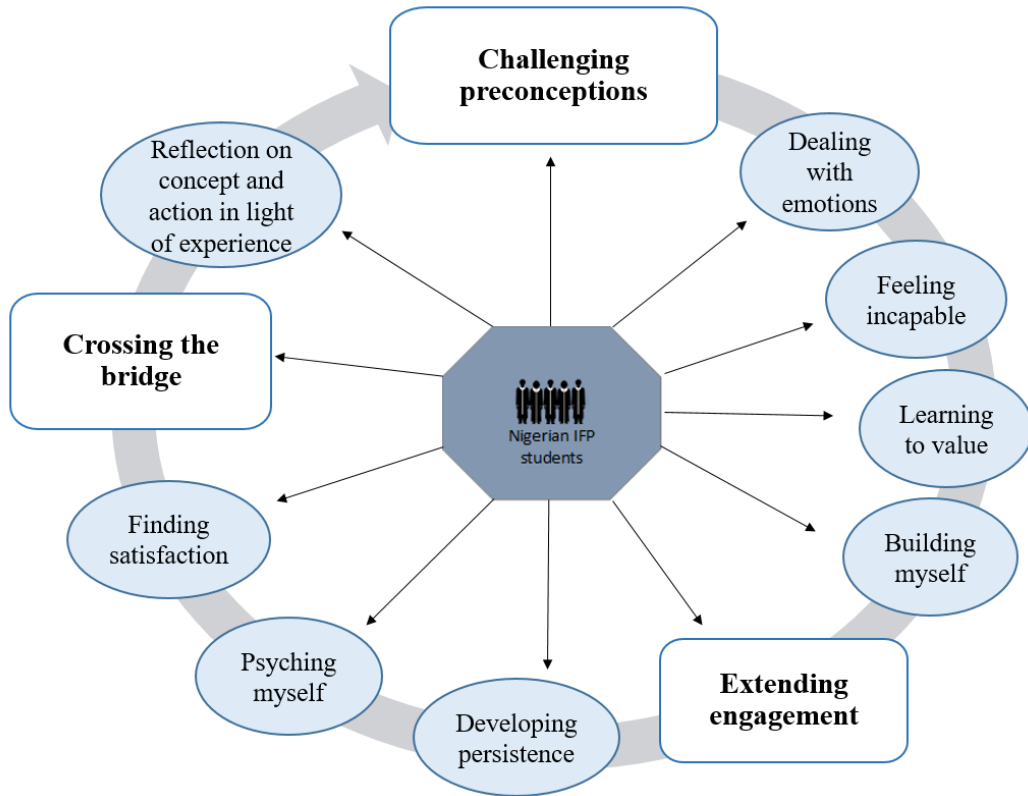


Figure 19. My conceptualisation of independent learning-as-experience.

Experience as the core of my independent learning-as-experience framework is the beginning, but not the end of my inquiry. In the sense of African ways of perceiving, connecting with and understanding our world and real lives which I discuss in Chapter 3, experience results in and contributes to making learning and development possible. I explored the significance of conceptions, actions and understanding in the context of the experience of independent learning in Chapters

5, 6, and 7. In particular, I have referred throughout to issues related to understanding in the context of 'crossing' in Chapter 7.

This study revealed much to me about a particular group of international students. Furthermore, I have identified a strong relationship between beliefs and actions, and students' understandings of independent learning are interpreted through their epistemological worldview and mediated by experience. Thus, teaching-learning which does not account for the epistemological beliefs that guide students' responses to independent learning inevitably do little to cultivate and sustain independent learner identity.

As shown in the figure above, independent learning-as-experience is understood as the relatedness and constant interaction between affective, behaviour and cognitive experience. I have placed students in the centre of this experience as they hold considerable power as experiencers, in their thinking, doing and knowing. In placing key themes in this cycle, I do not imply any hierarchal relationship between them. Rather, I am showing that independent learning as an experience is cyclical, and unchanging with time or space. As to the matter of transformation, students' crossing is an embodiment of transformation.

Drawing on my model of affective, behaviour and cognitive dimensions of experience, I see the transformation students experience in developing independent learning in the relatedness and reciprocity of experience as believing, as doing and as knowing. For this reason, the experience aspects of my study include elements of affect (believing), behaviour (doing) and cognition (knowing). In so doing, I align independent-learning-as-experience with a more dynamic and positive way of conceptualising learning for international students rather than with critique and deficit notions of international student experience. This moves away from the tendency of identifying processes in the international student experience that typically challenge and are challenging for students.

Reflecting on independent learning experience is an affordance of vlogs in this research. The vlogs, which students self-authored, offered a dynamic form of research engagement that facilitated narration of and reflection on experience, at once keeping vlogs as a unique locus of knowledge creation. Vlogs helped to capture not only students' verbatim accounts of their experiences, but their understanding of independent learning. This has implications for me as a researcher who seeks new and innovative ways to collect data that exemplifies the dynamism of lived experience in an evolving digital age. Students' reflections, which are evident in the data, are an unexpected yet powerful outcome of the research.

Although I still hold on to the conceptualisation of independent learning as an experience, nurturing and sustaining transformations that enhance learner development, a broader view of independent learning as conceptualised in my independent learning-as-experience unifying framework helps to explore the depth and breadth of understanding of independent learning that has been produced through the research that is recounted here.

There are, however, some limitations to this research. Firstly, my sample comprised only a small group of students from a larger international student population. However, the students' background, their programme of study, and the location of the Sixth form colleges, is unique to this research context. Understanding independent learning-as-experience is based on this context. For this reason, only tentative generalisations can be made outside this particular context. Secondly, there may be flaws in data collection. The vlogs were designed to disable public views and mute public comments, whereas allowing this might have enhanced the relational interaction between the students with each other and their peers who were not part of the research. Failure to have the vlogs publically accessible and invite comments from viewers meant that there was no room for the vlogs to emerge as a community in which the students shared group experiences about independent learning, and about the research itself, such that might have enriched students' reflexivity about knowledge creation in the broader international education context.

Nevertheless, this research has still made substantive contributions to knowledge, as outlined below.

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

The thesis adds to the body of literature on independent learning, extending it into the space of international further education. It makes an empirical contribution to researching independent learning by conceptualising experience as the essence of independent learning, independent learning-as-experience. Furthermore, it identifies that independent learning-as-experience is strongly mediated by a complex but interrelated cycle of affective, behaviour and cognitive- experience dimensions, whereby the student's independent learning-related experience and understanding shift and is limitless, with the result that their independent learning may be considered to be nurtured and sustained. This is different from the more dominant conceptualisations of independent learning as a continuum of processes that characterise the literature about independent learning. Furthermore, the notion of a 'crossing' captures the transformation students undergo as they experience independent learning. Thus, identity transformation becomes a powerful way of encapsulating our overall understanding of independent learning. To the best of my knowledge, this represents a unique contribution to the literature on independent learning.

The thesis contributes to the practical understanding of learning experiences of Nigerian IFP students in colleges in England. It highlights that international college students' conceptions of learning while studying in the UK, are not limited to processes and practices of independent learning in the classroom. Practically, a full understanding of student's conceptions of knowledge (and learning) is significant for educators designing better teaching-learning environments for academic success. International students, such as those in this study, draw on multiple conceptions of learning, and use higher levels of cognitive and metacognitive skills to think about, know about and do independent learning. Better-designed teaching-learning environments are constructive spaces to 'tap into' the various experiences

by which international students achieve academic success. Therefore, this thesis makes an important contribution for practice in FE and HE institutions in terms of bridging the gap between different students' and educators' understandings of learning in post-16 contexts. Furthermore, this thesis is significant for educators involved with students in pre-university programmes and in first year university study. Educators who work with international students may consider creating/developing learning spaces that encourage students to explore and reflect the different ways they conceptualise independent learning as part of developing academic competence. The thesis expands on the relatively small literature on international college students, and in particular, those from Nigeria and sheds light on a segment of the international student population not previously addressed in the literature. Nigeria provides a significant proportion of international students to UK educational institutions. As such, this thesis captures a key demographic of international students that are increasingly becoming part of FE and HE institutions across the UK. This has multiple implications for international education in relation to international mobility of students and their future career prospects. Most of these students upon graduation from university expect to go on to have successful academic and professional careers, joining the global workforce as Nigerians in the diaspora or returning home to lead and shape policy and practice in various public and private sectors.

The use of the vlog-interview method makes an important methodological contribution. To the best of my knowledge, no published academic research has used vlogs in the way that I have in this thesis to collect data about Nigerian IFP students' understanding of independent learning in the UK. The experience of using this method demonstrates the potential of vlogging to elicit young peoples' understanding of phenomena. In so doing, I demonstrate originality in terms of method; the practical usefulness of research vlogs for collecting data about lived experience. This has practical implications for the scholarship of teaching and learning – students' reflection during term time provides a way to access the nature and extent of students' beliefs about what they are gaining or learning. E-portfolios

in form of vlogs could potentially be utilised as a reflective assessment tool in addition to current assessment for/of learning to support more independent forms of learning. Additionally, the study identifies the transformational potential of vlogs and suggests that vlogging could be further developed as a methodology in educational research (Anthony-Okeke, forthcoming). This has implications for the changes outcome of research design change in research self-efficacy as a valid means of assessing. Another methodological contribution relates to my experience of applying the African-centred ethical framework to navigate ethical issues in researching young Nigerians' experiences as international students. Conducting research ethically, based on values held by participants is different from researcher dominant research. The principles of African-centred ethics were successfully applied in this thesis so my experience of using them can be used as an example for other researchers doing research with young people in similar or other contexts.

8.5 Suggestions for future research

My suggestions for future research are multi-dimensional. Additional independent learning studies should be conducted with post-16 teachers and learners at various (formal and informal) FE institutions examining the same issues identified in this thesis among students at varied levels of academic achievement – including those students perceived to be less successful at independent learning. Future research can include cohorts of participants of various demographics- race, ethnicity, age, gender, students considered home students within internationalised educational institutions, students studying academic as well as vocational subjects to make the outcome of independent learning experience research meaningful for all groups of students in post-16 education. Given the importance of Nigerian IFP students for the UK HE market, there is a need to conduct further studies on similar cohorts of international students. For example, future research can focus on the learning experiences of Nigerian (and other international) students who are studying A level programmes in the UK as 'dependant' children of parents who are themselves studying in the UK as international students.

One of the key propositions in this thesis is that there are school-college transitional opportunities for some international students to address some gaps between school leavers' expectations of learning at college and their actual experiences in college. The implication is that there is a need for stronger liaisons between schools and colleges as a way of easing transition issues and managing expectations. Examining and addressing this was beyond the remit of my research inquiry so there are remaining questions regarding the role transition/induction activities can play in defining independent learning. Furthermore, the high-stakes nature of the IFP, externally and internally imposed time pressures might have very well influenced learner expectations in this context, so could this true for other ones? Are there effective ways to bridge the student expectations-experiences gap? Are the Nigerian IFP students the only group of students who can successfully navigate college expectations of independent learning because of their 'elite' status? Might another group of students with different beliefs and motivation have a different perspective of independent learning? Might students who are less successful at regulating their own learning struggle with independent learning?

There are suggestions for teaching-learning, related to students applying affective, behaviour and cognitive experience to learning, to further study. I do not suggest this framework would form the basis of every classroom interaction or learning. Nevertheless, educators who work in internationalised settings may consider encouraging students to explore and reflect upon their different conceptualisations of independent learning, and how their different conceptions influence and shape their experience of teaching-learning. In higher education, if students begin their degree course understanding independent learning-as-experience, might they be more likely to be positively disposed to research-based activities? If this forms a major aspect of their degree course, then they are likely to apply independent learning skills and abilities to their learning leading to successful academic outcomes; this can potentially enhance retention in HE. Might this be the same for all other school leavers?

An ethnographical exploration of independent learning-as-experience can consider international students' perceptions, behaviours and experiences of independent learning, particularly their positioning in subject-specific contexts in relation to shared experiences of independent learning. Grounded theory study conducted with international college students before and after they transition to HE institutions can compare and describe the dimensions of independent learning-as-experience over time to help construct a theory of independent learning development; one that will help investigate in depth perceived notions of learner identities rooted within student epistemologies.

Aside from further research with varied groups of international student participants about their experiences with independent learning, it may be important to examine teacher experiences of developing independent learning in various post-16 and HE contexts; how they perceive it, how they introduce it within an internationalised curriculum, and how they implement it in their pedagogy. It would also be beneficial to teachers of international students (particularly those with English as an additional language) to re-evaluate their epistemological perspective in light of an evolved understanding of what and how their students think about knowledge and learning.

The rapport built with the research participants who are currently studying in universities across the UK after having gone through the IFP offers an opportunity for a longitudinal study that will track the significance of the experiences outlined in thesis on students' ongoing academic experiences at university and in their respective programmes until graduation. Furthermore, differences in enactment of independent learner identity, at university level, in peers who are both international and home students is worthy of study. As a result, there is the possibility of further research involving the same set of students and a wider composition of international students.

The use of the African-centred ethical framework is a significant aspect of this study. International students from post-colonial countries can have competing beliefs about knowledge and learning. In order to acknowledge this context, more could be done to privilege indigenous ways of knowing in a manner that dominant constructs of knowledge and ability in relation to international students fail to do. In this study, generally as researcher, and as I disseminate aspects of my research at conferences, workshops and seminars, I have strived to acknowledge my role and responsibility as a transformative, to challenge the affirmation and privileging of dominant knowledge systems and theorising of ethics and consent in research. I have begun this work through a contribution of a chapter to an edited book, in which I discuss complexities involved with navigating issues of consent and ethics in research inspired by the research presented in this thesis (Anthony-Okeke, forthcoming).

Beyond independent sixth form colleges, independent learning-as-experience needs to be further theorised within other FE and HE institutions with post-16 provisions in terms of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). Blackboard discussion boards, Moodle and WordPress blogs can become important media-based sites for independent study and work in HE. Research, which looks at VLEs as engagement spaces can build on this research, by exploring socio-cultural understandings of independent learning on through these sites and also how students cultivate learning spaces such as academic vlogs for extending engagement in learning with a focus on independent study.

8.6 Concluding thoughts

This thesis is the denouement of 3 years of exploration. It documents a qualitative exploration of independent learning among Nigerian IFP students in three independent sixth form colleges in three different regions of England. The study identified IFP students' perception of, connections with and understanding of independent learning as independent learning-as-experience; the essence of which

is mediated by the relatedness and interaction of affective, behaviour and cognitive dimensions of experience.

As the UK education sector continues to attract a broad and diverse range of learners in a rapidly growing international student market and more FE institutions continue to view independent learning as an alternative to *traditional* pedagogy common in most schools, this study suggests that deeper reflection and understanding of the student experience is a win-win for all stakeholders concerned. Numerous student experience surveys present an overview of the challenges international students face, but little about their successes in spite of these. However, studies such as the one reported in this thesis further understanding of individual and unique perceptions of independent learning and the international student experience of this, potentially amplifying the successes to be experienced in college.

This thesis offers an important contribution to conceptualisation of independent learning and to international student experience, as well as identifying areas where more work is needed in these areas. As Bolu, I too have crossed a bridge, that started as a personal endeavour, but is now very much a journey to reconstructing my own self. Therefore, crossings in themselves do not signal the end of a journey. But, where other ones begin.

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Appendix A: Summary of Pilot Study Conducted 9th – 18th

December 2016

A pilot study using focus group and group interview methods to explore the experiences of Nigerian students in one independent 16-18 school in England

[How can the results of this pilot study be used to test the feasibility of my ideas, evaluate and refine my research project timetable, methods of recruitment and data collection, and identify unanticipated challenges and benefits?]

Introduction

The pilot study explored the feasibility of a focus group and group interview for exploring the Nigerian student experience in an independent 16-18 college in England.

This summary report describes the procedure and the lessons I learned from a small pilot study of the adequacy of focus group and interview for exploring the experiences of Nigerian students in a residential independent school.

Purpose

To identify potential and practical problems in my proposed research procedure used

To pilot test the participant recruitment procedures and data generation instruments

To identify unclear or ambiguous terms from the research in the focus group and interview protocol

To gauge participants' behaviour during and reaction to the activities designed for data generation.

To investigate the practicalities related to participant recruitment and the data collection instruments and their usefulness in informing the pilot study outcomes to evaluate the adequacy of a focus group and group interview to explore Nigerian students' experiences.

Location and participants

The pilot study was conducted in England in one independent 16-18 Sixth form colleges. The college was selected because from my experience as a secondary school teacher in a Nigeria, I was aware that a number of my school leavers were opting to study the 1-year International Foundation Programme (IFP), a bespoke academic programme for post-16 international students wishing to attend university in the United Kingdom, there. The IFP is equivalent to the A-level and is accepted by a number of universities in England as a pre-entry qualification for most undergraduate degrees.

Ten IFP students participated in this pilot study. The participants were 17-year-old Nigerian IFP students who have obtained high academic scores in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), a regional examination in West Africa taken at the end of six years of secondary school.

Eight of the participants stayed in student rooms in the college's boarding house and two lived with different host families.

The main selection criteria applied was based on convenience, gender, age, nationality, course pathways.

Gender: male and female students

Age: 17 years old

Nationality: Nigerian

Course pathways: Science; Accounting and Business; Engineering; Medicine; Arts and Humanities

Procedure and activities Participant recruitment

At the time of conducting the pilot study 30 Nigerian students were enrolled as IFP students out of a population of 220 students in the college. On my first visit to the school I introduced myself and my study to this group of students at a face-to-face meeting. Each student, their parents and host families were given a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) describing the research and research procedure, and an informed consent form for students to participate in the study. Although students were over 17-years-old and could give their own consent, it was important to carry parents along because in West African (including Nigerian) societies, family is extremely important and cultural norms follow a strict system of obeisance which places a great deal of emphasis on Nigerian parents still having more say on decisions that affect their young people.

Within a week of distributing these, five students returned their respective signed consent forms indicating their consent to participate. The remaining 25 opted out of participating in the study because of timetable clashes or lack of interest in the project. As a result of participant attrition, I had to widen my participant pool. So I repeated this process for two other colleges with a similar profile to the first. Subsequently, I received responses from 18 Nigerian students volunteering to participate in the study. Because I had exceeded my target sample of ten, my remaining participants were selected based on the first five respondents from either college and the students were informed of my decision.

Prior to data collection, I again went over the PIS forms with participants and told them the purpose of the focus group and group interview, that the information they provide would be confidential and that they should feel free to give their own opinion.

The focus group and group interview typically started with me asking the participants what it is like being a student at their school.

Focus groups

Two focus groups, involving a total of 10 participants, 6 girls and 4 boys, were organised in two colleges; College A had six students making up the focus group – four girls and two boys and College B had four students in the other focus group. College A focus group was made up of 5 students who attended the same subject classes; College B focus group was made up of 4 students of different subject pathways.

Each focus group discussion lasted for 40 minutes. These focus groups yielded information on student's thoughts and feelings about how they experience college; particularly in relation to academic experiences. I listened to the audio-recordings, and transcribed and read through both focus group sessions in order to develop my research focus and improve my research question. I also noted participants' nonverbal communication; where and how they sat in relation to each other, length of silence and pace of speech, pitch and quality of voice, body movements and postures, etc. to improve my awareness of these and begin to consider their importance to the overall outcome of the study.

Interviews

Five voluntary participants, three girls and two boys from College B agreed to take part in a 40-minute group interview. Initially I had intended to carry out two group interviews, but students' difficulty in scheduling free time to participate made it impossible for me to conduct more than one. However, the advantage of conducting one group interview was that the amount of data to be analysed was manageable and it was feasible to write-up the results and reflect on the pilot study experience in the time I had before commencing the main study. Besides, one group interview with five students of mixed gender could reflect the views and opinions of students as a similar group with a similar student demographic.

The group interview was used to further their discussion about particular issues they brought up in the focus group; in particular, their learning experience, their interactions with peers and teachers, and the impact these have on how they experience college. The group interview was also audio-recorded and transcribed. I took care in taking into account all consenting or dissenting views so that I could treat each group member as a unique pilot study participant. This same strategy was also applied to my preliminary analysis of the group interview.

Although participants in the pilot study had only been in the school from September, feedback from focus groups and the group interview showed similar issues and concerns coming up in relation to academic experiences. I read and re-read the transcribed focus group and group interview data. Next I coded the data in NVivo, first using qualitative descriptors and then interpretive descriptors. I identified words and phrases used frequently by participants in the group interview to describe their learning experience at college and constantly compared these with data from the focus groups to identify any similarity.

Responses were categorised as representing confidence and anxiety if they referred to positive or negative individual academic concerns and ability respectively (particularly those that relate to independent learning, the IFP modules to be covered, the time for preparing for the final exam, and the final exam,) and to other personal feelings, such as those relating to the cost of the IFP and living expenses in a new country.

[Self-reflection: What is the range of students' actions and interactions in relation to their perception and/or ability to learn independently?]

'...so I have already started practicing some past papers.. I know what I am doing'

'...sometimes I feel as if I am supposed to know this already but they taught me something different when I was in secondary school in Nigeria'

'...ok so at least food is generally cheaper here than some of my friends get at the other campus'

'...school stuff is pricey' (3, Science and Pharmacy)

'...honestly, one year is not enough to cover all the topics before the examination (2, Science and Pharmacy)

'...they say just passing foundation is not enough...'

'...if I don't pass my parents will 'kill' me... do you know how much this costs when you convert the fees to Naira? I can't afford to fail' (5, Science and Pharmacy)

Responses were coded as representing isolation or belonging toward addressing their experience when they reflected a concern about their beliefs, thoughts and abilities about learning and whether these fit in with the beliefs/expectations of the college, parents, peers and teachers.

[Self-reflection: What is the significance of students' interactions on their overall learning experience?]

'Independent study is very important here and I'm afraid that if I don't learn how to study independently, I'll fail'
'...It's not just me, I think others are going through the same challenges here, although no one wants to really admit it'
'in Nigeria I would have been in uni already so it's not like I would have still been living at home'
'...my group has just been given a research project but none of us know where to begin o...' (4, Science and Pharmacy)

'my parents insisted that I must stay with a host family like they don't trust that I won't be negatively influenced by my mates...'
'it's not like I don't want to relate with them, but what would we talk about?'
'when Miss asks a question I feel awkward about answering again because some of them start saying 'Miss we don't understand her', like it's not English I'm speaking'
'they don't even try to learn how to say my name properly, they start with 'okay I'm probably going to say this wrong but is it...' then they proceed to butcher it as if I haven't been correcting them since September. This makes me feel like I don't belong' (1, Science and Pharmacy)

Responses were coded as representing maturity and development in their identity when they reflected a view that the one-year IFP is a time for independence and self-discovery. Responses were reflective of the importance of decisions about subject choice for the foundation year, and research into university choice, degree course and a future career.

[Self-reflection: How do students' make sense of what happens in school in relation to how they develop a learner identity?]

'I'm not sure, but it's like I'm already following this pathway so I don't know'
'I am constantly learning how to do things on my own, but it's looking like this will be a long, long process before I can get it right'
'now that I'm doing this, I'm not so sure if I want to continue, you know at uni, if it means I won't get more support' (2, Science and Pharmacy)

'I have always wanted to be a pharmacist so it's great that I can focus on just that here'
'...the independent study is helping because I'm the type that, I understand better when I read over the material in my own time and put it in my own words' (3, Science and Pharmacy)

'I was looking at some of the courses and was confused. I went to her office and she gave me advice about selecting one. Not just what I love to study but what I know that I'm really good at. Which is useful advice because I know it's important what I think or feel about what I'm learning and how I'm learning it'
'...looking at opportunities in that field' (5, Science and Pharmacy)


Self-reflection on piloting

- Although there were broad similarities between all participants, students living alone in the student rooms had minor differences in their experiences from their peers living with host families; the former showed signs of transferring independence attributes from living alone to their studies; female students' experiences were significantly different from the experiences of male students, for example female students were less confident and more anxious about school. However, as my sample did not include other Nigerian students at a different college, it was unclear whether the experiences of my participants were significantly distinct from those of the majority of the Nigerian student body at the same stage.
- I did not anticipate that I might not achieve my recruitment target in one school; visiting the two other schools within the group of colleges made me incur additional (financial and time costs). Additionally, my decision to limit my sample to ten participants made me focus more on not exceeding this number than on the robustness of data I could gather. In future I will consider expanding the participant pool to mitigate the possibility of attrition.
- Some participants in the group interview wanted more clarity on which particular experience I wanted them to discuss; 'You want to know about my experience of what?' Furthermore, researching both academic and social experience is too wide a research field; this needs to be narrowed down to either/or.
- Participants' interaction with and remarks to each other during the focus group were used as additional prompts in the interview. However, I found that this stage would have been enhanced if participants had more time to reflect on this. The focus group participants suggested that I incorporate internet-based communication such as email and video diaries to collect information from students about their experience citing time and monetary cost effectiveness.
- To mitigate the problem of participants needing more stimulation (beyond the focus group) and time to express their feelings further in the group interview I could create a research video log (vlog) to deliver sets of semi-structured prompts (developed through the topics or issues raised during the focus group) to future participants. This would be on a regular basis throughout the remainder of their academic year so that they can create their own vlogs about their experiences. Participants will have time to reflect on these and explain further in the interview stage.
- I underestimated the eagerness of participants to share their experience. They all said that they were not used to being asked how they felt about school, in Nigeria as well as in England, their parents expected them to just get on with things and do well in school; initially they did not want to talk but as the focus group developed they opened up.

Appendix B: Timeframe for the research

This table shows the timeframe for completion of this thesis. Data collection was conducted between May 2017 and November 2017; all data was entered into analysis framework simultaneously with data collection cycle and ended in March 2018. Data analysis was finished in July 2018. Thesis write-up phase commenced shortly after.										
Year	2015	2016				2017				2018
Month	Sept-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Aug	Sept-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-May	Jun-Dec	Jan-Aug	
Research proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Pilot study					<input type="checkbox"/>					
Literature review			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Negotiating access						<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Data collection							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Member checks								<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Data entry							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Data analysis							<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Write-up		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A Research Study Exploring Students' Experience of Independent Learning in Sixth-form College


Introduction



Hi, my name is Loretta and I'm a student at the University of Manchester doing a research study. I would like to invite you to participate in this study, which is concerned with the experiences Nigerian students in England have of independent learning while studying in the IFP and why you have them. I am also interested in how much control you feel you have over your own learning.

Why you?

- ✓ You are a Nigerian student studying in England
- ✓ You are 17 years old
- ✓ You are a student in sixth-form
- ✓ You are studying in the IFP

What will it involve?








- ✓ Return the consent form to me by email so that I know you are interested
- ✓ Agree on a time to meet, which is convenient for you, in your school
- ✓ Post 3 5-minute vlogs on your channel in which you will talk about your understanding and experience of independent learning in college
- ✓ Take part in 2, 30-minute interviews with me where you will select and talk about your vlogs

CONFIDENTIAL

Will I be identifiable in the study?

No. Your real name, the name of your channel, pseudonyms you use when posting or the name of your school will not be used in any discussion about the study. However, as you know





Any web-based activity might be publicly accessible so it is best to post to only password-protected online spaces using a secure login and set privacy restrictions to your online content if you do not wish for others to view your vlogs.

What happens with what I tell you? Your vlogs belong to you. You can review, edit or delete any vlogs within the 2-month period of the research. You have the right to review any interview audio-recordings before analysis is complete. All data which result from the interview exercise will be stored safely and securely and treated correctly in password-protected files on encrypted lap-tops and memory devices. These will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed.

What's in it for me?


You may find the study interesting and enjoy vlogging and answering questions about your learning experiences.


Do I have to take part in the study?

No. Your participation is entirely voluntary. This study isn't part of your college work and it's up to you to decide if you want to take part or not. If you change your mind, you can withdraw your participation at any time without giving a reason.

- If you do not wish to take part, simply ignore this email and I will not contact you again.
- If you wish to discontinue with vlogging, you only need to stop uploading videos to the channel and inform me that you have done this
- If you no longer wish to take part in the interview just say so and leave the room.

I will not use any part or all of your data if you tell me not to.





OK Count me in! What happens now?

Complete and sign the attached consent form and return to me by email loretta.okeke@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk You can also send me an email if you want more information about my research.

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Appendix D: Vlogging guidelines



A Research Study Exploring Students' Experience of Independent

Learning in Sixth-form College

ONLINE PERSONAL SAFETY GUIDELINES (to be discussed with students before the vlog exercise)

1. If you want your vlog to be public, disclose only what you want everyone on the Internet to know. Otherwise, keep your vlog private.
2. Never post or share personal information or anyone else's online.
3. Never share your internet passwords with anyone.
4. Keep details that identify you only to yourself and trusted people. Consider using an assumed name if you wish to keep your identity secret for personal safety.
5. Remember to set privacy restrictions and periodically review who has access to your site and make changes if necessary.
6. Do not post confidential information that might be used to identify you or steal your identity such as bank details, passport details or home address and telephone number.
7. Be careful what information you disclose such as your address, school or birthday.
8. Be careful about the vlogs you post as they may reveal things about you that you would rather keep private.
9. Be cautious about meeting in person someone you only know through any online activity.
10. Ensure that you as a young person are aware of the dangers of vlogging to a public audience.
11. If you are new to vlogging, start cautiously. Understand the features of the software you use and how the vlogging community (the 'vlogosphere') works, including how to set passwords and viewing restrictions, filter comments, etc.
12. Do not post anything that may cause you embarrassment at a later date.

Appendix E: Vlog schedule and prompts



- Before vlogging:
 - Are you familiar with vlogs?
 - Have you vlogged before? If yes, tell how you got into vlogging.
 - What sort of things would you normally vlog about?
 - What do you think/feel makes a good vlog?
 - How did you feel about vlogging for my study?
 - How did you feel about vlogging about your learning experiences in college?
 - Remind the students of their rights (PIS), and check again that they consent to taking part in the vlogs (PCF)
 - Remind the students they can vlog as many times as they want, for a minimum of 3 minutes but no more than 10 minutes, however we would be discussing only 3-5 vlogs during interview. Check that they are happy with this.
 - Tell them that the vlogs are theirs to keep but would like their permission to disseminate the data in my thesis, conferences and other publications.
 - Remind the students that I will not show anyone else their vlogs, or record their vlogs or use their visuals in my thesis, but I will take notes about vlog posts
 - Remind them that their real vlog channel names will not be attached to the data.
 - Provide students with clear guidelines about keeping themselves safe during the vlogging activity
 - Tell students they can record vlogs in quiet places like their private room or in public places so long as other people are not the subject/focus of the vlog. For example, another student walking out of a building or into the room where they are standing/sitting) or are not identifiable in the video (e.g. if the video was shot from behind or from a distance).
 - Remind them that they must not record a vlog in a setting where they have been requested from someone not to.
- During vlogging:
 - Student will post vlogs related to their perception, connection with and understanding of independent learning.
 - Use vlog prompts/cues I will give as a starting point for their vlog posts. For example, What college life has been/is like for them so far? What are some of the academic experiences they had/are having as a college student? What independence in learning means to them and how they might have experienced/are experiencing it in college?
 - Tell them the [Reflexive and Reflective] vlogs posted are intended to facilitate subsequent interviews with me in which they discuss any three important/significant vlogs of their choice.
- Prompts
 - What did/do you think about independent learning?
 - What is your perceptions/expectations of independent learning before/during college?
 - What is your attitude to independent learning?
 - What are your opinions about independent learning?
 - Successful/unsuccessful for exams, complement your learning, effect on results, enhance specific skills?
 - What are your understandings of independent learning?

- What are the effects of these understandings on you?

- Winding down

- What did you like/dislike about vlogging about your learning experiences in college?
- Did vlogging about your learning experiences help you to think more about your learning approach and practices at college? Why/ why not?
- Would you say that vlogging about your learning experiences had an impact on the issues you chose to discuss in your vlog? Why/Why not?

Appendix F: Student Interview protocol and questions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explain who I am and what I am doing in college ○ Remind the student of their rights (PIS) and obtain informed consent (ICF) ○ Remind the student that both interviews will take up to one hour all together ○ Remind student about being open and honest in answering questions ○ Remind the student that I am asking their permission to audio record the interview. Remind them that their name will not be attached to the data. (<i>If they do not give permission to audio record, I will take notes and if this is refused then the interview will not go ahead</i>). ○ Ask the student if they have any questions and are happy for the interview to go ahead

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Name
<p>1. Would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself? Probe: What state are you from/live in Nigeria? How long have you been in the UK? What are you studying (subject pathway, favourite subject)? For how long? What in and out of college activities do you do? Hobbies/interests/sports/games, etc.</p>
<p>2. Would you like to tell me a little bit about your family? Probe: Siblings? How many? Parents' educational background, occupation?</p>
<p>3. Do you enjoy college? Probe: Why/why not? What was it like when you first started college? Is it different from studying in secondary school? In what ways? How was it, settling into college? Was it easy/hard to adapt to studying in college? Why/why not?</p>
<p>4. Who do you spend the most time with here? Probe: Where are they from? Do you have any friends from other programmes? How many? How did you meet them? Do you feel part of the wider college community?</p>
<p>5. What is like learning in college? Probe: Could you describe what a typical day for you is in college? What kinds of learning do you do? Are there any aspects of learning that you find easy/difficult? What are they? What do you do if learning is difficult?</p>
<p>6. Can you tell whether you have experienced anything you consider to be independent learning? Probe: Can you give an example of this experience? Can you say what/if you gained from the experience? Do you feel like you can perform independently in your learning? What do you feel is your level of independence (fully independent, somewhat independent, independent just as much as necessary, unsure about being independent, preferring more directed learning from the teacher?)?</p>

<p>7. Can you say how you develop/maintain independent learning? Probe: Can you explain what you think is involved in independent learning? Do you feel you/teachers/peers have a role in independent learning? Would you describe your college as a community (teachers, peers)?</p>
<p>8. Do you feel that college is organised and structured to help you become an independent learner? Probe: Do you feel that your time here is preparing you for learning at university? Why/why not?</p>
<p>9. Have you ever reflected on your learning? Can you describe how/when you did? Probe: How do you see yourself as a learner? Any different now? What changed? When did it change? What changed it?</p>
<p>10. Are you happy to talk more about any vlog posts that are most important or significant to you? Prompt: Remind student that they can select as many as three vlogs. Wait for them to open their video channel and watch the vlogs they created together with them.</p>
<p>11. Can you tell me about your learning experience through these vlogs? Probe: Why are these experiences important to you?</p>
<p>12. From your reflection, can you give an example of one particular time when you most perceived yourself as an independent learner? Probe: Study on your own? Reflecting on your learning? Having and/or making choices about your learning? Being sure about who you are as a learner? Being motivated to learn? Participating and engaging in your learning? Being in control of what and how you are learning? Recognising your abilities/ limitations? Asking for and/or receiving help with your learning? Analysing problems, dealing with new information appropriately, thinking critically for yourself?</p>
<p>13. What sort of things happen in your learning to make you feel you are developing as an independent learner? Probe: Are these experiences important to your overall learning experience, expectations and future aspirations?</p>
<p>14. (This question was added in response to a view Ayo expressed in Vlog 2) Can you tell what you have observed in that teaching situation that added or took away from your sense of independence as a learner?</p>
<p>15. Are there instances that were ideal/ not ideal for you to act independently? Probe: What were these?</p>
<p>16. How important/unimportant is teacher-led instruction to you? Explain particular situations when you want teacher-led instruction (lectures, notes, papers and explanations, assessment etc). Would you/ When would you prefer to lead in your own learning? Probe: Can you remember one time you felt the teacher supported you in becoming an independent learner? What makes you think this? Teaching arrangements- creating original projects or tasks, assigning individual or group projects or tasks, student-led class discussion, using online web spaces?</p>
<p>17. How important do you find independent learning? Probe: Why/why not?</p>

<p>18. Would you say you have developed independent learning since you started college? Probe: Why/ why not? Do you do anything specific to improve your learning? What? How? When?</p>
<p>19. What stands out in your memory of a time in which the presence (or absence) of teacher/college peers made a difference in your development as an independent learner or your capacity to maintain this independence? Probe: Interesting. Can you tell me more?</p>
<p>Winding down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that you have made these vlogs, how important have you found it for you as a college student to feel that you can reflect on your learning experiences? Was vlogging about your learning experience useful? Why/why not? • Do you feel your development as an independent learner might be improved by any of the things we discussed today? Which ones and in what ways? • Is there anything you would like to add about the vlogs or issues discussed? • What do you think your vlogs might tell overall about independent learning? • Is there any thing else you would like to say/question you want to ask me? • Can I contact you again (either by email or video chat) if I have additional questions about these interview and/or vlogs? • Thank you for your time.

Appendix G: Email of invitation to

1. Participants

Subject:	What's learning like for a Nigerian IFP student in England														
Tahoma	10	B	I	U											
Hi															
Some of you remember me from the pilot study I did last year.															
My name is Loretta and I am doing some research about Nigerian IFP students in England. I am interested in talking to students like you about what learning is like for Nigerian IFP students.															
I have some research activities to find out more about your experience like: what you like about learning in college and what you find challenging or interesting?															
If you would like to speak to me please email me back so that I can tell you more about my research and how you can help.															
Thanks,															
Best wishes,															
Loretta															

2. Principals/House parents

Subject	Letter of invitation to Principal
Dear [name]	
I am writing to introduce myself to ask your agreement to include your young person in a research project I am undertaking in your college.	
My name is Loretta Anthony-Okeke and I am undertaking a PhD in the Manchester institute of Education, University of Manchester. I would like to write to and agree with your students, to be involved with my research project. As a result I am writing to you now to ask for your support with the research project.	
A participant information sheet is included with this letter and you will see that it outlines the research project and the student's rights as a participant. A consent form is also included for you to see what they will agree to do in the project.	
I would like stress that giving consent for their participation is based on informed consent, and they have the right to withdraw. Furthermore, I will ensure confidentiality as I will not discuss what they tell me with anyone in College, and I will not attach the student's name to any data in my thesis or other publication.	
I look forward to your support of this project and hearing from you. Please reply to my email address below by [date].	
Yours sincerely,	
Loretta Anthony-Okeke	

3. Parents

Subject	Letter of invitation to parents
Dear [name]	
I am writing to introduce myself to ask your agreement to include [name of young person] in a research project I am undertaking in [name of college].	
My name is Loretta Anthony-Okeke and I am undertaking a PhD in the Manchester institute of Education, University of Manchester. I have already written to and agreed with [name of young person] to be involved with my research project. As a result I am writing to you now to ask for your support with the research project.	
A participant information sheet is included with this letter and you will see that it outlines the research project and [name of young person]'s rights as a participant. A consent form is also included for you to see what they have agreed to do in the project.	
I would like stress that giving [his/her] consent for participation is based on informed consent, and they have the right to withdraw. Furthermore, I will ensure confidentiality as I will not discuss what they tell me with anyone in College, and I will not attach [his/her] name to any data in my thesis or other publication.	
I look forward to your support of this project and hearing from you. Please reply to my email address below by [date].	
Yours sincerely,	
Loretta Anthony-Okeke	

Appendix H: Informed consent form (ICF)



A Research Study Exploring Independent Learning in Sixth-form College

CONSENT FORM

Please Tick Box

I have read the information leaflet and would like to participate in your research study.

I understand I do not have to take part if I do not want to and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason

I understand that my opinions will be recorded as video and audio.

I agree that my responses and views may be used in the study as long as my name is not used

I agree to take part in the above study

My email address is.....

My signature

Date

Name of the person taking consent **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**

Date.....

Thanks! 😊

Appendix I: Sample interview transcript

Title: SIMI's interview

Record date: 24.07.2017

Record time: 20:19

Recording file name: SIMI's interview

S: And again if the concept still weren't understood it'd be explained

L: Okay by the teacher?

S: Yeah the teacher would do some more explaining

L: Okay

S: So the teacher would always have something of a role em but so did the students like everyone still got involved and like yeah

L: And how many of you were usually in class

S: Em never above 30 it was about 25 to 30 in each class

L: So with that number when the class went over homework how individual was that? Did you get individual feedback on your homework in class or was it more of a general

S: Yeah Yeah I mean It was it depended on the homework like if we were just asked to I don't know so write a summary in our own words of what we've just learned for example we would like we would never really hand the how in it'd just be discussed with like your partner make sure they think it's right so in that situation you might have in a big summary there might be a sentence or two where your understandings of it like oh don't know, but obviously it's not checked on but then sometimes we'd have like quiz kind of thing to do and bring back in with us which then it would be checked on cos obviously you'd go through it answer by answer

L: Mm

7:19 S: so it depends what type of homework

L: Mm. Did you ever feel that you wanted the teachers to check all your homework themselves so that you're sure you know it's right?

S: Yeah, I suppose, I mean I liked that we were given responsibility to check each other's work but what if the person checking your work doesn't you know what to look for or know the answer? You know what I mean like I'd still want the teacher to check my work so yeah that's what they're there for, right?

L: Is that what you think?

S: Well yeah. It's not like it's a distance learning course or its online or something. Like if you get to see your teachers face-to-face then and they give homework then like they should give individual feedback, you know what I mean. But I suppose on the flip side I felt like most of the time and also its kind of a case of if you'd done the homework and you still didn't understand something or you couldn't answer a question it's kinda your own responsibility to kind of put your hand up you know and say or stay behind and ask

L: Mm so if you still didn't understand something what would happen then? What did you do?

S: Personally, I'd put my hand up in class and say I didn't understand and the teacher would explain or maybe ask me to go see them in the staffroom. But sometimes I would also stay behind after class and ask the teacher

L: You mentioned in your vlog, before, about studying with your friends so would that be something you would do, if you had homework that no one in the group understood?

S: Yeah

L: So would that be something that you would bring up in class or do you just

S: Em

















L: figure it out on your own?

S: Yeah, I'd probably bring it up in class. I mean everyone kind of knew each other so everyone's kind of comfortable so I'd just I'd just probably say I don't understand but I think there was some people may be shy people in class who maybe wouldn't have felt comfortable to shout out 'I don't understand' or stay behind

Appendix J: Example of analytical memoing

Appendix K: Example of analytical memo writing

How do you feel about your level of independent learning?
<i>I don't think that it's good enough. But I have to get over these doubts. I can get by, you know do the basics if I have homework. Just simple things. I'm not usually sure if I'm doing the right thing. I need more guidance from the teachers to be able to get to that next level to do better.</i>
So you think your independent learning needs to be at a higher level?
<i>Yes, and I'm not sure if one year is enough for me to develop this and be satisfied with my progress.</i>
Do you think your final result could be better if you had a better learning experience?
<i>Yes, I think so. But independent learning is everything we do here and if I can't demonstrate it well, then I will not have high marks. Especially if I will be doing more of this in uni. It's better I have a full experience of it now. So I think that is a positive.</i>
Do you have classmates who are having the same experience?
<i>Yes, not just in the IFP, but in A level who think the same as me. And even some of them I know who are home students who think the same as me.</i>
Do you all discuss these experiences?
<i>Yes. Sometimes when we get together to talk about the work, tasks, during independent study period. When we can, we communicate with others doing A level. I think they are thinking about and experiencing similar things.</i>
What do you make of these experiences?
<i>It is insightful. Because whatever I'm going through isn't because I am not doing something right. Or where I come from. And I'm not alone. From sharing our experiences I can understand what they're doing to adjust to their environment so applying this is important for me too. Our teachers don't even realise that we're talking and exchanging views and that this helps.</i>

-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Feelings of inadequacy of IL
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
But are they, really?
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Ability to do IL is there; they are reflecting are they not?
And what are they doing as they engage with these feelings (dealing with their emotions)?
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Awareness of what is needed and where to go for it?
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Doubts about readiness based on the length of programme.
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Preconception v reality
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Awareness that IL is important for university
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Experiencing this attitude now is an affordance. But how do they know?
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Awareness of advantage. Other advantages? Value; Satisfaction
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Experiences of/issues with IL are not limited to international students after all...
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
IFP students study together
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Preconception v reality. But why? How is it that international and home students share similar experiences of 'challenges'. Why do they?
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Sharing same experiences.
But what is distinctive/similar to these shared experiences?
Community of learning?
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Group v individual thinking/working
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Developing IL is a community effort?
Recognising and applying strategies for IL.
-  **Loretta Anthony-Okeke**
Teacher presence/absence

Appendix K: ‘Starting to make sense of the data’

Memo 3.2: Conceptualising independent learning?

Emerging category	‘building myself’
Primary and secondary indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>doing research investigating new topics</i> • <i>learning to understand rather than learning to pass learning new things I did not know before preparing me for university learning being student-led less contact time</i> • <i>doing what my parents and teachers expect of me doing what the teacher tells me to do working on my own outside college</i> • <i>studying on my own without input from the teacher discussing what I'm learning with teachers and classmates lacking competence to learn without supervision memorising topics</i> • <i>being able to carry out high quality projects, homework, research with little teacher supervision</i> • <i>managing my time well pacing myself when I revise following independent study timetable</i> <p><i>not being up to the standard (feeling inadequate, not cutting it, not making the grade) building confidence (feeling in control, making choices, recognising my own ability, in the driving seat, inspired to continue with more IL)</i></p>
Premise	<p>How the students see IL is one concern that is emerging from the data. Nigerian IFP students consider understanding what IL is and why they are doing it as the key contributing factor to how they experience IL. They think of IL as doing research to find information when they are given tasks by the teacher and gaining new knowledge. They consider IL to be the gateway to successful academic outcomes in college and an excellent way to prepare for university in the UK. They sometimes feel that their college does not fully explain what IL is and why it is important. They also feel that their IL skills were not up to the standard expected at college and they feel disadvantaged that with IFP, they have only one year to develop strong IL skills and prepare for university rather than the two years with the A-level programme. Because of this they are often under pressure to cover twice as much work. Students with weaker study skills sometimes resort to surface learning in their attempt to just get through tests and exams with little success. They feel they lack competence because they do not have constant supervision from teachers and</p>

Appendix L: Analytical strategy for the theme ‘Challenging preconceived attitudes’

In Chapter 5, I introduced my strategy for inductive analysis. I chose an inductive approach because I deemed it most appropriate to work with vlog data that I collected through a broad range of questions. Having presented the analysis framework, I now present an example of the different layers of analysis to handle and manage the data, and name the theme Challenging preconceived attitudes. My purpose here is to exemplify the analytical steps I took (see table below), and the insights that emerged as a result. The example dataset was generated by excerpts of vlog datasets from Simi, Ayo and Bolu (pseudonyms) in their vlogs *Life with Independent Learning* (Vlog 1), *Ayo explains ‘IL’ all* (Vlog 3) and *Independently Me* (Vlog 3) respectively. The first data analysis step generated useful students’ descriptions of the vlogs and vlog posts before, during after interview before I could go into detailed analysis, thereby, reviewing and familiarising myself with the vlog and maximising my ability to understand the data (descriptive & textual analysis). Then, categorising and labelling segments of the vlogs, building codes from the data or the literature into initial themes either from students’ phrases (in vivo codes) or my words based on the students’ descriptions (naming the themes). Next, writing (reflective) analytical memos helping me understand the data, address the relationship between the data and my research questions, and account for my role in developing the emerging concepts (analytical memoing). Thereafter, analysing vlog data individually and synthesising repeated patterns and themes from all the students (condensed discussion). Ultimately, developing and extracting free themes, while critically analysing my analytical memos to arrive at what is significant and meaningful about the vlog (core themes creation).

Descriptive analysis

I established the following sample descriptors for Ayo and analytical memoing for participant vlog before initial coding.

PARTICIPANT (PSEUDONYM): Ayo	AGE: 17	COURSE AND SUBJECT PATHWAY: IFP & Business	ENTRY QUALIFICATION: Five A1 and seven A2 WASSCEs
GENDER: Male	ETHNICITY: Yoruba	RELIGION: Islam	DATA FORMAT: Vlog 2 of 3
SITE: Wesley Sixth Form College	TIME FRAME: May 2017 to March 2018		

Students gave a general description of their vlogs and their contents. My own subsequent analytical description was guided by prompts that I generated inductively whilst watching a vlog, including:

- how did the student create the vlog?
- what sense does she/he make of their creative process?
- what sense does she/he make of the vlog post?
- how does the student describe the vlog post?

- how does she/he describe and discuss key moments of importance of the vlog post?
- how does the students use the vlog post in interview later?

Each vlog also represented a variety of videography skills ranging from novice to experienced. Crucially, the vlogs enabled students to have authorship and ownership of expression. Additionally, each student's vlog channel reflected a range of commitment to vlog posting. Some students posted more regularly than others, some posted a lot to begin with and then less as the days went by. All posted on the first date that was mutually agreed, thus resulting in the selection of specific vlogs that were posted on the same day by individual students.

The vlogs facilitated answering my research questions. My research questions examined what happens to Nigerian IFP students when they experience independent learning, what they understand by these experiences and, how the students' insights inform my own knowledge about independent learning.

Textual analysis

After the students selected three vlogs each, I carried out textual analysis on the vlogs. First, I looked at the index post of each vlog, then examined the structure of each post, the video, any links, as well as the comments the student made under each of their own vlogs. I collected primary data from 24 vlogs for textual analysis between 7 May 2017 and 20 December 2018. All but one of the students (Ayo) provided a brief textual description for each video, which I read first, before viewing the vlog. Ayo retrospectively wrote the descriptions for his vlogs based on the prompts enumerated above.

I examined each vlog at least thrice, but overall, I studied them for as many as 8 to 10 times. After which I read students' comments associated with each of their vlogs. I considered these comments as personal responses and they were helpful in my understanding of the eventual study themes as I developed them.

Textual analysis also incorporated a consideration of narrative and editing style, the topics of each vlog, locations and camera angles. Many of the vlogs were vlogger-focused, with some occasionally focused off-camera. All students alternated between keeping the camera in a stationary opposition, entering and exiting the frame. Most vlogs had a simple cut at the beginning and at the end of each post. Bolu's vlogs were the only ones with extensive edits. A soundtrack of popular Nigerian music, Afrobeat, accompanied all the vlogs.

Initial coding

Each vlog reflected each student's academic experience, and presented a construction of him or her as an individual. Each student chose three vlog posts because they incorporated a range of experiences – usually within a single post. The variety in each vlog post thus reflected the essence of independent learning-as-experience uncovered. Although, some vlog posts are more demonstrable of a range of these experiences than others.

As I watched each student’s selected posts, I assigned names systematically to segments of vlog data, in a Word document to give them some meaning. The initial names from the vlog data were mostly descriptive. Additionally, I used frame-by-frame analysis as a strategy to fragment students’ narratives on the vlogs with names. As I did this, the significant meaning underlying the narratives became clearer to me and I was able to write them down, sometimes as gerunds, adding –ing to the nouns to make them verbs, to name blocks of resulting texts and further clarify the meaning in the data. This strategy is what ultimately led to substituting some of these for in vivo codes in the naming of themes, e.g. the -ing form of “challenge”, as in “challenging”. Such codes were useful, as they progressed thematic understanding of independent learning-as-experience and so did not require further abstraction.

Early data patterns that I identified in the memoing conveyed a specific impression of each student’s experience, and formed a useful dataset. These were revisited in the interviews to ensure final analysis and thematic development was indicative of the data. A subsequent layer of analysis followed to make further sense of each interview dataset. As I cross-compared vlog and interview datasets I was able to form early categories, identifying complementary features within both. Some of these categories were tabulated and colour-coded in Microsoft Word software. For example:

Ayo: Vlog data analytical memo (RE preconceptions, expectations and attitudes)	Initial codes	Subsequent codes	Emerging conceptual categories
<p>Initially I thought I wasn’t good enough. But I have to get over these doubts. It’s easy to think whether you’re doing the right thing, especially away from the classroom. Maybe I would need more than one year to build myself and be satisfied with my progress before university. Especially if I’ll be doing more of independent learning in uni. I believe it’s better I have the experience now. So I think that is a positive. And there are other students in IFP in A level who think the same as me. Sometimes when we get together to talk about the work, tasks, during independent study period. When we can, we communicate with others doing A level. I think they are thinking about and experiencing similar things. It is insightful. Because whatever I’m going through isn’t because I am not doing something right. Or where I come from. And I’m not alone. From sharing our experiences, I can understand what they’re doing to</p>	<p>Not being ‘good enough’ Being uncertain/ Not being ‘sure’/ Having doubts Having to get over ‘preconceived’ attitudes Having preconceptions Getting over preconceptions Teacher presence Building myself University preparedness Peer motivation Improved understanding Positive value</p>	<p>Meaningful attitudes Beliefs about own abilities Insight into own attitudes; challenging them Understanding what needs to happen attitudes about what is happening and what needs to happen Having preconceived attitudes</p>	<p>Seeing how to overcome your own preconceived attitudes</p>

adjust to their environment so applying this is important for me too . Our teachers don't even realise that we're talking and exchanging views and that this helps.			
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The coding above highlighted three common experiences: Nigerian IFP students had preconceptions about independent learning (purple); attitudes related to preconceptions (yellow); and understanding related to dealing with these attitudes (blue).

Data management after initial coding

After the first stage of coding, I sought to identify the most salient and prevalent themes within the vlogs, and where necessary, subject them to further abstraction. I used emerging conceptual categories to carefully examine and categorise data to go beyond descriptive concepts, to determine whether they contain higher-level concepts. I revisited and re-watched each vlog, then compared with early categories I identified from initial coding and developed higher-level names. I compared these names with data from interview transcripts to further meaning. This process facilitated a thorough examination of various perspectives of dimensions of Nigerian IFP students' independent learning experiences, conceptualisation of multiple student perspectives, definition of common meanings within the phenomenon of independent learning experience, and occasionally resulted in multiple descriptors of the unfolding essence. For example, the code 'being uncertain' was also named as 'not being sure' and 'having doubts' to reflect the relatedness of meaning as data analysis progressed. Within the analytical memos (for the vlogs), I built on emerging insights, keeping in mind the research questions. I continued to manage the data in this way, constantly comparing, and coding thematically, until I identified all thematic categories.

Thematic development (Overcoming preconceived attitudes? Or 'Challenging' preconceptions)

In my analysis of the data, I identified attitudes as common reference points that Nigerian IFP students drew on to form preconceptions they were getting over, also suggesting challenging 'preconceived attitudes' shaped how present and future experiences are understood. In so doing, I gained insights into the influence attitudes had on experience. As I moved through the various stages of coding, increased understanding of how Nigerian IFP students consciously were challenging preconceived attitudes about independent learning, and their impact on thinking and behaviour about independent learning and, drawing on my knowledge about attitudes to understand 'challenging preconceived attitudes'. As this theme developed, I revisited and refined identified codes through continued comparative analysis, and then drew together resulting concepts (see table below). Thus, challenging preconceived attitudes became not only the definitive essence of independent learning-as-experience, but also centred on individual Nigerian IFP students as experiencers of independent learning.

Self-perception	Validated preconceptions	Ways of knowing
Attitudes about own abilities	Having preconceptions	Sharing with others
Attitudes about present experience		Attitudes about independent learning by others
Getting over my emotions		
Not knowing how to do independent learning		Sharing how others do independent learning
'building myself'	Overcoming preconceived attitudes	Communicating with others
		Value
		Satisfaction

Tentative 'drawing together' emerging concepts for thematic development